

Dear distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to be here in Geneva.

I wish to highlight the issue of the West Papuan refugees currently living in Papua New Guinea. The issue is close to my heart. Me and my family lived in the camps for many years until most of us were able to come to the Netherlands as part of a resettlement program of the United Nations.

However, over 10-thousand refugees from West Papua still live in the camps. The majority of these refugees arrived in 1984, which is now more than 30 years ago. For almost all of this time the refugees were undocumented and had little opportunities to make a decent living. The refugees are scattered in small camps along the border and they have been getting basic support from the church, individuals and the UNHCR.

The PNG government gave very little assistance to the refugees and made it almost impossible for them to get PNG citizenship, because the government asked a large sum of money for its application. Money that most of the refugees did not have. This resulted in the fact that almost no West Papuan refugees gained PNG citizenship and thus remained undocumented.

In 2016 and 2017 the PNG government started a program to provide citizenship to the West Papuan refugees. Through this program over 3-thousand applications have been, or are currently being, processed. PNG citizenship would provide the refugees documentation, but many are hesitant about the process and have not applied for it.

Several studies have been done into the situation of the West Papuan refugees. It stands out that 30 years of being undocumented has left deep scars on the social lives of the refugees. Scars that will not be removed by only providing the PNG citizenship.

One issue is that PNG citizenship will do little to improve the social-economic situation of the refugees that has deteriorated during 30 years of neglect. Most people will remain poor.

Another main issue of the refugees is the fact that many of them want to be recognized as political refugees. This status would provide the refugees the emotional recognition and sense of identity that has been taken away from them during their decades' long struggle.

In order to solve the current issue which leaves thousands of West Papuan refugees in PNG without documentation:

1. We request the PNG government to recognize those individuals from West Papua who consider themselves to have fled from persecution, as political refugees.
2. We request the UNHCR and the PNG government to work together with the West Papuan organizations to register all the West Papuan refugees and document their specific situation and provide them with the documentation that best reflects their situation.