



FREEDOM NOW

Honorary Chair
The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu

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Media Release

Papuan Activist Filep Karma Released from Prison

Washington, D.C.: Freedom Now is pleased to announce that Papuan activist Filep Samuel Karma was released from prison today, four years before the end of his 15 year sentence. Indonesian authorities released Mr. Karma after considerable international attention has been brought to his case, most recently from a letter signed by Members of the U.S. Congress.

“We are relieved that Mr. Karma is free – but regret that it has taken the government more than ten years to respect his fundamental human rights,” said Freedom Now’s executive director Maran Turner. “We urge President Joko Widodo to respect international law and free other peaceful activists who remain in Indonesia’s prisons.”

Mr. Karma is one of the most prominent advocates for Papuan independence. He was formerly a civil servant in the Indonesian government, assigned to the Education and Training Department in Jayapura, the provincial capital of Papua. Authorities arrested Mr. Karma on December 1, 2004, for organizing and participating in a ceremony at Trikora Field in Abepura, Paupa at which several hundred peaceful activists gathered to raise the Papuan Morning Star flag and celebrate the anniversary of the 1961 Papuan declaration of independence from Dutch rule.

The trial of Mr. Karma featured a number of procedural irregularities. Mr. Karma’s lawyers were excluded from participating in the trial and providing Mr. Karma with a defense, his right under international law and Indonesian law. While the trial was in process, his lawyers were subjected to harassment and intimidation by authorities. On May 26, 2005, Mr. Karma was sentenced to 15 years in prison, a sentence tripling the prosecution’s request of only five years.

Mr. Karma has spent nearly one-fifth of his life in prison. He suffers from a number of health issues, including acute prostate problems and leg injuries, which date to injuries received from rubber bullets fired by armed forces during another demonstration. These health issues have worsened dramatically over the last decade and have been exacerbated by his imprisonment.

In 2011, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled Mr. Karma’s detention as arbitrary and called for his immediate release. Most recently, Freedom Now directly appealed to President Widodo in October 2015 to release Mr. Karma.