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Young
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WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF DALLAS/FORT WORTH

JWAC Lesson Plan

Indonesia: A Case Study on Independence Movements

By: Emma Sheean, November 2017

Warm up: *What have you heard about Indonesia? What are some defining factors of the country of Indonesia?*

Fast Facts:

- 4th most populous country in the world; population of 260,580,739
- Country with the largest Muslim population; 87.2 % Muslim
- Main language: Bahasa Indonesia, although over 700 languages are used
- Gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949

Discussion: Knocked out of the top three most populous nations in the world by China, India, and the U.S., Indonesia boasts an impressive population of approximately 260 million. Indonesia is also home to the largest Muslim population in the world, at around 209 million followers of the Islamic faith. Indonesia is known in the Western world for Bali, a famous tourist destination, and coffee coming from the island of Java. However, there is much more to Indonesia than those two islands. Little known to the rest of the world is the ongoing independence movement in West Papua, in the very eastern part of Indonesia.

Case Study: The Papua Conflict

Background: Since 1969, there has been widespread resistance to Indonesian rule over West Papua, a region including the two Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua. The region was originally independent after the Netherlands relinquished the territory in 1961, years after the rest of Indonesia gained independence. It was soon handed over to the United Nations, which agreed to host a vote on whether West Papua would join Indonesia or remain independent. The vast majority of West Papuans wanted independence; however, Indonesia suppressed the independence movement and orchestrated the vote to result in Indonesia's favor. They did so by picking a far from proportionally representative amount of 1,026 people to participate in the vote, and forced them to vote against independence under threat of death. Thus, West Papua became a part of Indonesia. Since then, the West Papuans have fought relentlessly against Indonesian rule, led by the Free Papua Movement (OPM).

Activity: *Watch at least the first 10 minutes of this video:*

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2013/01/201313018313632585.html> (NOTE: The video contains some nudity in the context of indigenous peoples)

Quickly glance over this article on human rights violations in West Papua:

<https://www.freewestpapua.org/info/human-rights/> (NOTE: this source contains some graphic images and biased perspectives on the conflict)

Discuss: *What is the basis of the OPM's movement? How is the Indonesian government suppressing the rights of the OPM? Why do you think the West Papuan conflict is not well known internationally? Does the West Papuan conflict remind you of any other separation conflicts? If so, what do they have in common? Some people are calling the conflict a genocide. Do you agree?*

Recap and Reaching Further: The West Papuan conflict has been a 30 year-long struggle for independence of a people vastly different to the rest of Indonesia. Violence on both sides has resulted in deaths and with extremely restricted press access to the area, the conflict is not well known outside of the Asia-Pacific region. *How have the West Papuans justified independence? Indonesia is suspected to want access to West Papua for its natural resources. How might West Papuan independence benefit the region? What is the importance of press coverage for an independence movement such as this one? Do you think the violation of human rights are a justified cost of independence?*

Similar independence movements are occurring throughout the world in Kurdistan (in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq), the Caucus region of Russia and Georgia, the island of Cyprus, Kashmir in India, and many more countries around the world. Some conflicts are not as violent as the West Papuan movement and others are just as turbulent. Whether or not the basis for these movements are solid, knowing about them is an important step toward ending the deaths of innocents in these regions.

Call to Action: Above all, educate yourself on the situation and decide your own stance on the conflict. Spreading the word about the West Papuan movement is one of the best things to do to help the cause.

You can sign the petition supporting a UN supervised referendum on West Papuan independence: <https://www.freewestpapua.org/actions/sign-the-global-petition-for-an-internationally-supervised-vote-in-west-papua/>

The Free West Papua Campaign website has a list of ideas to help, including fundraising, signing petitions, sending emails, and more: <https://www.freewestpapua.org/take-action/>



Works Cited

"The World Factbook: INDONESIA." *Central Intelligence Agency*, Central Intelligence Agency, 1 Aug. 2017, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html.

Taylor, N.A.J. "West Papua: A History of Exploitation." *Al Jazeera English*, Al Jazeera, 19 Oct. 2011, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/08/201182814172453998.html.