

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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WEST NEW GUINEA

Statement by Mr. J.W. Holmes of Canada, in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, February 27, 1957.

We find this debate distressing because it involves a conflict of views between countries which we consider to be our good friends. It is a difficult question, and one on which there are on both sides strong views sincerely held. We have studied these views seriously and earnestly, not just in preparation for this debate, but on many occasions during the years since the founding of the Indonesian Republic.

It has been our view in the past, and it still is, that if there is a genuine legal dispute on the status of West New Guinea, as there appears to be, it should be referred to the International Court of Justice for a decision. Although it has been said that this is a political rather than a legal dispute, we have listened to considerable and very well-reasoned arguments from both the Indonesian and Netherlands Delegations on the constitutional position of West New Guinea. It would certainly assist in reaching a fair judgment on this subject to have the opinion of the best international authority. Unfortunately, however, it has not been possible as yet to seek the decision of the International Court.

In the absence of such a decision, I am bound to say that we have not been convinced of the argument for a change in the status of this territory. I would like to assure the representative of Indonesia that we have listened to his moderate and reasonable exposition with great care, with sympathy, and with a strong desire to understand the point of view of a country in the position of Indonesia. My country has proved many times its sympathy with all countries engaged in the arduous endeavour to establish and develop their own governments, and I know that our friends in Indonesia will recognize that our views on this matter of West Irian are not the product of prejudice. It is just that we cannot, with all due respect, understand why the people of West New Guinea should be annexed to a country with which they have had only the most

fortuitous connection in the past. I quite understand the argument of the representative of Indonesia that the fact that the inhabitants are different in race is not conclusive because Indonesia is a state which is not based on race or religion. I not only accept this argument, I honour it, for we Canadians have long believed that the state based on the union of races and languages is a higher conception than that of the uni-racial and unilingual state. However, one must be careful of this argument. It cannot be used as a reason for extending the state to include races which have no desire to be included. It does not seem to us that there is any clear evidence of a desire on the part of the inhabitants of West New Guinea to join Indonesia, and it seems to us a fact that the Indonesian Government has passed over this aspect of the question somewhat lightly. The Netherlands Government, in our opinion, should continue to administer this territory with the purpose, which it has constantly avowed, of educating and assisting its people to the point when they can govern themselves and choose their own destiny. If, when that day comes, they choose to affiliate themselves with Indonesia, the situation would be quite different. It may be, of course, that they would prefer to remain a state to themselves or to join with the peoples, more closely related to them, in other parts of the island which they share. But these are questions which the people of West New Guinea should decide for themselves when the time is ripe, not questions which should be decided for them by this body. If we are, as we are constantly urged, to liquidate the empires of the past, I see no reason why we should impose forever on peoples now dependent a pattern of nationality for which the only justification would appear to be the imperial structure from which they have emerged.

What really bothers us most in this debate, I must say frankly, is what seems to us a regrettable lack of consistency on the subject of self-government and self-determination. We hear a great deal in this body about the evils of colonialism. Canadians strongly support the development of self-government and autonomy in colonial lands; we are members of a Commonwealth of Nations founded on the essentially anti-colonialist principle of the growth of self-government and independence. Our attitude is based on an unshakeable belief in the efficacy of self-government and a recognition of historical processes. It is not based on a belief in the wickedness of the inhabitants of any particular continent or of great powers. And it is not based on any pre-occupation with race.

In speaking thus of colonialism I trust my Indonesian friends will not think I am implying any desire on their part to exploit the people of West Irian. I believe in the sincerity of their intentions as described here. But it does seem to me that no transfer of the land and people of West New Guinea can be justified simply on the grounds that an

Asian country would like to take over the territory from a European country. Surely, at the very least, we are entitled to the opinion of the International Court on the legal issue, and, when it is possible, the opinion of the people of West New Guinea themselves, exercising their right to determine their own future.

In the light of these views the Canadian Delegation can see no virtue in the draft resolution tabled by thirteen delegations. The only interpretation to be placed on this resolution, taken in conjunction with the statements of the distinguished representative of Indonesia, is that we should now accept and agree to the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia without benefit of any legal judgement, and in the absence of any indication of the wishes of the people concerned.

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