



# Appropriating Just Peacemaking Theory for Sustainable Peace in Papua: An Ethical Framework for Conflict Resolution

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## ABSTRACT

The Papua conflict, with its deep roots in contested history, human rights violations, and economic marginalization, demands responses that are both ethically serious and practically grounded. This study asks whether Glen Stassen's Just Peacemaking Theory can be applied to that context. Through qualitative conceptual analysis, it identifies practices within the theory most capable of translation to Papuan conditions—nonviolent direct action, human rights advocacy, sustainable development, grassroots peacebuilding—and works them into strategic orientations: empowering indigenous advocacy, insisting on inclusive development, strengthening local peace networks. For practical theology, the contribution is straightforward: it demonstrates how a normative ethical framework can be brought into genuine conversation with a live conflict, not as an abstract principle but as an adaptable resource. For Papuan churches, it offers a way of naming what they already do and a vocabulary for taking it further.

Keywords: Just Peacemaking Theory, Nonviolent Conflict Resolution, Papua Conflict, Sustainable Peace

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## INTRODUCTION

The 1969 Act of Free Choice was meant to settle Papua's status. Instead, it became the conflict's origin story. Conducted under military oversight and widely viewed as orchestrated, the referendum formalized integration into Indonesia without, in the view of many Papuan nationalists, any genuine self-determination (Abdullah et al., 2018). That foundational dispute never receded. What followed was a predictable cycle: separatist resistance, military response, and a quiet accumulation of human rights allegations—disappearances, arbitrary detention, villages burned—that left indigenous communities deeply distrustful of the state (Widjojo et al., 2010). Jakarta did attempt other registers. The 2001 Special Autonomy Law promised greater local control and a fairer share of resource revenues. However, implementation was uneven, corruption was pervasive, and benefits, when they materialized, tended to accrue to non-Papuan migrants rather than to the local populations the policy was meant to serve (Fahrudin & Susilo, 2022). Military, political, and economic interventions have thus each failed—not for want of effort, but because they consistently bypassed the conflict's core drivers: the unresolved question of political identity and the historical grievance that continues to animate it (Elmslie, 2010). Until those are engaged directly, the impasse will almost certainly hold.

What the literature on Papua does well is diagnose failure. It tells us, in considerable detail, how the 1969 Act of Free Choice went wrong, why the military campaigns backfired, and where autonomy fell short. However, it rarely asks what justice might actually look like here, not as an abstraction, but as something actionable. Just Peacemaking Theory has been used to wrestle with precisely these kinds of questions in other difficult settings—Rwanda after the genocide (Shao, 2019) and Ukraine today (Penner, 2024). Moreover, closer to home, there has been some thoughtful work on how this theory might strengthen interfaith peacebuilding elsewhere in Indonesia (Funk, 2019). However, in Papua, there is almost nothing. That absence matters. It suggests the conflict is still understood primarily as a governance problem or a security problem, rather than an ethical one with its own particular texture—its own theological currents, its own long memory of injury. This study is an attempt to take that ethical question seriously. It brings Just Peacemaking Theory into the Papuan context, not as a formula to be applied, but as a framework to be tested, questioned, and reworked. The basic intuition is simple: peacebuilding that sidesteps the question of what is right will not, in the end, hold.

This article asks whether Glen Stassen's Just Peacemaking Theory could be applied in Papua, not as an abstract ethical exercise, but as a lens for thinking about conflict transformation that is both nonviolent and genuinely attentive to justice—and, more specifically, for considering what religious institutions in Papua could contribute to that effort. The aim is to examine certain practices Stassen developed—nonviolent direct action, advocacy for sustainable development, and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives—and to ask what they would look like when read through Papuan history, politics, and churches. To do this, the argument unfolds in three movements. The article begins by tracing the core commitments of Just Peacemaking Theory and the theological groundwork beneath them. From there, it attempts something more difficult: translating three of its central practices into the Papuan context, not

in the abstract but concretely, with attention to what they would demand, who would need to take them up, and what kinds of openings they might create. Finally, it offers recommendations. They are not meant as a master plan but as points of departure for stakeholders who might wish to take them further. The thread running through all of this is straightforward: that a framework for conflict transformation in Papua, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be both ethically serious and locally grounded.

## **METHOD**

This study uses existing texts rather than collecting new data. That is a deliberate choice. A literature-based conceptual inquiry, as Hart (2018) and Snyder (2019) frame it, allows one to pull together what is already known and put it into conversation with a normative framework—in this case, Just Peacemaking Theory. For a project that asks what an ethical model might contribute to a specific, complex conflict, this approach makes sense. It permits the drawing together of scholarship across political history, human rights reporting, and peace studies without pretending to start from scratch.

The sources themselves are varied. The study relies on peer-reviewed articles, certainly, but also on policy briefs and reports from organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These non-academic texts require some care. To assess their reliability, three questions guided the selection: whether the issuing organization is transparent about its methods and generally regarded as credible; whether the claims made in one report are echoed, or at least not contradicted, by other independent sources; and whether the information remains relevant to Papua's contemporary dynamics. Triangulation across multiple accounts became, in practice, a quiet discipline. In terms of scope, the literature examined falls into three broad categories. First, work that traces the historical and political roots of the Papuan conflict, including its economic dimensions. Second, documentation—much of it from human rights and advocacy groups—on peacebuilding efforts and conditions on the ground. Third, theological and applied scholarship on Just Peacemaking Theory, particularly studies that have tested its usefulness in other conflict settings. These materials were identified through systematic database searches; abstracts and full texts were then manually reviewed to ensure alignment with the study's objectives.

The analysis itself unfolded in two stages. The first involved reading across the Papuan literature thematically, identifying what seemed most persistent: political marginalization, patterns of human rights abuse, and economic injustice that refuse to budge. The second brought Just Peacemaking Theory into the frame. More precisely, a conceptual matrix was constructed, setting each of Stassen's (cf. 1992, 1998, 2004) core practices alongside the contextual challenges identified. It allowed for a practice-by-practice assessment of resonance, adaptability, and friction. The matrix became a kind of translation device—moving from theory's general propositions toward something more contextually specific.

A word, finally, about what this method cannot do: a literature-based study does not directly capture lived experience. The voices of Papuan stakeholders are not present here in their own words; they are mediated through reports and analyses that may carry their own biases

and silences. What is offered, then, is not a finished framework but a provisional one—grounded in theory and in existing knowledge, certainly, but also waiting to be tested, contested, and reworked through empirical research and genuine engagement with those who actually live this conflict day to day.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings emerge from a sustained attempt to read the Papuan conflict through the lens of Just Peacemaking Theory. Before turning to that analysis directly, however, some contextual ground needs to be laid. The section, therefore, opens with a brief historical orientation—not an exhaustive accounting, but a focused sketch of those events and structural conditions that have made peace in Papua so elusive. It is not background for its own sake; it is meant to anchor what follows in the particularities of the place. From there, the discussion moves to Just Peacemaking Theory itself. The theory is presented not as an abstract philosophical system but as a cluster of identifiable practices—nonviolent direct action, grassroots peacebuilding, the work of advancing democracy and human rights—each with its own theological and ethical grounding. What matters here is less the internal coherence of the theory than its translatability: whether, and in what ways, these practices might take root in Papuan soil. The final movement is necessarily more tentative. It asks what the theory might actually enable if taken up by churches, civil society groups, or other local actors. Not in a programmatic sense—no blueprints are offered—but as a series of possibilities worth testing: strategies for reconciliation, pathways toward economic justice, forms of advocacy that do not simply reproduce old patterns of marginalization. The thread running through all of this is straightforward enough: that Just Peacemaking Theory, for all its origins in quite different contexts, may yet yield something actionable for a region long trapped between grievance and impasse. Whether it can do so, of course, remains an open question—one that only careful, context-sensitive experimentation can answer.

### **The struggle for peace and justice in Papua: A brief overview**

When Indonesia declared independence in 1949, the Dutch relinquished most of their colonial holdings. But not all. West New Guinea—now Papua—remained under Dutch control, a lingering outpost in an archipelago that had otherwise been surrendered (Abdullah et al., 2018). Jakarta never accepted this. Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the territory was pursued through a mix of diplomacy, political pressure, and, quietly, military threat. Resolution came in 1962 with the New York Agreement, a UN-brokered deal that transferred administrative authority to Indonesia—but on a condition. A referendum would be held. The Papuan people would be asked, directly, what they wanted. Seven years later, that referendum arrived. Known as the Act of Free Choice, or Pepera (*Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat*), it was meant to close the question. Instead, it opened a wound that has never properly healed. Only 1026 representatives were permitted to vote, all selected by Indonesian authorities, most operating under the Indonesian military's visible presence—and implicit coercion (Viartasiwi, 2018). They voted for integration. The outcome was certified, formally, and Papua became part

of Indonesia. However, among large segments of the Papuan population, the process was understood not as an exercise in self-determination but as its performance: staged, controlled, and foreordained. That perception, whether or not one fully endorses it, has proven remarkably durable. It is, in many ways, the conflict's origin story.

Some conflicts are sustained by material deprivation, others by cycles of violence. The Papua conflict is sustained, more fundamentally, by a question that was supposed to be settled in 1969 and never really was. That year, the Act of Free Choice—Pepera—delivered Papua's formal integration into Indonesia. However, among many Papuans, especially within indigenous communities, the referendum is not remembered as a genuine expression of the people's will. The few delegates who participated, all selected rather than elected, and the Indonesian military were, by most accounts, a visible presence throughout (Widjojo et al., 2010). The outcome, unsurprisingly, was integration. What lingers is not disagreement over the result but a deeper conviction that the process itself was a procedural fiction. That conviction has never been officially acknowledged, and it has never receded. Compounding it is a fundamental cultural distance. Papuans are Melanesians; their languages, social structures, and historical memory share little with those of the Malay populations who have long held power in Jakarta (Viartasiwi, 2018). For many, rule from the center feels less like national governance than like rule by a foreign power—one whose authority rests on a procedure widely viewed as illegitimate. This double-wound, procedural and identity-based, has sustained the independence movement across five decades. Since the 1960s, the Free Papua Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*) has carried out armed resistance, not in expectation of military victory, but as a refusal to let the question close.

If the contested legitimacy of Pepera is the Papua conflict's origin story, then what has followed is a long, quiet accumulation of injury. Over the decades, military operations ostensibly aimed at separatist groups have consistently spilled far beyond their stated targets. The documentation, both domestic and international, is now extensive: extrajudicial killings, torture, forced displacement, arbitrary arrests—the familiar grammar of counterinsurgency when it operates without meaningful oversight (Elmslie, 2010). For Indigenous Papuans (*Orang Asli Papua* or OAP), this is not a series of isolated incidents but a persistent condition. The Indonesian military has maintained a heavy presence across the region for more than fifty years, and that presence has, for many communities, come to define the state itself—not as a provider of services or a guarantor of rights, but as a source of fear. Widjojo et al. (2010) describe something like a *memoria passionis*, a collective memory of suffering passed down and continually reinforced. Reports from LIPI, from Amnesty International, and from Human Rights Watch have laid out the patterns with considerable care. However, accountability remains elusive. Denials are routine; investigations, when they occur, rarely lead to prosecutions. The impunity is not incidental to the conflict. It is, for many Papuans, further confirmation that the state does not regard them as citizens in the full sense of the term.

For decades, the promise of Papua's vast natural resources—its copper, gold, and timber—has never quite translated into prosperity for those who actually live there. That gap

between extractable wealth and lived poverty is not incidental; it is the product of deliberate arrangements. The 2001 Special Autonomy Law (*Otonomi Khusus/Otsus*) was supposed to be the remedy. It offered something rare in Indonesia's treatment of Papua: a formal commitment to redirect a significant portion of resource revenues back to the province, funding schools, clinics, infrastructure—the ordinary apparatus of development. On paper, it was a genuine turning point. However, the paper turns out to be porous. Audits from the Supreme Audit Agency have, year after year, turned up the same troubling patterns: money allocated but unspent, projects approved but never tendered, budgets approved but diverted through layers of subcontractors and phantom line items (Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan, 2020). Corruption watchdogs have traced much of this captured funding not to Papuan districts but to political networks in Jakarta and provincial capitals (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2021). What makes this failure sting more acutely is its visibility. Migrants from Java, Sulawesi, and elsewhere have arrived in growing numbers and have come to dominate much of the formal economy—transport, retail, and civil service contracts (McGibbon, 2004). Indigenous Papuans, meanwhile, watch their own resources extracted and sold, their own autonomy funds dispersed elsewhere, their own presence in the market economy increasingly marginal (Woodman, 2023). Otsus was meant to close this wound. Instead, for many, it has become another layer.

There is, if one looks across the decades, a discernible pattern to how Jakarta has approached Papua. Not a single strategy, exactly—there have been shifts in emphasis, changes in personnel, adjustments in rhetoric—but a consistent underlying logic. Moreover, that logic has been heavily militarized from the beginning. The Indonesian military has maintained a continuous presence in the region since the 1960s, its role extending well beyond external defense into the ordinary business of internal control (Chauvel, 2021)—separatist gestures, whether armed resistance or peaceful protest, have been met overwhelmingly with force. The assumption seems to have been that the problem is fundamentally one of order, and that order can be restored through sufficient strength. What this has meant for Papuan communities is not conjecture; it has been repeatedly documented by human rights organizations, journalists, and researchers who have pieced together accounts from survivors and witnesses. Military operations have consistently blurred the line between targeting combatants and punishing populations. Thus, the cycle persists: resistance, retaliation, more resistance. Negotiation has rarely been attempted in any serious form. Acknowledgment of the 1969 referendum's flaws has never come. Genuine autonomy, of the sort that might shift Papuan perceptions of the state, remains elusive (Baird, 2024). What endures, instead, is the force.

There have been other approaches, of course. Not only soldiers and checkpoints, but legislation, budgets, and institutions. The most significant of these came in 2001 with the Special Autonomy Law—Otsus, in the local shorthand. On paper, it represented something genuinely new. Papua would be permitted to govern itself to a degree unprecedented in any other province. A larger share of resource revenues would stay in the territory rather than flowing to Jakarta. Development programs would be designed locally, not dictated from the center. Moreover, a new institution, the Papuan People's Council, would be established to specifically represent

indigenous interests in the political process (Dewi, 2017; Timmer, 2007). When Otsus was first announced, it was received not with cynicism but with something approaching cautious hope. Here, at last, was an acknowledgment that Papua was different—and a recognition, however belated, that difference might require accommodation rather than suppression. That hope, in the years since, has been tested severely. Nevertheless, at the moment of its passage, Otsus appeared to many observers, Papuan and otherwise, as a genuine opening.

What became of that hope is, by now, a familiar story. Nearly two decades after Otsus was passed, the gap between its promises and its outcomes is difficult to ignore. Corruption has bled the autonomy funds dry in ways that audits and anti-graft reports have traced in meticulous detail—money allocated for roads, schools, and clinics reappearing in property acquisitions and luxury vehicles for local officials (Anderson, 2020). The intended beneficiaries, meanwhile, have seen little of it. Poverty rates in Papua remain the highest in Indonesia; infant mortality, malnutrition, and educational access all lag stubbornly behind national averages. However, the failure is not only economic. The political dimensions of Otsus—the expanded autonomy, the Indigenous Council, the promise of genuine self-governance—have never quite materialized in practice. Key decisions still flow from Jakarta. Control over natural resources remains tightly centralized. The Majelis Rakyat Papua, meant to be a robust representative body, has struggled to assert meaningful influence (Dewi, 2017). Moreover, the deeper grievances—the ones that trace back to 1969, to questions of self-determination and historical injury—have been left entirely untouched. For many Papuans, Otsus has come to resemble less a genuine concession than a management strategy: absorb dissent into bureaucratic channels, distribute enough patronage to co-opt elites, and declare the problem solved (Kivimäki, 2006). The disillusionment, under the circumstances, is not difficult to understand.

Dialogue, when it has occurred, has been halting and fragile. Papuan leaders and government representatives have met periodically, but the conversations rarely deepen into anything sustained. Too much distrust has accumulated, and the parameters are, from Jakarta's perspective, non-negotiable: Papua's integration into Indonesia is not open to discussion. Within those tightly drawn boundaries, a genuine political settlement is difficult to imagine. The current administration has opted for a different register. Under President Joko Widodo, the signature policy has been infrastructure—roads, airports, seaports, and the ambitious Trans-Papua Highway. The stated logic is integration through connectivity: tie Papua more closely to the national economy, and development will follow. However, on the ground, the reception is more complicated. For some Papuans, these projects appear less about prosperity than about access—easier movement for military patrols, more efficient extraction of natural resources, smoother pathways for migrants from other islands (Blades, 2020). What is advertised as development is experienced, in some quarters, as acceleration of the very dynamics that have long marginalized indigenous communities. Civil society groups and church leaders have, at various points, attempted to broker more substantive engagement. However, without political traction in Jakarta, these efforts remain ad hoc and unable to shift the broader impasse

(Kivimäki, 2008). Thus, the cycle continues: intermittent dialogue, unmet expectations, periodic outbreaks of armed conflict, the steady accumulation of grievance.

After more than five decades, what is striking is not that the Papua conflict remains unresolved. It is that the approaches meant to resolve it have circled the same ground, again and again, without ever quite touching the center. Military operations have suppressed resistance in the short term, while, in the long term, they have fed grievances (MacLeod, 2015). Special autonomy was promising on paper but, in practice, corroded by corruption and administrative capture; the promised benefits rarely reached those most in need, and the political dimensions of autonomy—genuine self-governance, meaningful control over resources—were quietly set aside. Dialogue, when attempted, has been episodic and circumscribed, always with the understanding that certain questions are not on the table. The cumulative effect is not progress but exhaustion. Moreover, underneath it all, the conflict's original drivers remain untouched: the contested legitimacy of the 1969 referendum, the profound cultural estrangement between Melanesian Papua and Malay Indonesia, the long accumulation of unacknowledged injury from decades of military presence. These are not technical problems amenable to technical fixes. They are political and historical and, at root, ethical. A different approach is needed—one that does not manage the conflict around the edges but engages directly with what has been consistently evaded. Not more roads, troops, and autonomy budgets that fail to deliver. Nevertheless, a genuine reckoning with the question that Pepera was meant to settle and never did.

### **Just Peacemaking Theory**

There is, in the long tradition of Christian reflection on war and peace, a familiar standoff. On the one hand, just war theory accepts that, under certain tightly constrained conditions, violence may be morally permissible. On the other hand, pacifism rejects it altogether. Both have ancient pedigrees. Both continue to command serious adherence. However, for Glen Stassen and the colleagues who joined him in the early 1990s, neither seemed adequate to the conflicts then emerging—and still less to those on the horizon. Just war theory, for all its careful criteria, had too often functioned as a permission structure rather than a restraint. Pacifism, meanwhile, offered principled refusal but few practical resources for those seeking to transform conflict rather than withdraw from it actively (Stassen, 1992). What was needed, Stassen argued, was a third way. Not a synthesis of the two traditions, exactly, but something that moved beyond their terms altogether. He called it just peacemaking.

The first major articulation came in 1992, but the framework was refined and expanded in subsequent years, most notably in the 1998 edited volume *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Stassen, 1998). There, the theory crystallized not as an abstract principle but as identifiable, teachable practices. The emphasis shifted from whether and when violence might be justified to what can be done, concretely, to prevent it from breaking out in the first place. It was not an abandonment of moral seriousness but a reorientation of it—away from casuistry and toward practice. Moreover, it drew explicitly on a different scriptural register: not the criteria of the just war tradition, but the Beatitudes, particularly the call to peacemaking

(Matthew 5:9) as a form of discipleship (Stassen, 2005). The peacemaker, in this reading, is not one who merely refrains from violence or weighs its justification, but one who actively builds the conditions under which violence becomes less thinkable, less necessary, less likely.

Just Peacemaking Theory operates on a simple premise: that by the time violence erupts, it is already too late to ask what might have prevented it. Stassen (2008) was not interested in simply justifying or refusing war. He wanted to understand why wars happen in the first place—and whether there might be identifiable, teachable practices that could make them less likely. The answers he arrived at pointed not toward better weapons or more precise rules of engagement, but toward the slow work of addressing economic exclusion, political marginalization, and the accumulated grievances that make armed conflict thinkable. A peace agreement that leaves those structures intact is, in this view, not genuine peace. It is a ceasefire, and a temporary one at that. Funk (2019) puts it plainly: sustainable peace requires more than the absence of shooting. It requires the presence of justice. Not as an afterthought, not as a phase two, but as the very substance of what peacemaking means. Stassen (2008) was insistent on this point. The reductionist view—that peace is simply what happens when the guns fall silent—had, in his reading, failed too often and too catastrophically to be trusted any longer.

There is, embedded in Just Peacemaking Theory, a deep conviction about the power of organized refusal. Not refusal as withdrawal, but refusal as confrontation—disciplined, collective, and pointedly nonviolent. Stassen and Westmoreland-White (2003) drew on a long and vivid tradition here. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) offers the original grammar: turn the other cheek, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Centuries later, that grammar was taken up by movements in quite different registers—Gandhi’s salt march, King’s Birmingham campaign—and it proved, again and again, capable of unsettling orders that had seemed immovable (McCarthy, 2014). What nonviolent direct action does, at its best, is not simply block or disrupt. It reveals. The brutality of a regime, the cruelty of an economic arrangement, the moral incoherence of a legal order—all of this becomes suddenly, publicly visible when unarmed civilians persist in demanding what is theirs. D. J. Weaver and Biesecker-Mast (2003) trace this dynamic across contexts as varied as the American civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. What emerges is a consistent pattern: nonviolent campaigns are neither passive nor resigned. They are strategically aggressive, though their aggression is aimed at structures rather than persons. They require planning, coordination, and an almost unnerving patience in the face of crackdowns. However, when they succeed—and the historical record suggests they succeed more often than armed insurgencies do—they succeed not by defeating an enemy but by dissolving the legitimacy of the order that enemy defends (Cartwright & Thistlethwaite, 2008; Stassen, 1998). The moral authority is not incidental to this outcome. It is the mechanism itself.

There is a particular kind of courage that Just Peacemaking Theory asks of parties in conflict. Not the courage to fight, but the courage to stop—unilaterally, without waiting for reciprocity. Stassen (1992) found its roots in the Sermon on the Mount, in the unsettling call to go the extra mile, to turn the other cheek, to leave the gift at the altar, and first be reconciled

(Matthew 5–7). These are not strategies for the weak. They require a willingness to absorb risk, to make oneself vulnerable, to extend trust before there is any guarantee it will be returned. The conventional wisdom of conflict holds that concessions must be earned, that reciprocity is the only safe currency. Stassen saw this differently. Waiting for the other side to move first, he believed, was not prudence but paralysis. Someone has to break the pattern.

Consider the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines. When it announced unilateral ceasefires, the gestures were imperfect, and the peace that followed remained fragile for years. However, those initial, unreciprocated moves opened something. Negotiators sat down. Talks that had gone nowhere for decades began, haltingly, to move (Åkebo, 2021). There was no guarantee the government would respond in kind. It might have exploited the opening, read restraint as weakness, and pressed its advantage. However, without the gesture, the deadlock would have persisted. Independent initiatives do not guarantee peace. They do, however, make it possible in a way that waiting for the other to move first never can.

Restorative justice, as Just Peacemaking Theory conceives it, begins from a different set of questions than the adversarial model. Not who is to blame and what punishment they deserve, but what harm has been done and what might repair it. This shift in orientation is neither naïve nor merely therapeutic. It reflects a conviction, deeply biblical in its grammar, that peace purchased through the suppression of memory is not peace at all. The truth commissions that emerged in post-apartheid South Africa and, more unevenly, in post-conflict settings across Latin America and Asia, were attempts to institutionalize this insight: that acknowledgment must precede reconciliation, that confession and forgiveness (Matthew 18:15–17; Isaiah 1:18) are not pious abstractions but concrete political labor (Bronkema et al., 1998; Friesen, 1998). Stassen (2004) understood that such processes are fragile. They require intermediaries trusted by all parties, who can hold space for testimony without predetermining its outcome, and who can resist the temptation to trade truth for expediency. International organizations sometimes play this role; so do local religious leaders, elders, and civil society networks with deep roots in affected communities. What they enable, when it works, is not the erasure of past wrongs but their integration into a shared story that can be carried forward. The alternative is not justice but victory—and victory, in deeply divided societies, rarely holds.

Confession is not, in the first instance, a religious category. It is a human one. Before it is offered to God, it is owed to those who have been harmed. Just Peacemaking Theory takes this seriously: that the work of reconciliation cannot begin until someone names what has been done. Geyer (1998) understood that conflicts leave behind not only material destruction but moral debris—stories that cannot be told, losses that cannot be named, anger that circulates for generations because no one has ever said, out loud, this should not have happened (cf. James 5:16; 2 Chronicles 7:14). Truth commissions are, in this sense, institutionalized confession. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission remains the most familiar example, imperfect as it was: amnesty in exchange for testimony, perpetrators walking free while victims spoke their grief into a microphone (McCallum & Waller, 2021). The trade-offs were agonizing, and not everyone agreed they were worth it. Some survivors wanted prosecution, not a platform. Some

found that speaking did not heal but reopened. However, the commission did something that trials alone could not. It created a public record of what had been denied for so long. It named names, acknowledged patterns, and refused to let the past be buried under the pragmatic calculus of political transition. There is no formula for this work. Every attempt is provisional, contested, and insufficient. However, the alternative—silence, denial, the pretense that the past can be left behind—is not really an alternative at all. It is just the continuation of injury by other means.

There is a diagnostic assumption embedded in Just Peacemaking Theory: that violence is not random but predictable, and that its predictability lies, in part, in the violation of human dignity that precedes it. People do not generally take up arms because they are content. They take up arms because their grievances have gone unacknowledged, their rights (cf. Galatians 5:13; Isaiah 1:17) have been systematically denied, and their capacity to speak, assemble, and worship has been treated as contingent rather than inherent. Russett (1998) put it plainly: regimes that repress are, over time, regimes that fight. Not always, not exclusively, but persistently enough to discern a pattern. Protecting religious liberty, then, is not merely a matter of tolerance or legal compliance. It is a peacemaking practice. When a religious minority is permitted to gather without fear, when its members can hold property, publish texts, raise children in their tradition without state interference, a particular kind of grievance is preemptively disarmed. International human rights frameworks exist to codify these protections, and organizations such as the United Nations and regional human rights bodies work, unevenly, to hold states to account (Davidian & Kenney, 2017). However, treaties are only paper. Their force depends on governments willing to be bound by them and civil societies willing to demand that they be honored. Without that combination, the rights remain abstract, the grievances accumulate, and the pattern Russett (1998) identified continues its grim repetition.

The relationship between economic grievance and armed conflict is not mysterious. It is, by now, one of the better-documented regularities in the study of political violence. When people are systematically denied access to land, livelihood, and the ordinary means of sustaining their families, they do not, in the main, respond with patience. They respond with anger, and that anger, when it finds no peaceful outlet, turns toward more desperate registers. Some have arrived at a careful formulation after examining conflicts across several regions (Penner, 2024; Süß & Weipert-Fenner, 2024). Inequality, they concluded, does not mechanically produce armed struggle. However, it does something else. It slowly and steadily fills a reservoir over the years and decades. That reservoir can remain untapped for long stretches. Then a political actor appears who knows how to release it, or a state crackdown pierces the wall, and the water rushes out. Repression alone cannot drain what has already accumulated.

Just Peacemaking Theory takes this connection seriously. It insists that peacebuilding cannot confine itself to ceasefires and constitutional negotiations while the economic arrangements that produced the conflict remain undisturbed. Bronkema et al. (1998) understood this decades ago. Peace, in their reading, requires not merely redistribution but structural transformation—land reform that actually transfers title, credit systems that reach beyond existing patronage networks, labor protections that extend to those who have always been

excluded. There are precedents. Microfinance initiatives in South Asia, when designed with genuine community participation, have shifted local power dynamics in measurable ways (Banerjee & Jackson, 2017). Land reform in parts of Brazil, however incomplete, has reduced rural violence in municipalities where it was implemented seriously (Filho et al., 2016). These are not panaceas. They are vulnerable to co-optation, reversal, and the slow corrosion of corruption. However, they are also, in the absence of any better alternative, what peacemaking looks like when it takes economics seriously.

In the architecture of Just Peacemaking Theory, there is recognition that no conflict of any significant scale can be resolved by local actors alone. Not because local actors lack capacity or will, but because the forces that sustain protracted violence—arms flows, economic interests, geopolitical alignments—almost always exceed the boundaries of the immediate conflict zone. It is why Stassen and his colleagues insisted on strengthening international cooperation as a distinct peacemaking practice (Schroeder, 1998). The United Nations, regional bodies like ASEAN and the African Union, and even institutions primarily concerned with economic governance, such as the IMF—all of these, however imperfect, represent the rudiments of a global capacity to prevent, contain, and repair armed conflict (Ali et al., 2025; Jones, 2020). The imperfections are considerable. Anyone who has followed the debates knows this. Security Council reform has been stalled for decades. Peacekeeping missions are given ambitious mandates and a fraction of what it would take to fulfil them. Troop-contributing countries vary widely in terms of training and discipline. Diplomatic envoys shuttle between capitals, but their efforts are often undercut by the very governments that dispatched them. However, the alternative to these flawed institutions is not a purer, more just international order. It is, more likely, a return to spheres of influence and the unilateral use of force. Complementing these intergovernmental bodies is a dense web of non-governmental organizations and civil society networks that monitor, advocate, and deliver services where states cannot or will not (Van Wessel et al., 2021). They lack formal authority but possess something else: flexibility, moral credibility, the capacity to name violations that diplomats, bound by protocol, must leave unspoken. Neither layer is sufficient alone. Together, they constitute the current thin global infrastructure for peacemaking. The work of strengthening it is neither naïve nor optional.

Reducing the global flow of weapons is, in Just Peacemaking Theory, neither a secondary concern nor a symbolic gesture. It is a direct intervention into the material infrastructure of armed conflict. Stassen (1998) was blunt on this point: weapons do not cause wars by themselves, but their abundance makes wars longer, bloodier, and harder to contain. Green and Stassen (1998) took this further. They examined not merely the presence of arms but the systems that produce and distribute them—systems justified in the language of national security yet sustained, in large part, by commercial appetite. A factory does not ask where its products will eventually be fired. A broker does not interview the end user. The transaction is the thing. Years of advocacy by civil society groups eventually yielded the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014, a document that codifies what had long been obvious to anyone who had tracked a particular shipment from manufacturer to conflict zone: that this trade is not beyond regulation

(Hersman et al., 2022). However, treaties do not enforce themselves. Major exporters continue to supply parties engaged in active hostilities. Importing states with dismal human rights records continue to receive sophisticated weaponry. The gap between what the treaty says and what states do is not a failure of drafting. It is a failure of political will.

If international arms control represents the macro level of peacemaking practice, grassroots initiatives occupy the other end of the scale entirely. Here, the logic is inverted. Not top-down regulation but bottom-up capacity. Friesen (1998) observed what should have been obvious: the people who understand a conflict most intimately are those who live inside it. They know which lineages hold grudges, which elders command respect, which rituals have historically repaired what violence has torn apart. Outsiders bring resources, expertise, and sometimes impartiality. However, they rarely bring this local knowledge, and without it, peacebuilding becomes a blunt instrument. There are examples worth attending to. In Ethiopia, local peace committees have drawn on customary dispute-resolution practices to mediate between communities that state security forces could only pacify temporarily and at great cost (Aragaw, 2024). The committees are imperfect, their authority sometimes contested, their agreements fragile. However, they operate in a register that no external intervention can replicate: from within, not from above.

What Just Peacemaking Theory offers, in the end, is not a menu of options to be selected à la carte. It is a field of practices, each operating at a different scale, each requiring different actors and competencies, but all oriented toward the same end. That end is not the absence of conflict—conflict is inevitable in any society composed of free persons—but the transformation of how conflict is conducted. Away from violence and toward persuasion, away from domination and toward reciprocity, away from the permanent entrenchment of winners and losers and toward the endless, ordinary work of repair. Whether this vision can take root in a place as deeply wounded as Papua is not a question that theory alone can answer. However, theory can clarify what is at stake, name the practices most likely to matter, and insist that the question itself be asked.

### **Appropriating Just Peacemaking Theory to the Papua conflict**

Discerning what Just Peacemaking Theory might contribute to Papua is not a matter of applying it whole cloth. It is, rather, a matter of reading the conflict and the theory alongside one another, patiently, to see where they align and where friction emerges. Some practices within the theory's framework will travel more easily than others. Nonviolent direct action, grassroots peacebuilding, the patient work of economic justice—these speak directly to a population that has experienced decades of militarization and marginalization. They offer an alternative grammar to the cycles of armed resistance and state retaliation that have yielded only exhaustion. Moreover, they do not depend on Jakarta's permission. That alone makes them significant.

Nevertheless, something deeper is also at work here. For Indonesian Christians, and particularly for Papuan Christians, the appropriation of Just Peacemaking Theory is not simply a strategic calculation. It is a theological recognition. The Beatitudes are not foreign scripture

in Papua; they are read from pulpits every Sunday. The call to be peacemakers, to turn the cheek, to overcome evil with good—these are not abstract propositions but the daily texture of Christian discipleship in a region where the church has often been the only institution willing to speak truth to power. Tebay (2009) documented this extensively: Papuan church leaders have, for decades, documented human rights violations, mediated between communities and security forces, and insisted that the conflict be understood not only politically but morally. They have done so with little institutional support and at considerable personal risk.

Darmaputera's (1988) work on transformative grace, though developed in a different Indonesian context, captures something essential here. He understood that the church's task is not merely to console the afflicted but to reconstruct the social order that afflicts them. It is not a quietist piety. It is an active, costly engagement with the powers of this world. What Just Peacemaking Theory offers, then, is not a new theology but a practical grammar for a theology already present. It names and orders what Papuan Christians have been attempting, often improvisationally, for decades. It provides a vocabulary for what they already know: that peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, and that this justice must be built, patiently, practice by practice, from the ground up.

Some practices within Just Peacemaking Theory fit the Papuan context more naturally than others. A framework developed with Cold War superpowers, European integration, and North American civil rights movements in view cannot simply be lifted and set down in the highlands of Papua without adjustment. However, several of its core commitments arrive with real force, such as nonviolent direct action, the defense of human rights, and economic alternatives built from the ground up. These do not require Jakarta's permission. They can be taken up locally, adapted to village structures and urban networks alike, and sustained over the long arc that genuine change demands.

Papua is not starting from zero here. There is a history, however unevenly documented, of nonviolent political expression. Flag-raising ceremonies, though illegal, continue to draw crowds. Cultural festivals become occasions for asserting Melanesian identity against Malay dominance, as protesters march, display banners, and refuse orders to disperse. The response from security forces has been consistent and predictable: arrests, beatings, in some cases killings. However, the practices persist, transmitted informally through families and communities, because the perceived alternatives are either armed struggle, with its own devastating human costs, or acquiescence (Taliawo et al., 2023). Strengthening this existing capacity is not about teaching Papuans what they already know. It is about recognizing what they have sustained under extraordinary pressure and asking what might make it more sustainable still: strategic planning, connections to international human rights networks, communication platforms that circumvent local blackouts and national media silences (Hallward & Norman, 2015). The churches are critical here. They are present in nearly every district. They command respect across generational and tribal lines. Moreover, their theological resources do not need to be imported or invented. Nonviolence is not an alien doctrine in Papuan

Christianity. It is there in every reading of the Sermon on the Mount, every hymn about peace, every sermon that dares to name injustice.

None of this is easy, and pretending otherwise helps no one. The militarization of Papua is not abstract; it is checkpoints, intelligence networks, and the ever-present possibility that a peaceful gathering will be declared a security threat and dispersed accordingly. The report from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (2021) catalogued how routine this criminalization has become: organizers detained preemptively, participants charged under anti-terrorism statutes, the label “separatist” applied to anyone who raises a Morning Star flag or criticizes the military’s role in the region. Geography compounds the difficulty. Papua’s population is not concentrated in a few easily organized cities; it is scattered across mountains and swamps, connected by roads that wash out in the wet season and mobile signals that flicker in and out. Coordinating any collective action across this terrain is exhausting.

Furthermore, Papuan civil society, like civil societies everywhere, harbors its own tensions. Generational differences. Rivalries between leaders. Disagreements about whether the ultimate goal is independence, autonomy, or something else not yet named. Security forces monitor these divisions closely and exploit them when it serves their purposes. The way forward, then, is not through grand gestures or heroic sacrifice. It is through incremental, patient work: building the digital infrastructure that might circumvent information blackouts, cultivating international relationships that can shift the cost-benefit calculus of repression, and training organizers in the unglamorous craft of turnout, messaging, and negotiation.

Before there can be reconciliation, there must be acknowledgment. It is not a theological nicety but a psychological and political necessity. The 1969 Act of Free Choice, the decades of military operations, the unmet promises of special autonomy—these are not wounds that time alone heals. They have been documented, testified to, and entered into the record by human rights organizations, scholars, and the survivors themselves (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2004; MacLeod, 2015). What has been consistently missing is a response from those who bear responsibility. An official acknowledgment from the Indonesian government that wrongs were committed, that Papuans suffered unjustly, that the state’s apparatus was used not to protect but to repress. Zam and Himmawan (2023) are not naïve about what such an acknowledgment would cost. It would open legal questions, political vulnerabilities, and the prospect of further demands. Nevertheless, they argue persuasively that it would also open the possibility that the relationship between Jakarta and Papua might be rebuilt on something other than coercion and resentment.

The churches are the obvious, perhaps the only, institution capable of initiating this work at the societal level. They have the trust of Papuan communities, the organizational infrastructure, and a theological vocabulary that can name both sin and grace without embarrassment. Widjojo et al. (2010) envisioned a truth-telling forum modelled loosely on other transitional justice processes, but adapted to Papuan conditions: smaller scale, community-based, led by local clergy and customary elders. Not a single grand commission but many local hearings, each creating a record of what happened in that district, to those families, on that date. The purpose would not be prosecution—though that might follow in some cases—

but acknowledgment. Someone in authority would listen, write down what was said, and confirm its truth. That alone, in a context where denial has been the official posture for five decades, would represent a profound shift.

The defense of human rights in Papua cannot wait, however, for this longer process of acknowledgment and repair. Abuses continue to be documented with grim regularity: extrajudicial killings in remote districts, torture in military detention, the criminalization of peaceful speech and assembly (Perkasa & Puspitosari, 2024). Here, the churches' role is more direct advocacy. Documentation. Legal accompaniment. The quiet work of ensuring that when a Papuan is arrested, someone shows up at the police station with a notebook and the contact information for a lawyer. Yeimo (2024) describes how local church networks have sometimes been the only institutions willing to perform this function, and how their presence has, in some cases, deterred the worst excesses. International human rights organizations provide important amplification, but they cannot be everywhere. The proximate witness matters differently.

Economic marginalization is, in some ways, the most intractable dimension of the conflict. It is not the product of a single policy failure or a discrete set of abuses; it is the accumulated outcome of decades of extraction without reinvestment, migration without integration, and development planning that treats Papuans as obstacles rather than participants (Trajano, 2010). Addressing this will require more than budget allocations or infrastructure projects. It will require a deliberate reorientation of economic life toward indigenous ownership and control—cooperative enterprises, land trusts, and credit unions that actually serve the communities they nominally represent. Van Burg (2020) documents several such initiatives in the highlands, small in scale and struggling against long odds, but demonstrating that alternatives to the extractive model are possible. The churches, again, are positioned to support this work—not as managers but as conveners, investors, guarantors of accountability. They hold land, some of it contested. They command the loyalty of educated professionals who might otherwise migrate to Java. They can model, in their own institutional practices, what stewardship rather than extraction might look like. It is not a solution to Papua's economic crisis. It is, at best, a beginning. However, beginnings are what have been missing.

The question of translation is finally the question of ownership. Just Peacemaking Theory arrives in Papua with a set of practices, but those practices will either take root in local soil or wither on it. The good news is that the soil is not barren. Papuan societies have, for generations, maintained their own protocols for addressing harm and restoring relationships. Among the Mee, the *rakar* gathers disputing parties before community elders for sustained, face-to-face deliberation. Among the Dani, the *wor* operates as a ceremonial mechanism for acknowledging loss and reestablishing equilibrium (Giay, 2000). These are not relics; they are living systems, adapted and readapted across decades of colonial and post-colonial disruption. The task, then, is not to supplant them with something foreign but to ask how the theory's principles might be rendered in their grammar. Truth-telling already has a local idiom. Restitution already has customary forms. The work of integration is delicate, easily botched by outsiders in a hurry.

However, done patiently, with respect for elders and fluency in local languages, it yields something that neither imported theory nor inherited tradition could produce alone.

Grassroots peacebuilding in Papua is not a future aspiration. It is a present reality, underfunded and under-recognized, but persistent. Local organizations have mediated between security forces and village councils, accompanied survivors to hospitals and police stations, and organized trauma healing workshops in districts where no government mental health services exist (Tebay, 2009). They operate with scant resources and under constant surveillance. What they lack is not commitment but capacity: training, connections, the modest financial buffer that allows an organizer to travel to a neighboring valley or print informational materials. The churches, again, are the natural partners here. They have the infrastructure, moral credibility, and a theological framework that legitimize peacebuilding as an authentic Christian practice, not as foreign political interference (Gehlin, 2020). Mentorship, not direction. Accompaniment, not control. The relationship between church institutions and grassroots peace teams should mirror the relationship that Just Peacemaking Theory itself seeks between theory and practice: mutually constituting and mutually correcting.

What emerges from this process of discernment is not the full Just Peacemaking Theory menu but a curated selection. Nonviolent direct action has already been taken up by Papuan civil society, and the question is how to sustain it amid persistent repression. The demand for acknowledgment speaks directly to the 1969 referendum and the decades of violence that followed—not as a legal claim alone, but as a precondition for any credible process of reconciliation. Human rights documentation, tedious and dangerous as it is, remains the primary means by which Papuan suffering enters the historical record. Economic alternatives, from cooperatives to land trusts, offer a concrete grammar for what justice might mean in districts where mining revenues have never reached those who bear the environmental and social costs. These five practices, taken together, do not constitute a comprehensive peace plan. They constitute a starting point—one that respects Papuan agency, draws on existing capacities, and refuses the false choice between armed resistance and acquiescence.

The Papua conflict, for all its particularity, is not wholly without parallel. It shares features with other struggles against state-perpetrated marginalization, and with other contexts where a distinct ethnic or cultural community presses claims the state refuses to acknowledge. Shao (2019) traced how Just Peacemaking Theory was taken up in post-genocide Rwanda, where churches confronted their own deep complicity in violence and the long, halting work of institutional repentance. Papua's churches inhabit a different moral position. They have not been perpetrators; they have been, by and large, victims and witnesses, their leaders detained, their congregants killed, their buildings surveilled. However, they share with Rwandan Christians the task of constructing a public ethic of peacemaking from within a community marked by profound suffering. Consider the Ukrainian case. Penner (2024) documented how evangelical communities there, long accustomed to avoiding political entanglement, found themselves after 2022 confronting questions they had never needed to ask: what does it mean

to witness to peace when your country is under invasion, your neighbours are fleeing, your own theological commitments seem suddenly inadequate to the scale of the catastrophe?

Papuan Christians face not invasion from without but occupation from within, not a foreign army's artillery but a domestic military's checkpoints and intelligence networks. The theological question, however, converges: what does faithful witness require when the political order, which scripture instructs believers to honor, becomes the agent of their affliction? Papua's churches have been working through this question, implicitly, through sermons, pastoral letters, and quiet acts of accompaniment, for decades. Just Peacemaking Theory offers a vocabulary to name what they already practice, and a community of discourse that extends beyond the archipelago. The contribution of the Papuan case to the broader Just Peacemaking Theory literature is precisely this: it demonstrates that religious actors embedded within the very state apparatus that perpetuates conflict can nonetheless function as counter-cultural witnesses to justice. They do not require international cover to speak the truth. They have been speaking it all along.

There is a recurring temptation in peacebuilding scholarship to treat moral claims and empirical evidence as belonging to separate domains. One is the province of theology or philosophy, the other of political science or sociology. Just Peacemaking Theory refuses this division. Stassen (1992) drew the theory's normative commitments directly from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)—the call to turn the cheek, to go the second mile, to be peacemakers rather than merely peace-talkers. However, those commitments were never meant to remain in the register of exhortation. They were meant to be enacted, tested, and refined through practice. The question was not whether nonviolence was righteous but whether it worked. Moreover, on that question, the historical record accumulated through the twentieth century became increasingly difficult to dismiss. Movements in India, South America, South Africa, and the Philippines—each provided evidence that organized, disciplined nonviolent action could shift political settlements where armed struggle only entrenched them (Ilesanmi, 2003). It is not to claim that nonviolence always succeeds. It is claimed that its success is not miraculous but patterned, and those patterns can be studied, taught, and adapted.

The Papuan conflict is, among other things, a moral crisis. It is not only that the 1969 referendum was procedurally flawed, though it was. It is that Papuans have, for five decades, been asking for that flaw to be acknowledged, only to be met with denial. It is not only that military operations have caused civilian casualties, though they have. It is that those casualties have been treated as acceptable collateral in a counterinsurgency campaign without a clear endpoint. It is not only that Otsus funds have been misappropriated, though they have. It is that the misappropriation follows a predictable pattern: money meant for Papuan communities is diverted to non-Papuan contractors, Papuan politicians are co-opted into patronage networks, and the entire apparatus of autonomy functions as a kind of managed dependency rather than genuine self-governance. These are not technical failures. They are failures of moral recognition. The state has not treated Papuans as citizens whose injuries merit acknowledgment and redress.

Just Peacemaking Theory's insistence on integrating moral responsibility with empirical strategy is, in this context, not an academic refinement but a practical necessity. A peace process that does not acknowledge the 1969 referendum's contested legitimacy will rest on a foundation of denial. A human rights framework that does not translate into documentation, prosecution, and institutional reform will remain aspirational. Economic initiatives that do not shift ownership and control toward indigenous communities will reproduce the very dependency they purport to address. The theory's contribution is to insist that these are not separate tracks—moral, legal, economic, political—but dimensions of a single integrated process. Each requires the others. Acknowledgment without material change becomes an empty ritual. Economic empowerment without political voice becomes incorporation into an unjust system. Human rights documentation without accountability becomes an archival exercise. The task in Papua is not to choose among these practices but to advance them together, patiently, in the knowledge that each success, however small, creates conditions for the next.

### **Toward Papua as a (dream) land of peace**

The question, finally, is what Just Peacemaking Theory actually makes possible in Papua. Not in the abstract, but on the ground—in district capitals and highland villages, in church halls and university classrooms, in the patient, unglamorous work of organizing and advocacy. The framework offers no miracle cure, no checklist that guarantees peace if only each box is ticked. What it offers is something more modest and, for that reason, more durable: a set of orienting commitments that can guide practice across the conflict's many dimensions.

The first of these commitments is to an inclusive political framework. Papuan grievances are not monolithic. They encompass the contested legitimacy of the 1969 referendum, the human rights abuses of five decades, the failed promises of special autonomy, the daily experience of economic marginalization, and cultural displacement (Kimball, 2003). No single intervention can address all of these simultaneously. However, an approach informed by Just Peacemaking Theory insists that none of them can be bracketed indefinitely. A peace that ignores the question of Pepera's legitimacy rests on denial. A development strategy that fails to shift ownership and control to indigenous communities reproduces dependency (Nahari, 2023). A human rights agenda that does not translate into accountability becomes an archival exercise. The framework does not prescribe the precise sequence in which these issues must be addressed. It insists only that they must be addressed, and that addressing them requires the participation of those most affected by them.

It is where grassroots empowerment becomes not an optional add-on but the central mechanism of the entire enterprise. Papuan civil society is not a blank slate awaiting instruction from Jakarta or Jayapura. It is dense with organizations, networks, and leaders who have been engaged in this work for years, often under severe constraints. Local NGOs have documented abuses that state institutions refused to acknowledge. Indigenous councils have maintained customary governance structures alongside and sometimes against the official administrative system. Church-based groups have accompanied survivors, mediated disputes, and organized

trauma healing workshops in districts where no government mental health services exist (McGibbon, 2004; Sugandi, 2008). What these actors lack is not legitimacy or commitment but capacity: training, resources, connections to national and international networks that might amplify their voices and protect them from retaliation. The churches are well-positioned to provide this support, not by supplanting grassroots initiatives but by strengthening them. Mentorship, not direction. Accompaniment, not control.

Collaboration with state actors is unavoidable and deeply fraught. The Indonesian government is not an external party to the Papua conflict; it is the principal agent of the policies and practices that Papuans contest. Here, the dilemma is plain (Kivimäki, 2008; Widjojo et al., 2010). Excluding Jakarta from a peace process guarantees failure. Relying entirely on Jakarta's voluntary cooperation guarantees little more. Just Peacemaking Theory's emphasis on cooperative conflict resolution does not dissolve this tension but supplies a vocabulary for working within it. Structured dialogue, when arranged, allows immediate grievances to be addressed while keeping open the possibility of deeper engagement with systemic questions (Stassen, 1992). Who facilitates such dialogue matters enormously. The churches have sometimes played this role, not because they are neutral—few institutions in Papua are genuinely neutral—but because they maintain relationships across the divide. A bishop can telephone a district military commander and be reasonably sure the call will be answered. A pastor can accompany a village head to a meeting with a Regent (or *Bupati*) and be heard with a degree of respect not extended to unknown activists. These are slender threads on which to hang hopes for peace. Nevertheless, they are the threads that exist.

Processes of truth-telling and reconciliation, imperfect as they are, offer one possible extension of this work (Sumule et al., 2024). They cannot compel acknowledgment where the state remains committed to denial. They cannot substitute for prosecution where prosecution is legally warranted and politically conceivable. What they can do is something more modest but not unimportant. They can receive testimony. They can document what happened, to whom, by whose order, or negligence. They can create a public record that, later generations, should they choose to inquire, will find waiting for them. Moreover, for survivors, the experience of being heard by someone authorized to listen—not as an intelligence-gathering exercise, not as a prelude to dismissal, but as an end in itself—can shift something.

Economic transformation is the least developed dimension of most peace processes, and the Papua conflict is no exception. Special autonomy was supposed to deliver development with equity; instead, it delivered corruption and the enrichment of non-Papuan contractors. The extractive industries continue to operate with minimal local benefit and catastrophic environmental cost. Indigenous Papuans watch their timber, minerals, and marine resources removed from their territories while they remain the poorest population in the country (MacLeod, 2015; Marpaung, 2024). Addressing this requires more than budget allocations or infrastructure projects. It requires a fundamental reorientation of economic life toward local ownership, sustainable practice, and the equitable distribution of both benefits and decision-making authority. Churches can advocate for such reorientation, invest in cooperative

enterprises, and model stewardship in their own institutional practices. They cannot single-handedly transform Papua's political economy. Nevertheless, they can help create the conditions under which such a transformation becomes thinkable.

The vision that emerges from all of this is not a detailed blueprint. It is, rather, a direction of travel, toward acknowledgment rather than denial, local capacity rather than elite capture, dialogue rather than coercion, economic arrangements that serve communities rather than extracting from them, and a peace that is not merely the absence of armed conflict but the presence of justice, dignity, and genuine participation, whether Papua can achieve such peace is not a question that theory can answer. That depends on factors far beyond the scope of any scholarly project: political will in Jakarta, the evolution of Papuan civil society, the unpredictable dynamics of international attention and neglect. What theory can do is name the practices most likely to matter, clarify the moral commitments that animate them, and insist that the question itself remains open. The churches, for their part, have already chosen their answer. They have been witnessing, accompanying, advocating, and praying for peace in Papua for decades. Just Peacemaking Theory offers them a vocabulary to describe what they already do, and a community of discourse that extends beyond the archipelago. The work itself is theirs.

## CONCLUSION

The argument running through this study is that Just Peacemaking Theory, often read as an ethical reflection, also serves as a guide to action. Its contribution to the Papua literature is not the invention of new moral principles but the systematic application of existing ones to a conflict where they have been, until now, largely absent from scholarly treatment. The shift in register is not trivial. Instead of asking how the conflict might be managed more efficiently—the implicit question behind so many policy interventions—Just Peacemaking Theory asks what justice requires, and how those requirements might be met through nonviolent, participatory, locally embedded practices. The answer is not a single solution but a field of possibilities: truth-telling processes that could finally acknowledge what has been denied since 1969; protected spaces for peaceful civic organizing in a heavily militarized environment; economic initiatives that prioritize indigenous ownership over the familiar pattern of extraction and elite capture. For Papuan churches, the implications are considerable. The study invites them to reconsider their role: not only as pastoral caregivers to the afflicted, though that work continues to matter, but as prophetic witnesses who name injustice, facilitate dialogue across hardened divides, and train communities in the disciplined practice of nonviolent resistance (cf. Dudouet, 2015; Suryawan, 2022). It also asks them to recognize that the peacemaking traditions embedded in Papuan cultures are not obstacles to be cleared away before Just Peacemaking Theory can be applied. The *rakar* of the Mee, the *wor* of the Dani, the authority of elders, the solidarity of kinship networks—these are not foreign to the theory's grammar. They are local dialects of it, waiting to be spoken in new registers and put to work in new contexts.

None of this is offered as definitive. A study conducted entirely through existing literature, however carefully assembled, cannot substitute for the voices and experiences of

Papuans themselves. Future research needs to attend to what this one could not: how Papuan stakeholders—village leaders, women organizers, youth activists, church elders—understand their own peacemaking practices and perceive the possibilities and limits of nonviolent action under current conditions. The barriers to implementation are not theoretical but material, political, and psychological. They require empirical mapping, case by case, district by district. Moreover, the relationship between Just Peacemaking Theory and indigenous peacemaking traditions, only gestured at here, demands far more sustained attention than a single study can provide. The horizon, in the end, is not a comprehensive peace agreement or a final resolution to the conflict's underlying questions. It is something more modest and, for that reason, perhaps more attainable: a peace that is not merely the absence of armed violence but the presence of justice, the exercise of rights, the experience of dignity. Whether Papua reaches that horizon depends on factors far beyond any theoretical framework—political will in Jakarta, the evolution of Papuan civil society, and the unpredictable currents of international attention. Nevertheless, the framework can help clarify what it would mean to arrive there, and what practices might make the journey possible. That is what frameworks are for.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

### **Author contributions**

F.Y.M. developed the discourse, collected and analyzed the data, restructured and developed the initial manuscript, contributed to the interpretation of results, and revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. C.J.M. conceived and designed the study, developed the theoretical framework, and drafted the initial manuscript. Z.T.M. reviewed and edited the content, flow, and systematic arrangement of the manuscript.

### **Ethical considerations**

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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### **Disclaimer**

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