

## Cowichan **NEWS LEADER & PICTORIAL**

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The Pictorial

On Tuesday, Cowichan Tribes members and human rights supporters were given a rare first-hand account of graphic injustices happening on the other side of the world. According to Yan Christian Warinussy, indigenous people in West Papua, an island north of Australia, have been killed and continue to be killed at the hands of Indonesian armed forces and militias.

Warinussy, a human rights lawyer in West Papua, recently received the Rights and Democracy John Humphrey Freedom Award for 2005. As part of the award his organization, the Institute of Research, Analysis and Development of Legal Aid, receives \$25,000 and tours Canadian cities giving talks and learning from various groups.

“I want to know how we can protect our people in terms of writing laws,” Warinussy said via an interpreter in an interview with *The Pictorial*. “The Aboriginals in Canada handle their own resources. That’s what we want for West Papua.”

For the past 42 years the country has been under the control of the Indonesian government, which has created much distrust among the indigenous people. Since the government took power, it’s estimated 100,000 indigenous Papuans have been killed.

Warinussy has been working as a human rights lawyer since 1989, providing representation for indigenous people who otherwise have no one to defend them. He has been threatened with death, arrested and intimidated.

“Human rights activists in West Papua face big challenges,” he said. “Access to many areas is denied to aid organizations, international human rights observers, media and church representatives.”

Warinussy said companies from other countries coming in and exploiting the natural resources amplify the injustices.

Cowichan Tribes advisor and executive member of Rights and Democracy Lydia Hwitsum said First Nations could sympathize to fighting oppressive actions by government.

“We continue to have access to our traditional lands denied and looking at the history of Canada, there has been a lot of oppression,” she said.

The award Warinussy received is named after Canadian John Peters Humphrey who penned the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“It’s a bit ironic that he wrote this draft and before Canada could adopt it, they had to change their own laws which went against the declaration,” Hwitsum said. “Under the Indian Act First Nations weren’t allowed to have legal representation.

“By having people like Yan Christian Warinussy come and speak, we can raise the Canadian consciousness and advocate for change through legal avenues.”

Story provided courtesy of the Cowichan News Leader & Pictorial