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Member of the European Commission

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Dear Dr Lucas,

I thank you for your letter of 21st January 2009 regarding the detention of Mr Tabuni and Mr Sambom in West Papua following a demonstration in support of the establishment of the International Parliamentarians for West Papua. I am informed of this case and share your concerns. Our Delegation in Jakarta is trying to obtain as much reliable information as possible on the conditions of their detention.

As you know, the protection of human rights is a priority for the European Commission, to which we give prime consideration in our relations with third countries. We attach particular importance to the support to Human Rights Defenders, as outlined in the respective EU Guidelines. The Commission tries to address problems through dialogue with the Government and, to a limited extent, by financially supporting projects in the field of Human Rights that are mostly implemented by civil society organisations.

The European Commission follows closely the situation in Indonesia in general and particularly in the provinces of Papua and West Papua. Despite the legitimate preoccupations that cases like the ones you have indicated raise in terms of the assessment of respect of human rights in Indonesia, I would nevertheless like to underline that Indonesia has made substantial improvements over the last years in the promotion and protection of human rights.

The Government, in particular at central level, is trying to address shortcomings. Besides the enactment of important constitutional changes and national laws, the ratification of international conventions and the establishment of relevant national institutions, Indonesia is also increasingly open to international cooperation in Human Rights matters, as demonstrated by the Universal Periodic Review process at the UN Human Rights Council, of which the country is a member.

In this regard, we are encouraged by the recent acquittal of human rights defender Sabar Iwanggin Olif by the Jayapura State Court.

Dr. Caroline Lucas, MEP
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We believe that a constructive dialogue with Indonesian authorities is the most promising way forward. The EU and Indonesia have agreed on the principle of a specific policy dialogue on human rights that we hope will begin in the near future. In that context, the EU while aiming at the improvement of the human rights situation across the country, may also have the opportunity to address in a more focused way the situation in the provinces of Papua and West Papua.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Auliel

Benita FERRERO-WALDNER

*(Signed in the Commissioner's
absence)*