

Civilian volunteers ready to promote peace here

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A'an Suryana, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta

Yulianus J. Hisage, 36, has just completed two weeks of conflict-resolution training in Jakarta and is ready to apply his knowledge back home in Wamena, Papua.

He is proud to be numbered among those working for peace in the province, where sporadic conflict between the Indonesian military (TNI) and separatist groups has occurred over the last few decades. Municipal and regional elections have also given rise to violence.

He said that his long acquaintance with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and church groups had given him the conviction that he had something to contribute to society.

"I have to help establish peace in Papua. If not me, then who else?" said Yulianus, who is also the chairman of the humanitarian foundation, Silimo Bina Adat, in the regental capital of Jaya Wijaya, Wamena. The foundation is also affiliated with local churches.

Yulianus had no second thoughts when Ichsan Malik, the director of the Titian Perdamaian Institute, asked him to volunteer to be a civilian peacekeeper in Papua.

Yulianus met with Ichsan early this year when Ichsan visited Wamena to share his vast knowledge on conflict resolution.

Yulianus was encouraged to attend three two-week training programs run by the Titian Perdamaian Institute (ITP), the first of which was held in February this year, the latest, between November and December.

Yulianus, a graduate of a Christian institute in Jayapura, is among 24 civilian peacekeepers recruited from seven conflict-prone areas across the archipelago: South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, North Maluku and Papua provinces. To be a civilian peacekeeper requires no specific skills. The 24 peacekeepers are the first group to be trained by the ITP.

"They study theory for two weeks at a time but also have three months' field experience," said the ITP's coordinator of information, documentation and research, Rolly Leatemia.

Another 31 volunteers from across the nation have been recruited for ITP training programs next year. "We have a contract for three years, with funding from New Zealand Aid," said Rolly.

After attending the training, the volunteers are sent home with the moral obligation to work to restore peace in their respective areas.

"Whether there is money or not, they are morally committed to help defuse the conflict," said Rolly.

The training includes learning to "map out" conflicts and seek the root cause of problems, to find out who the main players are and who can be approached to defuse conflicts, to facilitate peace at the negotiating table and to educate people so that they are less easily provoked.

Volunteers are also given psychological training so that they are mentally prepared to facilitate peace in the field.

"Peace facilitators are often threatened or terrorized -- the volunteers have to be ready for it," said Rolly.

The establishment of the civilian peacekeeping team dates back to two years ago, when Ichsan was involved in a discussion with NGO activist Boedhy Widjarjo, who is currently the secretary of ITP.

"The situation in heterogeneous Indonesia is susceptible to conflict. Poso and Maluku have been conflict areas and more violence is possible during the direct elections of regional administrations next year," said Ichsan during a film screening recently at the office of *The Jakarta Post*. Over 100 regional administrations in Indonesia will hold direct elections next year.

"More volunteers are badly needed to materialize a peaceful Indonesia. We have been hit by many conflicts in various regions, and enough is enough," said Ichsan