

1 The Price of Freedom

The Lismore Regional Gallery is presenting a special exhibition this month entitled Papua Barat Merdeka: Free West Papua, which features a series of photographs by freelance journalist Andrew Kilvert.

The photographs, from the restive Indonesian province of West Papua, were taken over a three-year period during which Kilvert travelled and worked in the province.

Kilvert was forced to flee into neighbouring Papua New Guinea during the huge independence protests of 2000, after receiving warnings from Australian authorities based in Jakarta.

"Since the Indonesian annexation of the province in 1961, there had been a low-level insurgency among the indigenous Papuans resisting the Indonesian military occupation," Kilvert explained. "This spilled over in the year 2000 as tens of thousands of Papuans took to the streets of the capital Jayapura calling for independence. While the exhibition does deal with dark issues like the Biak massacre in July 1998, in which an estimated 300 Papuan civilians were gunned down and dumped in the ocean by Indonesian military authorities, it does not contain gory or violent images."

West Papua is now effectively a 'no-go' zone for journalists, with Jakarta refusing to grant visas and expelling journalists who do attempt to report the issues.

"This is an important human rights exhibition," said gallery director Bronwyn Lerner. "The photographs and text give an insight into this little known and troubled part of the world."

The exhibition has been shown in Melbourne and Port Moresby as well as the Northern Territory. This is its first showing in NSW.

Accompanying the exhibition is a display of Papua New Guinean string bags (called 'bilums') from Kilvert and Bronwyn's personal collections. The colourful woven bags have been made by women from various tribes in PNG.

Papua Barat Merdeka: Free West Papua is on show until July 24.

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