

Most locals reject Papua split: MRP

Jakarta — Ridwan Max Sijabat

The Papua People's Council (MRP) is stepping up its opposition to Jakarta's policy to split Papua, saying a recent survey found most people object to the plan.

MRP chairman Agus Alue Alua said The council had conducted a survey to find out what people's views were on the controversial policy to set up the new West Irian Jaya province.

According to the 2001 law on special autonomy for Papua, any division of the territory requires the approval of the MRP, the provincial legislature and the governor.

In a telephone interview with *The Jakarta Post* last week, Agus said that MRP officials conducted a series of public meetings throughout West Papua. The large majority of respondents, made up of people from women's groups, the church, tribal assemblies and non-governmental organizations, all expressed their strong opposition to the plan, he said.

Neither had any of the respondents ever been involved in the decision-making process, he said.

"Most respondents, in the provincial capital of Manokwari and in all the regencies, reject the new province. They said the province was established by Jakarta with the support of a few local politicians who would gain politically and economically from it," Agus said.

He knew of only between 10 and 20 government officials who supported the creation of the new province.

"The Papuan people don't see any urgency to form a new province. They want the government to prioritize other important issues, such as (resolving) human rights abuses, the widening gap between indigenous people and migrants and rampant corruption among local officials," he said.

Papuans want to directly elect a governor for the whole province to replace JP Solossa, who died of heart attack last month, he said.

Following up last November's meeting with Papuan leaders to set up the MRP, Vice President Jusuf Kalla on Jan. 9 asked the MRP, the provincial legislature and the governor to vote for the creation of West Irian Jaya by mid-May.

In November's meeting, Jakarta and some Papuan leaders agreed to sign a government regulation in lieu of law, or *Perpu*, which would provide a legal basis for the establishment of the new province.

The *Perpu* has provoked widespread protest in Papua and is yet to be enforced.

The central government insists that the split is necessary to better manage the large territory. However, its critics say the policy goes against the special autonomy law and is unconstitutional. In an odd decision, the Constitutional Court agreed with the critics in November 2004, but ruled the creation of West Irian Jaya should go ahead anyway.

Papuan political observer Frans Maniagassi and Cendrawasih University social scientist Agus Sumule in Manokwari said Jakarta should consider the results of the MRP's public consultation.

They said Papuans would be more likely to press ahead with demands for a self-determination referendum if Jakarta continued to insist on dividing the province.

Source: The Jakarta Post