

**“Developments in Indonesia and US-Indonesian Relations”**

**Honorable Sabam Siagian**  
Senior Editor, The Jakarta Post

**Reverend Herman Saud**  
Chairman of the Congress of Christian Churches in Papua

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**Sabam Siagian** provided a thumbnail sketch of the domestic political scene and the prospects for the 2009 elections. A possible bell weather was the recent elections for the Governor of West Java where a relatively unknown candidate with the backing of the PKS and PAN parties garnered a plurality of 40% of the vote. This was a reflection of a broad discontent with government and boded ill for SBY’s prospects in 2009.

The unhappiness with the SBY government is centered on the President’s perceived indecisiveness, although it has been admitted that a cabinet representing rival parties has tended to hobble the development of positive policies and programs. SBY’s strongest attribute is his reputation for being “clean”, with no viable reports of personal corruption. Possible rivals for 2009 presidential elections included most of the “old names”, with Sultan of Jogjakarta an interesting dark horse.

With respect to bilateral ties to the U.S., Sabam said the relations between the two governments have never been better,

though resentment among the Indonesian population toward certain U.S. policies remains a problem. There is widespread concern that the U.S. focuses too much attention on the Middle East at the expense of East and Southeast Asia.

As to the U.S. presidential elections, unsurprisingly most Indonesians favor Barack Obama. Hillary and Bill Clinton are considered remnants of “old Washington” However, there is skepticism that the U.S. is ready to elect a person of color to the White House.

In the area of Indonesian defense capabilities, the TNI is burdened with very old weapons and equipment. It needs an increase in levels of aid to modernize.

**Rev. Herman Saud** reported that conditions in the provinces of Papua and West Papua were improving but distribution of resources from the wealth-sharing formula related to the Special Autonomy Law were complicated by the conflicting actions and policies of the central government,

the provincial governments, and the military forces in the region. Aspirations for an independent Papua state, to the extent that they exist, are a result of dissatisfaction with the distribution of resources from Jakarta. Rev. Saud asserted that this distribution problem was widespread throughout Indonesia in areas such as Aceh and Kalimantan.

### **Discussion**

**Q. With respect to the sharing of profits from the BP operation at Tangguh, what is the split between the central government and West Papua?**

**A.** Seventy percent would be available to the province and thirty to Jakarta.

**Q. How do economic conditions in Papua New Guinea compare with the Indonesian provinces?**

**A.** Conditions on the Indonesian side of the border are much better as reflected in the movement of people from PNG across the border to take advantage of the more prosperous Indonesian markets.

**Q. Would you comment on the performance of Gov. Barnabas Suebu?**

**A.** Initially he was quite popular. However, there is a growing feeling that he is spending too much time out of the province and is not paying sufficient attention to provincial matters.