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The Foreign Service of the
United States of America

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April 2, 1962.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I have been intimately concerned in recent weeks with the problems facing your Government in arranging an honorable solution to your dispute with Indonesia over the disposition of Netherlands New Guinea. I was disturbed by the cessation of the secret talks between your representatives and those of Indonesia. However, I am convinced that a peaceful solution is still possible, provided the two parties are prepared to resume negotiations in good faith.

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The Netherlands Government has made a statesmanlike effort to meet this problem first through the United Nations and, when that failed, through direct secret negotiations with the Indonesians. I am appreciative of the heavy responsibilities which the Dutch Government supports in protecting its citizens in New Guinea and understand why you felt it necessary to reinforce your defense establishment in that area. However, we face a danger that increasing concentrations of military forces will result in a clash which will be a prelude to active warfare in the area. Such a conflict would have adverse consequences out of all proportion to the issue at stake.

This would be a war in which neither The Netherlands nor the West could win in any real sense. Whatever the outcome of particular military encounters, the entire free world position in Asia would be seriously damaged. Only the communists would benefit from such a conflict. If the Indonesian Army were committed to all-out war against The Netherlands, the moderate elements within the Army and the country would be quickly eliminated, leaving a clear field for communist intervention. If Indonesia were to succumb to communism in these circumstances, the whole non-communist position in Viet-Nam, Thailand, and Malaya would be in grave peril, and as you know these are areas in which we in the United States have heavy commitments and burdens.

The Netherlands position, as we understand it, is that you wish to withdraw from the territory of West New Guinea and that you have no objection to this territory eventually passing to the control of Indonesia. However, The Netherlands Government has committed itself to the Papuan leadership to assure those Papuans of the right to determine their future

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His Excellency Dr. J.E. de Quay,
Prime Minister of The Netherlands,
The Hague.

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political status. The Indonesians, on the other hand, have informed us that they desire direct transfer of administration to them but they are willing to arrange for the Papuan people to express their political desires at some future time. Clearly the positions are not so far apart that reasonable men cannot find a solution. Mr. Ellsworth Bunker, who has undertaken the task of moderator in the secret talks between The Netherlands and Indonesia, has prepared a formula which would permit The Netherlands to turn over administrative control of the territory to a UN administrator. The UN, in turn, would relinquish control to the Indonesians within a specified period. These arrangements would include provisions whereby the Papuan people would, within a certain period, be granted the right of self-determination. The UN would be involved in the preparations for and the exercise of self-determination.

My Government has interested itself greatly in this matter and you can be assured that the United States is prepared to render all appropriate assistance to the United Nations when the Papuan people exercise their right of self-determination. In these circumstances, and in light of our responsibilities to the free world, I strongly urge that The Netherlands Government agree to meet on the basis of the formula presented to your representative by Mr. Bunker.

We are of course pressing the Indonesian Government as strongly as we can for its agreement to further negotiations on the basis of this same formula.

I have written to you in the spirit of frankness and trust which I hope is appropriate to the relation of our countries as friends and allies. What moves me is my conviction that in our common interest the present opportunities for peaceful settlement in this painful matter must not be lost.

Sincerely,

/s/ John F. Kennedy

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