**Media Release – Liberty Victoria**

Liberty Victoria is awarding the 2023 Voltaire Empty Chair Award to Mr Victor Yeimo, a strong advocate for West Papua’s independence from Indonesia and an international spokesperson for the National Committee for West Papua (KNPB) and the Papuan People’s Petition.

Established in 2016, the Voltaire Empty Chair Award is presented to a person who is worthy to receive the Voltaire or Young Voltaire Award but cannot be present to receive the award due to the consequences of their exercise of or advocacy for human rights, free speech or civil liberties.

Mr Yeimo, a staunch pro-independence activist and human rights defender, had been on the Indonesian authorities wanted list since he led the civil resistance in West Papua. He has been arrested and imprisoned three times, in October 2009, May 2013 and May 2021, for exercising his civil rights in leading peaceful protest marches.

Mr Yeimo’s recent arrest and imprisonment was on charges of treason for leading peaceful protests against racial discrimination in West Papua in 2019. He was placed in solitary confinement for three months, where he had limited access to lawyers and family, as well as lack of medical treatment for his deteriorating health. After 28 months of imprisonment, he was released on 23 September 2023.

In May 2023, the Jayapura District Court ruled that Mr Yeimo violated the Indonesian Criminal Code by demonstrating and disseminating prohibited information. However, the Jayapura High Court overturned this ruling in July 2023 and sentenced Yeimo to one year’s imprisonmen.

Recently, thousands of Papuans celebrated Mr Yeimo’s release in Waena stadium in Jayapura.

We are honoured that Mr Yeimo has accepted the 2023 Liberty Victoria Empty Chair award.

The Liberty Victoria Empty Chair Award will be presented on Friday 10 November 2023.

**QUOTES FROM MR YEIMO:**

“Racism is a disease. Racism is a virus. Racism is first propagated by people who feel superior. The belief that other races are inferior. The feeling that another race is more primitive and backward than others.”

“After Indonesia became independent, it succeeded in driving out colonialism, but failed to eliminate the racism engendered by European cultures against archipelago communities. Currently, racism has evolved into a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon among the Indonesian population, leaving them with a sense of inferiority as a result of their history of colonisation.”

"The 1962 New York Agreement, the 1967 agreement between Indonesia and the United States regarding Freeport’s work contract, and the Act of Free Choice in 1969 excluded the participation of any Papuans. This exclusion was rooted in the belief that Papuans were viewed as primitive and not deserving of the right to determine their own political fate.”