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Timor-Leste: International community must press for justice for crimes against humanity

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On the fourth anniversary of the vote for independence by the people of Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor), Amnesty International is launching a new campaign to ensure that the victims of the 1999 violence do not have to wait another four years for justice.

On 30 August 1999, the people of Timor-Leste voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia. An estimated 1,300 people were murdered by the Indonesian security forces and pro-Indonesia militia opposed to independence. The crimes committed were so widespread and systematic that they are considered to be crimes against humanity. Four years on, the majority of victims and their families are still waiting for justice.

"The plight of the survivors and families of those who were attacked, killed, tortured or raped must not be forgotten," Amnesty International said.

"The persistent refusal of the Indonesian authorities to cooperate with the justice process in Timor-Leste, and the failure of the recently completed trials in Jakarta, Indonesia, to uncover the truth and bring the perpetrators to justice, means that the international community must now take action," Amnesty International added.

The organization is calling on the United Nations (UN) to undertake an independent review of the Jakarta trials with a view to recommending further measures to ensure that justice is achieved and the truth revealed.

Among those killed in Timor-Leste in 1999 were Ana Xavier da Conceição Lemos, a prominent political activist, primary school teacher and mother of three children. Ana had been outspoken in her criticism of the Indonesian military and in her support for independence. On the day of the independence ballot she was beaten and interrogated by militiamen led by an Indonesian military officer. She is subsequently reported to have been raped in detention before "disappearing". Her body was discovered in November 1999.

Students Augustino de Carvalho and Estevao Xavier Pereira were witnessed being beaten and kicked by Indonesian soldiers in May 1999. The eyewitness later heard two shots ring out and a vehicle driving away very fast. The students' bodies were discovered buried together with their hands tied.

Anacleto da Silva, a young father of two, was working as an interpreter for a British journalist and an American photographer. In September 1999 the men were travelling in a taxi when they crossed paths with Indonesian military Battalion 745, which was withdrawing its troops back to Indonesia. After attacking the taxi driver and blinding him in the eye with their rifle butts, soldiers forced Anacleto into a truck with other prisoners. He has not been seen since.

These tragic cases represent just a tiny number of the victims of the violence in 1999. In addition to those killed, unknown numbers of men, women and children were tortured or raped. Often targeted because of their support for the independence movement, the victims included political activists, community leaders, students, priests and nuns, and local people employed by the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET).

The Indonesian security forces were responsible for protecting the people of Timor-Leste, but stood by as the violence escalated and often participated directly in many attacks. Today, many Indonesian military or police officers who colluded in the violence remain in active service, some in senior posts.

Background

On 30 August 1999, in a UN-organized ballot, 78.5% of voters chose to reject Indonesian rule. Extensive evidence shows that the militia groups responsible for the violence before and after the ballot received the active support of the Indonesian armed forces, police and civilian authorities. Trials of suspected perpetrators, which recently concluded in Indonesia, have been seriously flawed. The majority of defendants were acquitted, while six men who received short prison terms have been released pending appeal. They include several members of the Indonesian military or police who remain in active service.

A parallel justice process in Timor-Leste has made considerable progress in investigating the crimes. Indictments have been issued against more than 300 individuals, the majority for crimes against humanity. 221 suspects named in the indictments remain in Indonesia, but the authorities have consistently refused to transfer them to Timor-Leste to stand trial.

For further information and to take action, please see AI's web action:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/tmp-290803-action-eng>

See also: Indonesia & Timor-Leste: International responsibility for justice

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA030012003?open&of=ENG-IDN>

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