

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 57/003/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 302
28 November 2006

Embargo Date: 28 November 2006 00:01 GMT

Timor Leste: UK Launch of Timor Justice Report

Joint Press Release by the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, TAPOL the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, Amnesty International, Progressio, and Human Rights Watch

(London, November 28, 2006) British parliamentarians who campaigned for human rights in Timor-Leste (then East Timor) were today urged to press the UK government for action on key recommendations of a landmark report on violations committed in Timor-Leste.

The All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG), TAPOL the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Progressio hosted the UK launch of the report at the Houses of Parliament today.

The report includes a number of specific findings and recommendations on the UK's role in the Timor-Leste conflict. In particular, it calls for a UK contribution to reparation payments to victims of the conflict and greater control over the arms trade. To date there has been no formal response from the British government about the report or its recommendations.

"It is astonishing that the British government, as a major funder of the CAVR, has yet to respond to the report's comprehensive findings and recommendations, since it was presented to them in February this year," said Paul Barber, advocacy officer for TAPOL.

The 2,500-page report by Timor-Leste's Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (known by its Portuguese acronym, CAVR), entitled *Chega!* (Enough!), was presented to the national parliament exactly a year ago on November 28, 2005. It documents widespread and systematic violations of human rights perpetrated by all parties in Timor-Leste between 1974 and 1999, immediately before and during Indonesia's occupation of the territory.

"The critical lessons of the report must be learnt and acted upon so that the suffering of the East Timorese people during the occupation is not repeated," said Dr Steve Kibble, Progressio's Timor-Leste Advocacy Coordinator.

The CAVR report states that at least 102,800 Timorese people died from conflict-related causes in this period, and that Indonesian authorities committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in the country.

“Despite the fact that crimes of the gravest kind were committed in Timor-Leste no Indonesian officer has been held responsible,” said Charmain Mohamed, Indonesia and Timor-Leste researcher for Human Rights Watch. “This lack of accountability makes it hard to build a society based on respect for human rights and justice.”

The groups said that a lack of justice for past crimes in Timor-Leste was a contributing factor to the serious unrest that destabilised the country earlier this year. The culture of impunity for past crimes has eroded current initiatives on the rule of law. The failure to address impunity is likely to undermine efforts to stabilize the country.

Chega! recommends that its findings are widely distributed and discussed, especially by the Timorese government, foreign governments, including the UK, and the UN. It calls for the development of a culture of respect for human rights and the rule of law, and the establishment of effective and accountable governance, judicial and civil society institutions in Timor-Leste.

“The people of Timor-Leste are still waiting for justice. Timely and serious consideration of this report by relevant governments and international institutions is an important step towards that goal,” said Dr. Purna Sen, Asia-Pacific Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Speakers at the launch included CAVR national commissioner, Father Jovito de Araujo, Timor-Leste’s Ambassador to the EU, José Amorim Dias, and a representative of REDE Feto, Timor-Leste’s women’s national network, Ivete de Oliveira. Ann Clwyd MP, Chair of the PHRG chaired the event. A specially-recorded message by Timor-Leste’s Prime Minister José Ramos-Horta was also screened.

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The full report and an executive summary is available at: <http://etan.org/news/2006/cavr.htm>

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