

3 April 2002

AI Index ASA 21/016/2002 - News Service Nr. 58

**Indonesia: Impunity and human rights violations in Papua  
Speech delivered to the UN Geneva press corps  
by Lucia Withers, Researcher on Indonesia and East Timor  
3 April 2002  
Press Conference - 58th Session of the UN Commission on  
Human Rights**

Thank you for coming to this meeting.

Today Amnesty International is launching a report *Impunity and human rights violations in Papua*. The report documents grave human rights violations in the province of Papua and the way in which failure to investigate and bring to justice perpetrators of violations is perpetuating this situation.

Amnesty International believes that there is a direct and causal link between impunity and the commission of human rights violations. Each failure to investigate or bring those responsible to trial reinforces the confidence of perpetrators that they are indeed above the law.

In Papua no perpetrator has been brought to justice in recent years. In the meantime, the leader of the civilian independence movement, Theys Eluay, has been killed -- the military has recently admitted that its members may be responsible. Other leading political leaders have been put on trial, pro-independence demonstrations have been violently broken up and there have been indiscriminate operations by the security forces against whole communities for attacks by armed groups.

In Wasior Sub-district, Manokwari District some 150 people are believed to have been arbitrarily detained, tortured or otherwise ill-treated during the course of operations by the Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) in the latter half of 2001. At least one person is known to have died in police custody. The number that were unlawfully killed or "disappeared" is as yet unknown.

These operations were prompted by an attack by an armed group on a logging company in June 2001 in which five members of Brimob were killed. Amnesty condemns these killings but equally condemns the operations that followed which appeared to be little short of a frenzy of revenge.

To give just one example, the 60-year-old principal of a primary school described to Amnesty International how he had repeatedly been beaten by members of Brimob with the butt and magazine of a gun when he was detained as he tried to flee the operations. He was released after Brimob realised that he had been mistakenly detained, but was detained and beaten a second time several days later. To this day, the school head does not know why he was treated in this way. He remains too afraid to return to his village or his job and now fears that he may lose the sight in one eye as a result of the beatings.

Attempts by human rights monitors to reach Wasior were prevented by the authorities for several months. A joint group of church workers and local human rights activists did manage to negotiate access to the area in October 2001, but were greeted on their arrival by some 20 members of Brimob firing shots into the air. The difficulties encountered by human rights defenders in Wasior is part of an increasingly common pattern in which activists have been threatened and harassed or otherwise prevented from carrying out their work.

Amnesty International believes that the Commission on Human Rights has a duty to address the present as well as the past. The Commission has quite rightly called for perpetrators of serious crimes, including crimes against humanity, in East Timor 1999 to be brought to trial. However, to date it has so far failed to recognize that grave violations continue to be committed in Indonesia, most notably in the contested provinces of Papua and Aceh, by the very same state institutions that were responsible for committing crimes in East Timor.

Our message to the Commission is that it cannot ignore the human rights situation in Indonesia any longer. As the UN's highest body on human rights it must show consistency by acting now to condemn the appalling human rights practices of the security forces in Papua, Aceh and elsewhere in Indonesia.

At the same time, the Commission must use its influence to pressure Indonesia to take urgent steps to ensure that the trials of serious crimes committed in East Timor during 1999 which are currently in progress in Jakarta meet with international fair trials standards. Amnesty International welcomes this process but is seriously concerned that these trials could fail because basic safeguards have not been put in place.

If these trials are not credible, and do not deliver justice in a manner which is consistent with international standards, there is a real risk that impunity will become further entrenched in Indonesia.

I was given a stark illustration of the close connection between the serious crimes that were committed by Indonesian security forces and pro-Indonesia militias in East Timor during 1999, and the ongoing grave violations in Papua during a visit to Papua in January this year. Murjono Murib, a political activist and school teacher from Wamena, related how he had been beaten with an iron bar by a member of Brimob in February 2001. As he was beaten he was threatened by the Brimob officer with the following words: "We have experience in operations in East Timor, be careful or we will shoot you all".

Murjono Murib and four other political leaders from Wamena have since been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of between four and four-and-a-half years for their peaceful political activities. Amnesty International regards them to be prisoners of conscience. No one has been held accountable for the beating of Murjono Murib, or for other cases of torture and ill-treatment of detainees in Wamena, together with unlawful killings and arbitrary detentions in connected cases dating from October 2000.

On the rare occasions when allegations of human rights violations in Papua have been investigated trials have not resulted. The most recent case is that of the abduction and killing in November 2001 of Theys Eluay, the leader of the independence umbrella group, the Papua

Presidium Council. To date there have five separate investigations into the killing but no suspect has yet been charged.

Amnesty International fears that this plethora of investigations is being used to obstruct the case from being brought to trial. Although we are encouraged by a recent admission by the military that its members may have been involved - after repeated denials - it appears that there is no will to look at issues of command responsibility and of the broader causes and patterns of human rights violations in Papua of which Theys Eluay's death was a part.

The Commission cannot be selective about the human rights violations it addresses. It was the scale and public nature of the crimes committed in East Timor during 1999 that drew condemnation from the world including the Commission. Just because neither the world's media or the UN is in Papua to witness the violations does not mean that are not happening. They are happening and must be condemned in equally strong terms.

\ENDS

public document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>