

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Indonesia: Successful elections mask turmoil in Aceh (NAD)**

As the rest of Indonesia celebrates its first direct presidential elections, its westernmost province is in turmoil. Political killings, torture, and armed raids on homes and villages are ruining the Acehese people's lives and forcing hundreds of them to flee.

"There is virtually no aspect of life in the province that has been untouched by grave abuses of human rights, carried out under the military emergency and since," said Asia director Ingrid Massage, commenting on a new Amnesty International report on Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD). "Yet these widespread abuses are largely hidden from the outside world."

One farmer whom Amnesty International spoke to described how his 25 year-old brother, Ilhami, was shot dead by soldiers as he was cutting grass for his cows in April 2004. Another man had seen a 16 year-old boy, Muliadi, working in the paddy fields when he was called over by a soldier. Muliadi tried to run away, but was shot in the ankle and captured. His whereabouts are unknown.

"The military pays scant regard to the security of civilians," said Ms Massage. "Young men are particularly at risk as they are suspected of being members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). We are told of men, women and children being forced to take part in military operations as scouts and human shields. Women and girls have also been subjected to rape and other sexual violence."

The situation in Aceh was downgraded from a military to a civil emergency in May this year, but reports of abuses continue. Several thousand suspected GAM members or supporters have been detained in the past 16 months. Many hundreds have been convicted to prison sentences after unfair trials -- often on the basis of confessions extracted under torture.

GAM also commits serious human rights abuses, including hostage taking. They also recruit children to act as spies, take part in arson attacks and carry out domestic tasks.

Despite the abuses and hardship resulting from the conflict, aid agencies face severe restrictions in working in Aceh and international human rights monitors are not allowed in at all.

"Indonesia prides itself on its progress towards becoming a democratic state, yet for the Acehese people little has changed. They live in a forgotten conflict zone and face terrible abuses of their human rights on a daily basis, with few avenues to turn to for help," said Ms Massage.

Faced with these conditions, hundreds of Acehese flee to neighbouring Malaysia. On arrival they risk arrest and detention in squalid immigration centres. Malaysia has even forcibly returned Acehese refugees on several occasions, in spite of international law prohibiting the return of people to situations where they face serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International urges the new president of Indonesia to state publicly his opposition to human rights violations and to set up a high-level team of independent experts to conduct an inquiry into the human rights abuses committed in Aceh. It is also essential that humanitarian and human rights groups -- including UN experts -- are allowed to visit. Foreign governments must dramatically increase pressure on Indonesia to open up Aceh to scrutiny by human rights experts, to allow aid agencies to carry out their work and to hold to account anyone who violates human rights.

To see a copy of the report, *Indonesia: New military operations, old patterns of abuse in Aceh (Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, NAD)*, please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa210332004>

### **Background**

In May 2003 a military emergency was declared in the Indonesian province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD, commonly known as Aceh). Civilian government was suspended and a massive counter-insurgency operation was initiated against the armed pro-independence group, the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). The following year marked one of the bloodiest in the 28 year conflict in Aceh. In May 2004 the status of Aceh was downgraded from military to civil emergency.

### Public Document

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