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Indonesia: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call for the release of Prisoners of Conscience

In a report released today, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch support the demands of Indonesian human rights groups for the government to immediately release all prisoners of conscience and to review the convictions against all political prisoners accused of using violence.

“President Habibie has come to power on the wave of demands for fundamental reform,” the two organizations said. “He must demonstrate an immediate commitment to human rights by substantive prisoner releases and by repealing the repressive laws which were used over the last three decades to imprison peaceful opposition activists.”

“Releasing four high profile political prisoners is a welcome gesture, but dozens of others remain in jail. President Habibie must go much further if his government is to gain the trust of the Indonesian people on its program of reform.”

Indonesia’s prisons still hold at least 47 Indonesians and East Timorese detained for their peaceful opposition to the Suharto Government. They include five East Timorese men accused of organizing the march to Santa Cruz cemetery in November 1991; 12 students imprisoned for their affiliation with a banned political organization; a community organizer in Tasikmalaya; several university lecturers from Aceh; and the organizers of peaceful pro-independence demonstrations in Irian Jaya.

Another priority for release must be the 13 elderly men detained for their alleged links to the banned Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) -- some of whom have been imprisoned for over three decades. All of these men had trials that were unfair by international standards and many are suffering severe health problems.

Some 170 people have been imprisoned for alleged involvement in violent political activities -- including those from Aceh, Irian Jaya, and East Timor, the three areas where armed insurgencies are active, and those accused of trying to establish an Islamic state. According to the two human rights organizations, many of them were tried and convicted on the basis of information extracted by torture or without adequate access to counsel.

“The Habibie government should immediately demonstrate that such practices are no longer consistent with a nation seeking genuine reform and that the government is willing to address past wrongs by giving these people the opportunity to have their convictions reviewed by an independent body which meets international standards of fairness and impartiality,” the two organizations said.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also called on the government to step up efforts to find the Indonesian activists still “disappeared” and prosecute those found responsible for the spate of “disappearances” prior to the March 1998 presidential elections.

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The joint report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, *Indonesia; Release Prisoners of Conscience Now*, 4 June 1998, contains lists of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Indonesia and in East Timor.

The 19-page report, plus 7 lists, is available from Amnesty International’s International Secretariat, telephone: +44 (0) 171 413 5661/5658/5653 and from Human Rights Watch/Asia on +1 212 216 1228/1825.