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Indonesia: Human rights are everyone's business in Papua

In a new report released today, Amnesty International warned that companies conducting business in Papua cannot ignore human rights. The organization urged the Indonesian government and companies with operations in the Indonesian province to take responsibility to protect and uphold human rights.

Incidents such as the recent killing of three teachers working at the Freeport gold and copper mine, and allegations in the past that Indonesian security personnel guarding the mining operations have been responsible for human rights violations highlight the difficulty of providing security for commercial enterprises, while protecting the human rights of those living around them.

Amnesty International's report documents human rights violations which took place during a police operation in Wasior district from April to October last year. The operation, the largest in Papua since 1996, was in response to the killing of nine people, including five police officers, in two attacks by unidentified armed groups on logging companies in March and June 2001.

As in the Freeport attack, the Indonesian authorities accused the armed opposition group, the Free Papua Movement (OPM), of being responsible. However, in the absence of an effective investigation there are still doubts about the group's involvement, and questions about whether they may have had military backing.

The Wasior operation was led by troops from Brimob -- a paramilitary police unit with a notorious human rights record whose members provide security to some logging, mining and other commercial enterprises in Papua and elsewhere in Indonesia.

During the operation at least seven people were killed and one person died in custody as a result of torture. Twenty-seven people were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials. Local human rights organizations estimate that over 100 other people were detained, tortured or otherwise ill-treated, that hundreds of people were internally displaced and dozens of houses destroyed.

"Rather than identifying and bringing to justice the individuals responsible for the attacks on the logging companies, the operation appears to have turned into a campaign of revenge against the immediate community and beyond," Amnesty International said.

The organization is calling on the Indonesian government to establish an independent investigation into the allegations of human rights violations in Wasior and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, including those with command responsibility.

Government failure to take credible and effective action to investigate cases like those in Wasior entrenches impunity further and contributes to security problems. It also has a negative impact on the economic, social and political development in the province.

"International and national companies operating in Papua have a responsibility to ensure that the security forces they engage do not have a history of human rights violations and are trained in human rights standards," Amnesty International recommended; "They should also ensure that their operations do not have a negative impact on the human rights of the local population and should actively monitor investigations and press for their proper resolution."

Background

Papua is Indonesia's largest province and amongst the richest in natural resources. The exploitation of natural resources has long been a source of tension between Papuans and the central government. Mining and logging have been among the major causes of environmental destruction in Papua and have encroached upon the rights of indigenous people, their livelihood, traditions and customs. This has had severe social, economic and cultural consequences, including displacement and loss of livelihood. Security forces assigned to protect the industries have been responsible for human rights violations which have aggravated existing tensions and fuelled demands for independence from Indonesia.

An independence movement has existed since the late 1960s. The Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) is a broad umbrella group. Its armed wing, the National Liberation Army (Tentara Pembebasan Nasional, TPN) mainly consists of small groups of fighters armed with bows and arrows and other simple weapons. Over the years it has carried out sporadic attacks mainly on military and police targets, although civilians have also on occasions been targeted and suffered human rights abuses, including unlawful killings and being taken hostage. Counter insurgency operations by the Indonesian security forces against the movement have resulted in gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", torture and arbitrary detentions.

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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>

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