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East Timor: UN Secretary-General has responsibility to ensure credible investigation

Following the adoption of a resolution on East Timor by the Commission on Human Rights at its special session in Geneva, Amnesty International said that it was now the UN Secretary-General's responsibility to ensure that any Commission of Inquiry into suspected crimes against humanity and war crimes is independent, credible and effective.

"The Commission on Human Rights has weakened its own initiative in the desperate search for consensus," Amnesty International said. "It is vital that the qualifications and caveats in the resolution do not impede the process of establishing truth and justice."

"In addition, there is a real risk that the Indonesian authorities will seek to block the process of investigation, intimidate witnesses and destroy evidence," the human rights organization said. "Immediate steps must be taken now by the multinational force and UNAMET to secure evidence and ensure protection for witnesses until proper investigations can take place."

The resolution calls on the Secretary-General to establish an International Commission of Inquiry with adequate representation of Asian experts to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in East Timor, in cooperation with the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights and thematic rapporteurs.

"The UN Secretary-General must now ensure that the commission is genuinely international, able to act independently of the Indonesian government and national institutions, and is given the necessary resources and expertise," the organization added.

"He should give the inquiry his full political backing and ensure that its report is considered and acted upon by the Security Council as soon as possible, and that identified suspects are prosecuted."

Amnesty International warned that the proposed involvement of Indonesia's national human rights commission -- Komnas HAM -- should not be allowed to compromise the investigative process.

"Cooperation between the international commission and Komnas HAM must not be allowed to become obstruction," Amnesty International said. "Komnas HAM has played a positive role in Indonesia over the years, but it has singularly failed to fulfil its mandate in East Timor and lacks any credibility with the East Timorese people."

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