

Indonesia: Impunity persists in Papua as militias take root

The recent growth of militia groups in Papua (Irian Jaya) and a failure to address human rights violations committed by the Indonesian security forces could lead to a serious escalation of violence in the province, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

"The police and military continue to commit serious human rights violations in Papua and the authorities have failed to make a credible effort to bring those responsible to justice. Until the security forces in Papua know that they are not above the law, unlawful killings, torture and arbitrary detentions will persist," the organization said.

Most violations have taken place during demonstrations for Papuan independence, including flag-raising ceremonies, a popular form of protest in Papua. In the latest incident, three people were shot dead and 12 were injured when members of the Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) opened fire on around 60 people who had raised a Papuan flag outside a church in Sorong on 22 August. At least 28 people were arrested, including five children, and 15 people remain missing.

Reports of torture are also common. A farmer, Yance Pekei, was tortured after being taken into police custody following a clash between independence supporters and the police in Nabire in March this year. He said his fingers and shoulders were burnt with molten plastic, his ears were punctured with a stapler and he was beaten with a rifle butt until he lost consciousness. The police have rejected his claims. Amnesty International is calling for a full, independent and impartial investigation into the case.

"After initial optimism that President Wahid's government would improve the human rights situation through entering into dialogue with those demanding independence, it seems that hard-line tactics and repression are once again the order of the day," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International's report also raises concerns about the growth of militia groups in Papua. The organization has received reports that militias supporting both independence and Indonesian rule have been responsible for human rights abuses.

"It is difficult not to draw parallels with East Timor, where militia, supported by the Indonesian security forces, were responsible for widespread killings and destruction last year. The Indonesian government needs to act now to prevent the risk of a similar scenario in Papua", the organization said.

The Red and White Taskforce (Satgas Merah Putih, SMP), which supports Indonesian rule in Papua, is reported to have thousands of members. There are indications that it is supported by the Indonesian army and police.

In March this year, members of the SMP ransacked and looted several houses in Wayati village near Fak Fak after a group of villagers beat up the district head, accusing him of attempting to bribe them to support Indonesian rule. It was said that local police allowed members of the SMP to intimidate those arrested in connection with the beating.

The pro-independence militia, Papua Taskforce (Satgas Papua), is thought to number several thousand. Recent reports suggest that the Indonesian security forces may be involved with the organization and coordination of the group. Earlier this year, members of Satgas Papua

beat up and intimidated people during the Second Papua Congress in Jayapura, where they were providing security.

"With ongoing violence in Aceh and the Moluccas, the Indonesian government cannot afford to let another province deteriorate. It should act now to prevent further human rights violations by ending impunity for the security forces and halting the growth of the militias".

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