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East Timor: While world leaders dither, Amnesty International members act

Spearheading a mass-mobilisation of Amnesty International's one million-strong worldwide membership, Secretary General Pierre Sané today wrote to the United Nations (UN) Security Council, urging it to immediately fulfil its responsibility to the East Timorese people.

"The UN has a clear legal -- as well as moral -- responsibility to ensure the well-being of the East Timorese people," Mr Sané said.

"The seriousness of the human rights crisis now unfolding in East Timor has compelled Amnesty International members around the globe to take action. If ordinary people can act, why are the world's leaders dithering?"

Amnesty International members worldwide are now engaged in a large-scale campaign to persuade their leaders to take decisive action on East Timor. Telegrams, faxes, letters and e-mails are flooding into the offices of Presidents and Prime Ministers around the world, asking searching questions about what exactly their government is doing to protect the rights of the East Timorese people.

"Amnesty International members are used to issuing appeals on behalf of individuals at risk," Mr Sané said. "This is the first time we have done so for an entire people."

The human rights organization is calling on all governments to stop all supplies to Indonesia of military, security or police equipment, training and personnel, including related logistical and financial support, *until they can demonstrate that such transfers will not be used to commit human rights abuses* by pro-Indonesian militia, the army and the police.

"We will be directing our action not just at the Indonesian authorities, but at the governments that have been complicit in the suffering of East Timor," Mr Sané said.

In his open letter, Mr Sané also pointed out that as Indonesia has deliberately violated its obligations under the UN-brokered 5 May Agreements for East Timor's future, it is now the responsibility of the UN -- in particular the Security Council -- to implement its obligations as the Transitional Authority for East Timor by restoring law and order and ensuring a transition to the next phase, namely independence for the territory.

"If the foundations are to be laid for a peaceful and prosperous future in an independent East Timor, the Security Council should act now to protect the lives of the East Timorese," Mr Sané said.

Mr Sané urged that human rights protection be central to any UN peacekeeping mission sent to re-establish law and order and perform law enforcement functions.

Immediate humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced and refugees should be ensured, and UN agencies and humanitarian organizations be given full access to them, including to those now in West Timor.

“There can be no impunity for the atrocities being committed in East Timor,” Mr Sané said. “The Security Council should signal now that those responsible will be held to account.”

Mr Sané called for the appointment of a Committee of Experts to gather evidence of massive or systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian law in East Timor and make recommendations with a view to establishing individual responsibility for international crimes and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

A process of disarmament and demobilization of the militia groups should be initiated, and an effective system of weapons *and firearms* controls implemented in order to create secure conditions for the United Nations Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET) to fulfil its mandate, and for the internally displaced and refugees to return to their homes in safety.

Mr Sané also urged for the redeployment of *UNAMET staff throughout East Timor once a sufficiently secure environment has been established and for the UN to undertake further assessments of East Timor’s long-term needs for assistance in order to ensure a coordinated and effective international response.*

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