

AI INDEX: ASA 21/181/99
6 October 1999

East Timor: Targeting of refugees continues

East Timorese refugees in West Timor and other parts of Indonesia continue to be harassed, threatened and attacked by pro-integration militia, Amnesty International said in a new report released today.

"The continued targeting and intimidation of East Timorese by members of the Indonesian army (TNI) and militia groups must cease immediately," Amnesty International said. "The Indonesian government can no longer pretend that it has no control over these rogue elements."

The human rights organization continues to receive credible reports of abductions and threats in West Timor. The whereabouts of six young men abducted by militias in Atambua on 27 September is still unknown. According to recent accounts the six men were taken outside a car workshop as they were repairing a car belonging to a priest. Other incidents include the abduction of Bantalen Soares, an East Timorese man, from the Stadium Gor refugee camp in Kupang by two members of the Aitarak militia.

The condition of the East Timorese refugees in West Timor continues to deteriorate as militia prevent humanitarian organizations from delivering food, medical and other essential supplies to the camps. There are credible reports that food is being withheld from those refugees who have expressed a wish to return to East Timor.

The human rights organization is concerned that refugees, particularly in West Timor, may not be able to choose freely whether to return to East Timor, or move to other locations in Indonesia or to third countries because of the level of militia control in the area.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned that the transmigration program for those East Timorese willing to be relocated within Indonesia, announced by the Indonesian government, could potentially place the refugees in a position where they are forced to state their support for integration or independence, thereby exposing themselves to risks of further human rights violations.

"The Indonesian government should halt the program until it can be demonstrated that the conditions exist for the refugees to make a decision free from coercion and with effective monitoring by UNHCR and other independent agencies."

With the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announcing that return flights from West Timor could begin shortly, Amnesty International warned that returning refugees could still be at risk of attack by militias or face dire humanitarian conditions.

"The international community must ensure that any return program for the refugees is accompanied by measures to ensure their security and the provision of shelter, basic services and other humanitarian needs."

Amnesty International fears that many activists such as human rights defenders, humanitarian workers, students and National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) members remain on immigration lists barring them from leaving Indonesia under the order of Indonesian military intelligence. In the last few days at least one person is known to have been prevented from leaving the country after their name appeared on one such list. Discussions with the Indonesian authorities on a possible evacuation program remain stalled.

In Jakarta, East Timorese residents were forced to flee their hotel late one evening when militia and members of TNI arrived at the hotel to look for them. In Ujung Padang, Sulawesi, there are reports that members of the Aitarak militia are in control of three refugee camps containing over 3,600 East Timorese refugees.

In Flores, members of the Indonesian military battalions 744 and the infamous 745 recently deployed in East Timor, are said by observers to be contributing to mounting levels of fear in the province among both the East Timorese refugees and the local population.

ENDS.../

For more information or to receive a copy of the report "*East Timor: Refugees at risk*" (AI Index: ASA 21/180/99), please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>

