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### **Indonesia: President Wahid -- a chance to break with the past**

The new Indonesian government must recognize the importance of human rights to Indonesia's political, economic and social development, Amnesty International said today in an Open Letter to the new President of Indonesia.

"Under previous governments key national institutions were weak and unaccountable, corruption was widespread and basic human rights were violated," Amnesty International said. "President Wahid now has the unique opportunity to reshape Indonesian society on the basis of respect for law, justice and human rights."

Despite many positive developments undertaken in the past 18 months -- such as the legalization of most political parties and independent trade unions, greater press freedom and the release of some prisoners of conscience and political prisoners -- the human rights organization stresses that the reform process is far from complete.

"The reforms must continue to ensure genuine participation for all Indonesians in the political process, an independent and impartial judiciary, equal access to justice and a security force that is fully accountable and abides by international humanitarian and human rights standards."

The recent human rights crisis in East Timor reflects similar patterns of human rights violations committed by the Indonesian army (TNI) and the police, in particular in response to armed and peaceful opposition movements in Aceh and Irian Jaya and to civil disturbances in other areas of the country.

In Aceh alone Amnesty International has recorded hundreds of arrests as well as dozens of "disappearances" and unlawful killings since the beginning of the year, carried out by members of the Indonesian armed forces in the knowledge that they will not be brought to justice.

The human rights organization stressed that the new government would need to ensure truth, justice and redress for the grave human rights abuses of the past and ensure that these problems did not continue to blight Indonesia's development.

"Only when the cycle of impunity is broken will civil society start to have faith and respect in the security forces," the organization stressed. "All allegations of human rights violations must be fully investigated and those responsible must be brought to justice in civilian courts."

Although Amnesty International recognizes that levels of civil disturbance have increased in Indonesia over the years, it urges all members of the Indonesian military (TNI) and police force to exercise restraint and act in accordance with international human rights standards.

Among its recommendations, Amnesty International urges the new government:

to release all remaining prisoners of conscience -- including two East Timorese men imprisoned in Semarang for their role in organizing demonstrations in East Timor in 1991 -- and to review the cases of at least 20 political prisoners that remain in custody after unfair trials;

to repeal legislation -- including the so-called "hate sowing" articles -- which allow for imprisonment of people for the peaceful expression of their beliefs;

not to ratify the new law on state security passed by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in September this year, which grants greater power to the TNI during times of emergency or war;

to investigate all threats, attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders, political, labour and environmental activists and ensure that freedom of expression and association is fully recognized;

to ensure that Indonesia fulfils all its commitments concerning East Timor as specified in the 5 May 1999 Agreements signed by Indonesia, Portugal and the UN, in particular disarming and disbanding the pro-integration militia in West Timor;

to prioritize and bring forward ratification of key international human rights standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and ensure that the principles enshrined in these standards are reflected in the training and performance of government officials, the judiciary, the TNI and the police.

"This is the beginning of a new era for Indonesia in which the authorities can review the legacy of the past, further the process of reform and ensure that the rights of all Indonesians are respected for the future," Amnesty International concluded.

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**For more information or to receive a copy of the Open Letter in English or Bahasa Indonesian, please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**