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IRAN JAYA: MINIMUM HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS SHOULD BE OBSERVED

As negotiations continue between the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) and an armed opposition group holding 13 hostages in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, Amnesty International today called for the release of the hostages and for all parties -- including the Indonesian army -- to abide by minimum humanitarian standards.

"We hope that this volatile situation can be resolved without a human rights tragedy," said Amnesty International.

On 8 January, 26 hostages were taken by a group of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (*Free Papua Movement* or OPM) in Mapunduma village, in the Baliem Valley of Irian Jaya. The OPM is fighting for the independence of Irian Jaya, the western half of the island of New Guinea, which was ceded to Indonesia in 1963.

Twelve of the hostages have already been released, while another, a German national, was temporarily released on the understanding that he would return to the OPM. Seven Indonesians and six foreigners are still being held. The OPM are not believed to have threatened the lives of the hostages.

Two Indonesian teenagers were also taken hostage by the OPM on 21 November. It is believed they are now being held inside the border of neighbouring Papua New Guinea by a different group of the OPM.

Amnesty International opposes the taking of hostages by armed opposition groups which is in contravention of the Geneva Conventions. The organization is calling on the OPM to immediately and unconditionally release the remaining hostages.

In addition to its call for the OPM to release the hostages, Amnesty International is also concerned that any actions taken to secure the release of the hostages by the Indonesian Armed Forces do not violate human rights. Any individual taken into detention for his alleged role in the hostage-taking should not be ill-treated and should be given immediate access to independent legal counsel.

Amnesty International has expressed concern about human rights violations committed in Irian Jaya by the Armed Forces. In September 1995, Indonesia's own National Human Rights Commission confirmed that 16 people had been extrajudicially executed by the army and that torture, unlawful and arbitrary arrests and "disappearances" had also occurred. Those targeted for the violations were those suspected of links with the OPM.

"In the midst of this hostage situation, Irian Jaya is in the international spotlight," Amnesty International said. "But even if it is resolved, the Indonesian government should continue to allow monitoring of human rights in the area." ENDS\