

0001 hrs gmt Wednesday 28 July 1993

INDONESIA - @SYSTEMATIC ABUSE IN ACEH IN NAME OF "RESTORING ORDER"

Amnesty International is calling for urgent action to tackle a pattern of gross human rights violations in the Indonesian province of Aceh.

"Systematic abuse of the civilian population has gone unchecked and unpunished by the Indonesian authorities" said the organization. "Prompt and concrete measures are required by the Indonesian Government to protect the people of Aceh and to prevent further violations".

The report provides documentary evidence of extreme human rights abuse, which has occurred since 1989 in the context of security force counter-insurgency operations against *Aceh Merdeka*, an armed opposition group active in Aceh and other parts of northern Sumatra. "The vast majority of the victims have been ordinary people with no involvement in the armed opposition", said Amnesty International.

An estimated 2,000 civilians have been summarily killed by government troops, including children and the very elderly. Some of those killed were publicly executed; others were "mysteriously killed", the corpses left in public places - beside a main road, in fields and plantations - apparently as a warning to others not to join or support the rebels.

In addition, more than 1,000 people have been arbitrarily arrested by Indonesian armed forces and scores, possibly hundreds, of detainees have "disappeared" while in military custody. At least 50 people, including prisoners of conscience, have been sentenced to long prison terms after unfair trials.

Those in detention have routinely faced torture, which has resulted in death in some cases. Methods commonly used include beatings with iron bars, bottles, rocks and electric cable; burning with lighted cigarettes; electrocution; slashing with razor blades; death threats and faked executions.

The incidence of politically-motivated killing and "disappearance" peaked in late 1990 and early 1991, and has declined in the past 18 months. But there is still an urgent human rights problem said Amnesty International. In its report the organization points out that:

- There have been no thorough and impartial investigations of violations. Independent human rights monitors have been prevented from carrying out their work and the government has simply dismissed reports of violations as "lies".
- The fate of the "disappeared" remains unknown and no compensation has been paid to families of the victims. An untold number of political suspects remain in secret, incommunicado detention.
- None of the suspected perpetrators has been brought to justice and there is no indication that they will be, sending a clear message to the military that they can act with impunity, and creating a climate conducive to further violations.
- Claims that life in Aceh has returned to normal are untrue. Reports of extrajudicial killing and "disappearance" continue, albeit on a reduced scale, and there are persistent reports of political suspects being tortured while in military custody.
- There is no indication of any significant change in military policy or practice in Aceh. The relative "peace and order" appears to reflect ordinary people's fear of violent reprisals by military forces. The apparatus is still in place for the government to crack down again if there are signs of renewed opposition to Indonesian rule.

• The pattern of violations in Aceh is by no means unique. The brutal methods used by the security forces are strongly reminiscent of those used to "restore order" in other parts of Indonesia and in East Timor, illegally occupied by Indonesia since 1975. These include the use of summary executions by anonymous death squads, a technique President Suharto chillingly described in 1989 as a kind of public "shock therapy".

The government has claimed that its actions are necessary to combat "terrorism", and it is clear that *Aceh Merdeka* members have committed human rights abuses, including the deliberate killing of civilians suspected of being informers. Amnesty International condemns these acts but they can never justify human rights violations by government forces.

"The Indonesian Government has shown no sign of taking the problem of human rights violations seriously" said Amnesty International. "What's more, the international community has failed to act on persistent reports of violations in Aceh. It is imperative that they act now".

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