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Indonesia: Fate of human rights activist raises fears for others

The Indonesian government must redouble its efforts to investigate the fate of Acehese human rights activist Jafar Siddiq Hamzah after the discovery of a body believed to be his in Medan, North Sumatra.

Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, a US resident and head of a non-governmental organization the International Forum for Aceh (IFA), was visiting Indonesia when he went missing on 5 August 2000. His family believe that he is one of five bodies found in Kabanjahe, near Medan in North Sumatra on 3 September 2000. They fear that he might have been killed because of his human rights work.

Amnesty International has called for immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the discovery of the five bodies in order to establish their identities and find out who was responsible for their deaths, so that they can be brought to justice.

"Jafar's fate highlights the risks that human rights defenders working in Aceh are facing," said Amnesty International.

Human rights defenders and humanitarian workers have reported an increase in threats and intimidation against them in recent weeks. Amrisaldin, a 24 year-old volunteer with a humanitarian organization, was arrested yesterday by the military. His arrest is apparently connected to his work in South Aceh with people displaced by ongoing violence between the security forces and the armed opposition group.

Anonymous telephone death threats have been received by activists in Banda Aceh and three Acehese staff members of an international

humanitarian agency were assaulted by members of the Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) on 28 August 2000.

"Human rights defenders and humanitarian workers are often exposed to risks in their work, but this risk is multiplied when the security forces are permitted to act outside the rule of law," said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International also urged the armed opposition group, Aceh Merdeka (GAM) to ensure that its members act in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Background

The human rights situation continues to be serious in the context of counter-insurgency operations against the armed opposition group GAM.

Killings, "disappearances" and arbitrary detention are widespread. The Indonesian government and GAM began a three-month suspension of armed operations in Aceh on 2 June, known as the "humanitarian pause", to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered in the province. This has now been extended in principle, and the two sides are negotiating the exact terms of the extension.

At first this agreement appeared to have had a positive impact on the human rights situation in Aceh. However, both sides have continued to commit human rights violations since the agreement came into effect and, in the last few weeks, local NGOs report that the situation has once again deteriorated.

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