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EAST TIMOR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR CONCRETE ACTION ON  
FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF SANTA CRUZ MASSACRE

As East Timor marks the fourth anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili this weekend, Amnesty International is renewing its call for the Indonesian government to fully and impartially investigate the massacre and hold those responsible for the killings to account.

"The tragic result of the government's failure to take any concrete action is that political killings and "disappearances" continue in East Timor," Amnesty International said today.

This year alone, at least 13 civilians have been killed by members of the security forces. At least five people are believed to have been "disappeared". The real figures may be higher -- independent human rights monitors are restricted in their access to East Timor and even foreign journalists have faced restrictions on entry to East Timor.

On 12 November 1991, Indonesian soldiers opened fire on a peaceful procession at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili. As many as 270 were believed to have been killed and up to 200 are still missing. Most were shot while attempting to flee and others were beaten and stabbed.

Despite evidence to the contrary, the Indonesian government continues to claim that the response by the army to the peaceful demonstrators at Santa Cruz was an aberration and that the government has satisfactorily investigated the killings and "disappearances".

In a report released in 1994, a United Nations (UN) expert, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, found that members of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) were responsible for killings in the massacre and that the response was "a planned military operation designed to deal with a public expression of political dissent in a way not in accordance with international human rights standards".

Echoing the findings of many international organisations, including Amnesty International, the report concluded that the "conditions that allowed the Santa Cruz killings to occur are still present. In particular, the members of the security forces responsible for the abuses have not been held accountable and continue to enjoy virtual impunity".

Indonesia has not formally responded to the report of the Special Rapporteur nor given any commitment to implement his recommendations. Neither has the government fully implemented the recommendations of a 1993 UN Commission on Human Rights resolution calling on the government to fully account for those killed and "disappeared" -- a call which was renewed in a statement of the Commission in 1995.

Since November 1991, there have been continuing reports of political killings and "disappearances". In January 1995, disturbances in the East Timor town of Baucau resulted in the military opening fire on rioters. Independent sources said that at least two people died as a result and up to 15 may have been wounded in what appeared to be excessive use of lethal force by the military. The military said that they fired in the air to disperse the crowd but because it was dark, their bullets may have hit individuals. Five men are believed to have "disappeared" in Dili in January after being arrested by the military. In February, police announced an inquiry into the fate of the five, but their whereabouts remain unknown.

Six civilians were killed by the military in Liquiza, East Timor in January. The military originally claimed that the six were guerrillas killed during fighting, but an inquiry by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights revealed that the six were civilians unlawfully killed. In July, two men were shot and killed by the army in Vermasse, Baucau district, after an army officer had been shot. There has been no inquiry into the killings. In August, two men were shot while out hunting deer. Soldiers fired on the two after they ignored calls to stop.

"These killings and "disappearances" are entirely consistent with a pattern of violations which results from a lack of systematic and thorough investigation of human rights violations," Amnesty International said.

Those violations which are investigated are usually those which are subject to international and domestic scrutiny, placing greater pressure on the government to take some form of action. Even then, such investigations have failed to meet international standards.

Of those political killings reported this year, only the killing of the six civilians in Liquiza has been investigated. Two soldiers are currently serving prison sentences of four and a half years after being tried for their role in the killings. Full and impartial investigations into other political killings and "disappearances" have still not occurred.

"It will take more to end political killings and "disappearances" in East Timor than one highly publicised trial," the organization said.

Amnesty International is urging that concrete measures be implemented to ensure that members of the security forces who commit violations are consistently held to account.

"Only then will the government send a clear message to members of the security forces that no violations will be tolerated," Amnesty International said.

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