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INDONESIA: GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DO MORE TO PROTECT ASYLUM-SEEKERS

As representatives from European Union (EU) governments meet with Association of South East Asian Nations Ambassadors in Madrid tomorrow, Amnesty International is calling on EU governments to ensure that their embassies in Indonesia do more to protect Indonesian and East Timorese human rights and political activists.

“Appeals for help from activists who need protection have been completely ignored by the representatives of the Dutch Government in Jakarta,” Amnesty International said today. “The government should do more to protect these activists who are under threat of being arrested, harassed and ill-treated by the security forces.”

Protests have been taking place in Jakarta since 7 December -- the 20th anniversary of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor -- when more than a hundred demonstrators entered the Dutch and Russian embassies in Jakarta. Within two days, they were forced to leave the safety of the embassy buildings, and were handed over to Indonesian police who entered the embassy compounds. They were questioned for 24 hours and some of those detained were allegedly ill-treated in police custody.

In an appeal on 8 December, Amnesty International expressed concern that even if all the demonstrators were released from custody, they remained at risk of harassment and further detention. The organization's concerns have been borne out by recent events.

Petrus Haryanto, an Indonesian activist who entered the Dutch Embassy, was arrested on 11 December by plainclothes military officers at a clinic in Jakarta where he was seeking medical assistance. He was held in military detention but was released on the morning of 12 December. Petrus and another Indonesian are believed to have now been issued with a summons under a charge of “insulting the President”. On 15 December, the military announced that 32 of the protestors had been arrested and were being held for questioning in Surabaya.

“These cases show that the Indonesian authorities are continuing to harass and victimise activists involved in the embassy protests. The Dutch Government showed a callous disregard for their security in handing the protestors over to the Indonesian authorities on a disingenuous assurance that they would only be questioned for 24 hours,” Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has been informed that the Dutch Government appears to have ignored a request for asylum from 26 East Timorese while in the embassy. The East Timorese claim that they requested asylum before they left the embassy.

“The Netherlands is a signatory to the Refugee Convention. It has a duty to protect people who request asylum,” Amnesty International said.

“By ignoring the request and allowing for the East Timorese to be taken from the embassy in police custody, the Dutch authorities may have placed the group at greater risk,” Amnesty International said.

According to the Dutch Government, the security of the embassy was threatened when pro-Indonesian demonstrators entered the embassy and attacked embassy staff and pro-independence activists on 8 December. The Dutch Government has stated in parliament that because the security of the embassy was threatened, it was imperative that the East Timorese leave, prior to any claim for asylum being heard.

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