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### **Getting away with murder: Killings by the Indonesian military in Aceh**

*As the death toll from the latest massacre by the Indonesian security forces in Aceh continues to rise, Amnesty International warned that the security forces are again operating outside the law -- literally getting away with murder.*

At least 40 -- possibly as many as 70 -- people were reportedly killed by the security forces during counter-insurgency operations in Beutong Sub-district, West Aceh, on 23 July.

*"For ten years, the Indonesian security forces have killed with impunity in Aceh," Amnesty International said. "We are urging the government to learn from the lessons of the province's past in order to bring an immediate halt to serious human rights violations."*

"The recent dramatic escalation in human rights violations in Aceh, including dozens of extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and arbitrary arrests, flies in the face of the government's commitments to address human rights problems in Indonesia."

"In the current climate of impunity, increasing troop numbers -- rather than attempting to address the problems in Aceh -- will only worsen Aceh's already critical human rights situation."

The violations committed in the province of Aceh in northern Sumatra are occurring in the context of Indonesian National Army (TNI) counter-insurgency operations against the armed opposition group *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), Free Aceh Movement, which intensified its activities in late 1998. GAM have also committed human rights abuses.

In response to GAM's increased activities, the Indonesian authorities have sent in more troops -- including so-called "crack" police troops -- who are targeting ordinary civilians as well as suspected members of GAM. Both the TNI and police are flouting Indonesian law and international human rights standards in carrying out their operations.

In January 1999, Amnesty International warned that human rights violations could escalate if troops were re-deployed to Aceh. Since then dozens of people have been unlawfully killed and "disappeared" by the security forces -- including by troops sent to the province in recent months to resolve the violence.

President Habibie's government has so far failed to bring to justice members of the security forces who tortured, "disappeared" or unlawfully killed thousands of Acehnese during counter-insurgency operations in Aceh from 1989-1998.

"The government's failure to address the human rights violations of the past sends a message to the security forces that they can continue to kill, 'disappear' and torture people without being held to account," Amnesty International said.



The human rights organization acknowledged President Habibie's latest initiative to establish an independent commission to investigate violence in Aceh. However, the commission can only contribute to ending impunity in Aceh if it is given access to all areas of the province; if it conducts full and independent investigations; if its findings are made public and if it leads to the prosecution of those found responsible.

As a first step towards ending the current wave of violations, the government should immediately instruct the TNI and police operating in Aceh to act according to international human rights standards and domestic law. The government should also demonstrate its commitment to human rights by bringing members of the security forces who commit human rights violations to justice.

The armed opposition also have a responsibility to halt human rights abuses and to immediately instruct GAM members to stop unlawful killings of soldiers and civilians.

The international community, which is currently paying close attention to the security situation in East Timor, should recognise that the same factors which allow human rights violations to occur in East Timor are also evident in Aceh.

"The international community largely ignored Aceh's grave human rights situation from 1989 to 1998. If they do so again the human cost will be high." Amnesty International said.

The organization appealed to governments worldwide to immediately urge the Indonesian government to stop the human rights violations in Aceh and to review their own military, security and police links with Indonesia to ensure that they are not facilitating such violations.

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