

UA 291/98

Fear for safety/Ill-treatment or Torture 9 November 1998**INDONESIA** Twenty four people, names not known

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of 24 people arrested in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh.

On 2 November 1998, a large group of people began a procession to the grave of a religious leader near the town of Geudong, 10 kilometres from Lhokseumawe. The group stopped a public bus and forced a member of the Indonesian Armed Forces out. They then beat him before he was released and hospitalised.

The crowd later pulled down the Indonesian national flag and replaced it with the flag of *Aceh Merdeka*, the separatist movement in Aceh, at several locations. On the same day, a police station in Lhokseumawe was also shot at, but it is not clear who did this.

The incidents were followed by the arrest of 25 people, although one person escaped from custody. Twenty-four people remain in custody at the Police Resort, Aceh Utara in Lhokseumawe and are currently being interrogated. It is believed that so far they have not had access to independent legal advice.

Amnesty International is concerned that the 24 people are at risk of torture or ill-treatment during the initial stages of their detention. Individuals taken into custody for alleged involvement in separatist activity in Aceh are at risk of torture and ill-treatment, particularly when they are interrogated without independent lawyers being present.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since President Habibie came to power in May 1998, the province of Aceh, which had remained closed to journalists and human rights monitors since a military counter-insurgency operation in the late 1980s, has witnessed greater openness. An outpouring of information about human rights violations during the military's counter-insurgency operations was prompted by the visit of a parliamentary fact-finding team to Aceh in July.

The Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, General Wiranto, travelled to Aceh to apologize on behalf of the Armed Forces for the violations committed during the military's counter-insurgency activities in August. He also announced the withdrawal of combat troops - although not regular, territorial troops - from the area. These make up around half of the 12,000 troops currently positioned there. Following this, on 20 August, 250 troops were reportedly withdrawn and a further 729 were expected to be withdrawn.

However, in late August disturbances took place in Lhokseumawe during the withdrawal of Kopassus troops, the special forces command, and as a result, the military announced that it was suspending the troop withdrawals. There has also been no further action taken to bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice.

It remains unclear who is responsible for recent disturbances in Aceh. Amnesty International is concerned that the events have already been used by the Armed Forces to justify a heavy military presence in the area and that this will undermine efforts to improve the human rights situation in Aceh.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Bahasa Indonesia or English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to ensure that all 24 people in custody have access to independent legal advice;
- that they are not at risk of torture or ill-treatment in custody;
- reminding the government of Indonesia of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".

APPEALS TO:

CHIEF OF NATIONAL POLICE
Gen. Dibyو Widodo
Kapolri
Markas Besar Kepolisian RI
Jl. Trunojoyo 13
Kebayoran Baru
Jakarta Selatan
Indonesia

Telegrams: General Widodo, Kapolri, Jakarta, Indonesia

Fax: (62 21) 720 7277

Salutation: Dear General Widodo

COPIES TO:

MILITARY COMMANDER REGION I/BUKIT BARISAN
(covers North & West Sumatra and Aceh)
Major General Ismet Juhairi Chaniago
Pangdam I/Bukit Barisan
Markas Besar KODAM I
Medan
Sumatra Utara
Indonesia

and to diplomatic representatives of Indonesia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 December 1998.

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person"

Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>