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Indonesia/East Timor: All human rights monitors forced out

East Timor has been left with virtually no one to monitor the worsening human rights situation, Amnesty International said today.

The statement came after around 35 East Timorese and Indonesian human rights and humanitarian workers and volunteers were forced to leave East Timor on 5 September 1999 following threats and attacks by armed pro-Indonesian militia. Most Indonesian and foreign journalists have already left East Timor, fearing for their lives after police failed to prevent attacks targeted at them.

“Rather than protecting those who are actively working on the ground to safeguard human rights in East Timor -- where their work is now more desperately needed than ever -- the Indonesian authorities have chosen to force them out,” Amnesty International said.

“It is one thing to provide adequate protection to human rights defenders, and a very different one to force them to leave while allowing their attackers to walk free.”

“This action appears to be part of a concerted strategy by the Indonesian authorities to further isolate the East Timorese people and draw a veil over the human rights abuses occurring there.”

On the night of 5 September, members of Yayasan Hak (The Human Rights Foundation), Etadep, a development non-governmental organization (NGO), Posko, an East Timorese NGO providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), and Indonesian human rights and humanitarian workers, were taken under police escort to the regional police headquarters in Dili after militias attacked Yayasan Hak’s office where they had all sought shelter.

Police then reportedly told the group to leave East Timor for their own security. While in Dili the group claimed that the militia members who attacked their office were seen using a Yayasan Hak vehicle and entering the police station itself. Police apparently made no attempt to question or arrest them.

The NGO workers have now left East Timor, but Amnesty International fears they could still face further intimidation and harassment from the Indonesian authorities. The group includes the Director of Yayasan Hak, Aniceto Guterres, who has been appointed to the East Timor Consultative Commission, established by the UN, which was expected to come into force after the ballot.

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