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Aceh: End human rights violations and the culture of impunity

The Indonesian government must respond to the reported findings of a government-appointed commission on human rights violations in Aceh by taking concrete steps to bring the perpetrators to justice, Amnesty International said today.*

“The summoning this week of senior military officers for questioning by a parliamentary inquiry about human rights violations, committed during anti-insurgency operations in Aceh, is a step in the right direction,” Amnesty International said.

“The Indonesian government now has an opportunity to address human rights violations in Aceh, past and present,” the organization added. “It must use this opportunity to investigate all alleged cases, put offenders on trial and compensate victims. Those who have violated human rights must be brought to justice – no matter what their rank or position.”

Amnesty International urges the government to make public the findings of the Independent Commission for the Investigation of Violence in Aceh, which have not so far been officially revealed.

“Transparency and public scrutiny is essential to the process of establishing the truth about past human rights violations.”

Even though Aceh no longer has the status of an Area of Military Operation (Daerah Operasi Militer), Amnesty International continues to receive reports of human rights violations in the province.

Since the beginning of this year, hundreds of people have been arbitrarily detained on suspicion of links to GAM, the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka). Many of those detained have been denied access to legal counsel and

their families while in military custody. Several have been ill-treated in custody while others have 'disappeared'. Dozens of Acehnese have been unlawfully killed.

"These violations highlight the Indonesian military's continued lack of accountability -- a situation which must be remedied in Indonesia's new political environment," Amnesty International said.

The organization is also concerned about increasing pressure from the military and police to impose martial law in Aceh and about reports that 876 members of the elite police mobile brigade, Brimob have been sent to the province to deal with likely demonstrations in the province.

"Members of Brimob are known to have committed human rights violations in East Timor in recent months. Imposition of martial law would grant further powers to the very same people who stand accused of the violations in the first place."

"If these reports are true, it will seem that the lessons of the recent past -- that repressive actions by the security forces inflame rather than solve conflict -- do not appear to have been learnt."

Amnesty International also stressed that GAM has a responsibility to halt human rights abuses and called upon the group's leadership to put an end to the unlawful killing of soldiers and civilians.

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*** Note to editors**

On 30 July 1999, the then Indonesian President B.J. Habibie set up a 27-member Independent Commission for the Investigation of Violence in Aceh. On 10 November 1999, the commission submitted its findings to Indonesia's new President, Abdurrahman Wahid. According to unofficial reports, the Commission has documented 5,000 cases of human rights abuses in Aceh, including war crimes committed by soldiers on the orders of their superiors.

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