

AI INDEX: ASA 21/207/99

EMBARGOED UNTIL 05:00 GMT, 16 DECEMBER 1999

East Timor: human rights must be made the cornerstone of reconstruction

Human rights must be made the cornerstone of donor assistance to East Timor, Amnesty International said today on the eve of an international meeting in Tokyo arranged by the World Bank to discuss the country's reconstruction needs.

"The international community has failed East Timor in the past," Amnesty International said. "By placing human rights at the heart of their financial assistance, donors can help to ensure a new future for East Timor, built on a platform of justice, equality and the rule of law."

The violence unleashed against the East Timorese people by the Indonesian security forces has devastated the territory. The World Bank estimates that over 75% of the population was displaced in the week following the announcement of the ballot results and almost 70% of the physical infrastructure was destroyed or rendered inoperable. Thousands of East Timorese refugees continue to suffer violations in military and militia-run camps in West Timor.

Amnesty International urges the international community not to play down the serious human rights violations that occurred in East Timor during the year -- in particular the crimes against humanity and war crimes that were committed in September -- in favour of adopting a quick-fix approach masquerading as 'reconciliation'.

"True reconciliation can only be achieved upon a bedrock of justice," the organization added. "When agreeing upon their levels of assistance, donors must recognise the urgent need for resources to cope with the aftermath of the crimes committed in East Timor over the year."

"Aid targeted at the development of East Timor's justice system for example, must include training in international standards of human rights and criminal justice."

As a non-self-governing territory under the stewardship of the UN, East Timor has the right to expect substantial and comprehensive support for its reconstruction from other UN member states. A rights-based approach would integrate human rights into every aspect of donor assistance, whether it relates to economic and social rights -- such as housing -- or civil and political rights -- such as the right to a fair trial.

"As a UN-administered territory, all international human rights standards adopted by the UN are deemed to apply in East Timor. All assistance programs must be based on the rights enshrined in these standards." Amnesty International said.

In a draft report following an assessment mission to East Timor in October/November this year, the World Bank stressed the importance of working with local political leaders, technical experts and NGOs to 'get it right for the people of East Timor'.

Amnesty International welcomes the World Bank's readiness to ensure local consultation and participation in its work. The organization believes that local community-based organizations and NGOs are the experts on the ground and have a key role to play in East Timor's development. Donors and the World Bank also have a duty to consult those who are at particular risk of marginalization, such as women and minorities.

The organization also welcomes the World Bank's comprehensive approach towards building new social institutions as well as material infrastructure, but stresses that such an integrated approach must be adopted in all spheres of development.

"Building new houses, for example, must go hand-in-hand with building grassroots organizations that can work to protect the rights of the construction workers," the organization said.

"This is a unique opportunity for the international community to work in cooperation with the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) and local East Timorese leaders and NGOs, to ensure that the first new state of the 21st century is one founded upon the twin principles of justice and human rights," Amnesty International concluded.

ENDS.../

For more information or to arrange an interview please call Hideki Morihara in Tokyo on + 81 3 3203 1050 or Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>