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## **Indonesia: Investigate forcible destruction of homes by the police in Riau**

Indonesian authorities should immediately investigate the forcible destruction of an estimated 300 homes in the village of Suluk Bongka on 18 December, Amnesty International said today. Local sources told Amnesty International that two children died during the confrontation and that nearly 400 villagers are still homeless and living in a nearby forest. Fifty eight people remain in police custody.

“Hundreds of people are now living in the forest, their homes destroyed, and two families are grieving the loss of their children. The Indonesian government should immediately investigate why and how this happened, and specifically examine the role of local law enforcement officials in this incident,” said Josef Benedict, Amnesty International’s Indonesia campaigner.

Around 700 local security forces fired bullets and tear gas to evict the residents of the village in the province of Riau on the eastern coast of Sumatra. The police were assisted by Satpol PP (Municipal Administrative Police Unit), Pamswakarsa (civilian security groups) and civilians apparently hired to carry out the eviction.

Local sources reported a two-year-old died after she fell down a well during the confrontation, while a two-month-old baby died from burn injuries. Two other people suffered gunshot wounds.

As the villagers fled into the forest, two helicopters then dropped what was thought to be a fire accelerant on the village of Suluk Bongkal, Bengkalis, burning to the ground around 300 homes. Bulldozers then went in and flattened the area completely.

The villagers have been engaged in a land dispute with the pulpwood supply company PT Arara Abadi since 1996, when the Indonesian forestry ministry gave the company management rights for industrial farming. Since then, the company has tried to evict the villagers but official letters from the Ministry of Forestry and the Riau Governor in 2007 stated clearly that the company could not start operations until the dispute had been settled.

The eviction of Suluk Bongka’s residents occurred without any resolution of the dispute and without the residents receiving any prior warning or being served official papers.

The police initially detained around 200 people. Fifty eight people are still in detention at the Polres Bengkalis (district police station)

Police are preventing human rights organisations from entering the area. Komnas HAM, the national human rights commission, has stated that it will, nonetheless, try to send an investigation team in and provide protection for villagers who had lodged complaints with them.

Amnesty International urgently calls on:

- the police to release those currently detained, or charge them with recognizably criminal offences;
- the police to allow access to the area to Komnas HAM and human rights groups;
- the Indonesian government to ensure the safety of villagers still in the forest, and provide essential shelter, water and food for those villagers made homeless;
- the Indonesian government to order an immediate investigation into the use of excessive lethal force by the police and into the deaths of the two children, with those found responsible brought to justice;
- the Indonesian government to provide reparation for those who have lost their homes.

“The immediate priority is the welfare of those villagers forced to live in the forest. Little information is coming out about the situation, which is why the Indonesian authorities need to act urgently to allow local organisations in, or at least provide more detailed information about how they are looking after these citizens,” said Josef Benedict.