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Indonesia: Commission's findings offer hope for victims of the Aceh conflict

Calls for truth, justice and reparation by victims of the devastating Aceh conflict are gathering momentum despite serious remaining challenges, Amnesty International said as it published a briefing to mark the eighth anniversary of the conflict's end.

The briefing, [*No Peace without Justice*](#), examines how countless victims and family members in Aceh are still left without knowing the truth about the conflict, and highlights a number of cases of human rights violations by the security forces.

At the same time there have been some positive developments in addressing the conflict's legacy, such as a new, potentially key investigation by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) into human rights violations by security forces in Aceh.

"Eight years after the Aceh conflict's end, the legacy of the violence is still part of the daily reality for thousands of people in the region. While victims and their families welcome the improved security situation, they cannot understand why their demands for truth, justice and reparation are being ignored," said Isabelle Arradon, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

"President Yudhoyono, who oversaw the 2005 peace deal ending the conflict must show his commitment to long lasting peace in Aceh by meeting the victims' demands before his term comes to an end next year. A key step forward would be to offer a formal and public apology to all victims of past human rights abuses."

The Aceh conflict between the armed pro-independence movement Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) and the Indonesian government dated back to 1976, and peaked during military operations from 1989 until 2005.

It took a brutal toll on the population there, leaving between 10,000 and 30,000 dead, many of them civilians. Both sides committed human rights abuses during the conflict, many of which constitute crimes under international law and may amount to war crimes. Human rights violations directed by the Indonesian security forces may amount to crimes against humanity.

Amnesty International has called on both parties to commit publicly that there will be no impunity for such crimes.

Victims and survivors of abuses during the conflict have since demanded to know the truth about what happened, but to little end. Thousands are still in the dark about the fate of "disappeared" loved ones, while only a handful of cases related to conflict abuses have been investigated, and not a single one since 2005.

Although there have been several initiatives by the government and Komnas HAM to investigate the conflict, the results have never been made public.

The new findings by Komnas HAM, released on 1 August 2013, allege that “gross human rights violations” were committed by the military during the conflict. Komnas HAM examined five key cases, including the infamous 1999 Simpang KKA incident when the military shot dead 21 protesters, and the torture and ill-treatment of detainees at the Rumoh Geudong military post in Pidie in 1997-98. Both cases are highlighted in the briefing.

Komnas HAM intends to follow up on its investigation by launching an inquiry, which could eventually lead to investigation and prosecution in a human rights court.

“These recent developments within Komnas HAM are positive and show that the issue is alive and needs attention. Many victims believe that with truth, justice and reparation, the peace process can not only be supported but can be strengthened,” said Arradon.

“We urge Komnas HAM to ensure that these new findings, which offer some genuine hope for accountability, are not just buried in the same way that past reports have been.”

Although the peace deal that ended the Aceh conflict called for the establishment of both a Human Rights Court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Aceh, neither of these bodies exist or operate today.

But the Aceh regional parliament is currently debating a draft bylaw on the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the conflict in Aceh.

“We have been encouraged to see the Aceh parliament taking the establishment of a truth commission seriously, in particular in the face of the almost complete lack of political will at the national level on this issue,” said Arradon.

“The Aceh parliament must now ensure that this bylaw is debated, enacted and implemented as soon as possible and that the truth commission operates in line with international law and standards. Such a law would be an enormous step towards justice for the victims of the Aceh conflict.”

Komnas HAM has also reportedly found that survivors and family members have yet to receive full and effective reparation from the government.

This reflects Amnesty International’s own research, published in the report *Time to Face the Past: Justice for human rights abuses in Indonesia’s Aceh province* earlier this year, which found that the limited measures to compensate victims do not go far enough.

“Aceh lacks a comprehensive reparation programme aimed specifically at victims of human rights abuses and their families. Many women survivors of sexual violence have been unable to receive any financial or medical assistance for what they suffered, and must be supported as a priority,” said Arradon.