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Indonesia: Malukan activists at risk of torture in detention

Amnesty International has warned that 10 Malukan political activists detained by Indonesia's special anti-terrorism police are facing a high risk of torture.

Detachment 88 police officers, who have regularly been accused of involvement in torture, arrested the activists on 2 August. The activists had been planning to use a visit by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to Maluku province on 3 August to draw attention to human rights violations there.

"We fear these activists are at risk of extremely brutal treatment given the record of Detachment 88" said Donna Guest, Asia-Pacific Deputy Director for Amnesty International. "Independence activists in Maluku have been tortured with impunity by police in the past."

Benney Sinay, Izak Sapulete, Andy Maruanaya, Ongen Krikof, Marven Bremer, Steven Siahaya, Ong Siahaya, Nomo Andries, Charly Souisa, and Glenn Wattimury are currently being held in police detention.

The men are accused of having links to the Republic of South Maluku (RMS) movement, according to local sources. The RMS was a pro-independence group whose armed wing has been defunct since 1966.

The activists were planning to disseminate posters, books and other materials on alleged human rights violations in Maluku, and to call for the release of Malukan political prisoners during the President's visit, Amnesty International has been told.

Detachment 88 officers are reported to be continuing their searches in the houses of family members of activists.

The unit was formed as a special anti-terrorism branch of the Indonesian police after the 2002 Bali bombings.

In recent years, Amnesty International has documented dozens of arrests of political activists in Indonesia who have peacefully called for independence for their region.

"The Indonesian authorities need to stop treating free speech and peaceful activism as security threats," said Donna Guest.

In June 2007, 22 political activists in Maluku province were arrested by Detachment 88 and other police for unfurling the Maluku independence flag in front of Indonesia's President.

In detention, they were beaten, forced to crawl on their stomachs over hot asphalt, whipped with an electric cable and had billiard balls forced into their mouths. They were also beaten on the head with rifle butts until

their ears bled, and shots were fired near their ears. The police threatened them continually with further torture, sometimes at gunpoint, in an attempt to force them to confess.

They are currently all serving sentences of between seven and 20 years' imprisonment for 'rebellion'. Despite the evidence of torture and the serious concerns this raises about the unfairness of their trials, there has been no investigation into their cases by the Indonesian authorities.

Independence activists in the province of Papua have also received hefty sentences for raising their independence flags in peaceful demonstrations.

Background

The 22 activists arrested in 2007 were convicted of 'rebellion' under Articles 106 and 110 of the Indonesia Criminal Code. A twenty-third person was arrested in June 2008 and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in March 2009. They are all considered by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience.

The Republic of South Maluku (RMS), an armed pro-independence movement, officially ended in Maluku with the execution by the Indonesian authorities of its leader in 1966. However some villagers continue to raise the 'Benang Raja flag', a symbol of the South Maluku independence, in Maluku as a peaceful political act of protest against the central government.