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INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR: LONDON TALKS IMPORTANT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

A detailed framework for the protection of human rights in East Timor should be at the top of the agenda for tomorrow's discussions between the Indonesian and Portuguese Foreign Ministers, meeting in London to discuss the future of East Timor, Amnesty International said.

The talks, sponsored by the United Nations (UN), are the seventh in a series between the Indonesian and Portuguese governments which began in 1992. The meetings are aimed at resolving conflict concerning East Timor, which has been occupied by Indonesia since 1975, although that occupation is not recognised by the UN.

"Any discussion concerning the future of East Timor must have at its core the protection of the human rights of the East Timorese," said Amnesty International. "Without an end to human rights violations there can be no just solution".

The human rights situation in East Timor remains critical. Prisoners of conscience are serving sentences of up to life imprisonment and alleged opponents of Indonesian rule are subject to arbitrary detention, during which they are frequently tortured. Extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" continue, despite a high profile investigation and trial of two soldiers for the murder of six civilians in January 1995.

Human rights has been on the agenda of the talks between the Indonesian and the Portuguese governments in the last few years. But Amnesty International considers that progress for the protection of human rights on the ground has been insufficient.

At previous sessions, the Indonesian government stated its recognition of the need to improve the human rights situation in East Timor, but the government has so far failed to act on commitments it has given during the talks to implement UN human rights resolutions.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas has agreed that the talks are now at the "substantive stage" and that the possibility of "building a framework for a solution to East Timor" should now be discussed.

Amnesty International considers that substantive discussions and a possible framework for resolving the situation on East Timor must include a clear program for the prevention of future human rights violations and redress for past violations.

Such a framework should include immediate access for human rights monitors to East Timor, an end to the practice of arbitrary detention of those suspected of political activism, the release of all prisoners of conscience, and an end to torture, political killings and disappearances.

"The Indonesia government should back up talk with action," Amnesty International said. "It should complement discussions on the future of East Timor with concrete measures to protect human rights there."

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For a full journalists' briefing on the background to the talks, please call Amnesty International Press Officer Casey Kelso at: 44 (0)171-413-5729.