

Indonesia: New president - new hope for human rights?

Amnesty International today wrote to the President of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, urging her to give high priority to the protection and promotion of human rights.

"Amnesty International welcomes the new president's apology for past violations in Aceh and Papua and her stated view that alternatives to violence should be sought to resolve problems. The organization hopes it indicates that she will now take practical and genuine measures to prevent further violations from occurring and provide victims of past violations with redress in Aceh, Papua or elsewhere in Indonesia."

The new President has also emphasised that national stability is a top priority. In the letter to the President, Amnesty International wrote: "Experience shows that respect for human rights is fundamental to ensuring a secure and stable environment in which sustainable development and economic growth is possible. Amnesty International hopes that your government will accelerate and give greater substance to the reform process to ensure genuine participation by the Indonesian people in the political process, equal access to justice, an independent and impartial judiciary and professional and accountable security forces."

The organization asked the President to prioritise the following issues:

-- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience: - After two years in which there were no prisoners of conscience in Indonesia there are currently at least 29 people detained or serving sentences because of their legitimate and non-violent political activities.

-- Urgently implement measures to ensure that human rights are respected in areas of armed conflict: - There are daily reports of grave human rights abuses committed by both Indonesian security forces and the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka - GAM*). Hundreds of people, many of them civilians, have been killed in Aceh this year alone. The organization calls on the security forces, and GAM, to abide by international humanitarian standards to ensure civilians are not targeted.

-- Establish mechanisms of accountability for the police and the military: - Despite a number of high profile investigations into allegations of grave human rights violations, it remains rare for perpetrators to be brought to justice in Indonesia. With only one exception since January 2000 - the case of the killing of a Muslim cleric and some 50 of his followers -- none of the investigations have so far resulted in trials or redress for the victims. The majority of cases, including widespread unlawful killings, torture and "disappearance" have not been investigated at all. The result is an environment in which the security forces appear to remain free to operate outside the law.

-- Guarantee the protection of human rights activists and humanitarian workers: - The work of human rights defenders in both Aceh and Papua is being hampered by the constant threat of detention, torture or even death. Some have been accused of unsupported criminal charges apparently in an effort to discourage them from assisting victims. Amnesty International urges the new President to give guarantees that human rights defenders will have secure and regular access to all areas of Indonesia and that they can carry out their work free from fear of human rights violations.

-- Reform the legislation on Human Rights Courts (Law 26/2000): - Under legislation adopted in November 2000, four permanent Human

Rights Courts are to be established to hear cases of gross violations. The law as it stands is not fully consistent with international human rights standards and, if courts were to be established under it, the rights of suspects to fair trial and victims to justice would be jeopardised.

-- Fulfil Indonesia's commitment to deliver justice to East Timor: - Amnesty International is concerned by the excessive delays in bringing to justice individuals suspected of committing crimes against humanity and other serious crimes in East Timor during 1999. One of the President's first acts on taking office was to issue an amendment to a Presidential Decision to establish an ad hoc Human Rights Court on East Timor. Although greeted as a positive step by some, the amended version still limits the jurisdiction of the court to just the two months of April and September 1999 and to just three out of 13 districts in East Timor. This means that hundreds of victims of violations during 1999 throughout East Timor will be denied justice and the full truth of the events will not emerge. Amnesty International is calling for the the decision to be reviewed and for trials to begin without further delay.

-- Urgently resolve the situation of the remaining East Timorese refugees still in Indonesia: - It is now almost two years since some quarter of a million East Timorese fled or were forcibly expelled to West Timor. Although many have returned, tens of thousands remain in poor conditions in West Timor. Amnesty International urges the new President to resolve this situation without further delay by fulfilling the demands of the UN Security Council and others to disband and disarm militias still operating in the area; provide secure conditions in which refugees can access all necessary information to freely choose whether to stay in Indonesia or return to East Timor; and facilitate the repatriation in safety and dignity of those who choose to return.

The organization also urged the President to amend provisions in the Criminal Code which violate international standards, to issue a moratorium on the death penalty, and to accelerate the process of judicial reform.

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