

146/99

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**EMBARGOED FOR 0500 GMT 4 AUGUST 1999****Amnesty International briefing on the deteriorating human rights situation in  
Aceh  
August 1999**

From 1989 to 1998, the Indonesian security forces conducted counter-insurgency operations against an armed opposition group, Free Aceh Movement, (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM), in the province of Aceh, northern Sumatra. In the context of the counter-insurgency operations, large-scale human rights violations were committed by the security forces including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", torture and rape, imprisonment of peaceful activists and unfair political trials. Aceh's status as an Area of Military Operation (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, DOM) was revoked in August 1998 and some combat troops were withdrawn. With greater political freedom being enjoyed all over Indonesia following the end of former president Suharto's 32-year-rule, Acehnese began speaking out about the human rights violations suffered during the DOM period and discussion began about the status of the province.

In December 1998 violence returned to the province with an increase in counter-insurgency operations by the Indonesian National Army (TNI) and police apparently in response to alleged activity by groups being identified as GAM. The targets of these counter-insurgency operations have not just included suspected members of the armed opposition movement but also civilians suspected of links with GAM. Also taking part in counter-insurgency operations - at times directly alongside the TNI - is a newly created riot control police unit, the PPRM (*Petugas Penindak Rusuh Massa*). Recent media reports indicate that more TNI troops and police are to be sent to Aceh to track down members of GAM. Activities by both the TNI and by GAM have contributed to thousands of Acehnese fleeing their homes to seek sanctuary in temporary Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps.

**Human rights violations**

In the course of TNI counter-insurgency operations, serious human rights violations have returned to Aceh. Dozens of people have been arbitrarily detained by the TNI and the PPRM on suspicion of links with GAM. Many are held in incommunicado detention, during which they have been subjected to torture or ill-treatment and denied access to their families and to human rights lawyers. Many of those detained have also been taken into custody by the TNI and the PPRM and subsequently "disappeared"; it was discovered subsequently that some of them were killed.

Izwar Puteh, a volunteer humanitarian worker assisting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Aceh, was arrested in Pidie District on 17 July 1999 as he and six other people were on their way to attend a meeting at an IDP camp to discuss health conditions in the camp. He was arrested by members of the PPRM and detained incommunicado at a TNI facility where he was ill-treated before he was released on 22 July.

Nazaruddin, a trader, was arrested by members of the PPRM on 1 July as he was travelling home by motorbike. Upon arrest he was beaten and forced into a PPRM truck. On 5 July, his dead body was found by the side of the road in Meurah Mulia Sub-district, North Aceh.

Large numbers of people have been unlawfully killed by the security forces in several different incidents in recent months.

On 3 May 1999, up to 41 people - including women and children - were shot dead by the TNI in Kreung Geukuh, Dewantara Sub-district, North Aceh District, as they took part in a demonstration against the TNI's excessive use of force. Most of those people killed or wounded were shot in the back as they tried to flee the military gun-fire. The TNI claimed that the people shot were supporters of GAM who were attempting to take over a military missile facility in the area. At least two women and seven children were among the dead.

On 23 July, at least 40 people and possibly as many as 70 were unlawfully killed by the TNI during counter-insurgency operations in Beutong Sub-district, West Aceh. Again the TNI claimed that those killed were members of GAM, but eyewitnesses and human rights groups deny this and claim that those killed were unarmed and were executed by the TNI.

### **No justice**

A significant contributing factor to disturbances in Aceh in the last year has been the sense of injustice felt by many Acehnese because of past human rights violations, for which the victims have been unable to seek justice and redress.

On coming to power in May 1998, President Habibie showed some signs of recognising the need to address human rights violations which took place in Aceh. Both President Habibie and the Chief of the Armed Forces, General Wiranto, apologised for human rights violations which had occurred during the DOM. A national parliamentary fact-finding team was sent to Aceh to investigate reports of human rights violations. Plans to establish a branch in Aceh of Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission have accelerated.

While noting these steps, Amnesty International is concerned that they have not yet resulted in any concrete measures to tackle the virtual impunity with which the security forces operate in Aceh. None of the violations which took place during the DOM have been independently investigated and the perpetrators have not been brought to justice. In February 1999, five soldiers were convicted by a military court in connection with the unlawful killing of five men in military custody. There have been no other instances, however, in which members of the security forces have been brought to justice.

On 30 July 1999, President Habibie announced that he had established an Independent Investigation Commission on Violence in Aceh (*Komisi Independen Pengusutan Tindak Kekerasan di Aceh*) which is expected to conduct investigations in Aceh, and to provide a report within six months, including recommendations on legal measures, rehabilitation and reconciliation. The commission is apparently comprised of 27 members including members of Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics and representatives of the government. Amnesty International believes that the commission can only be effective if it is given unhindered access to all areas of Aceh to conduct full and independent investigations into human rights violations during and after the DOM period, if its findings are made public and if it leads to the prosecution of those found responsible.

### **Human rights abuses by GAM**

Since an escalation of violence in Aceh in late 1998, GAM has allegedly committed human rights abuses, including unlawful killings of members of the security forces and civilians suspected of assisting the TNI. Amnesty International condemns such abuses and is calling on GAM to ensure that its members abide by international humanitarian law as defined in Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions which prohibits, among other things, the targeting of persons taking no active part in the hostilities; the taking of hostages; humiliating and degrading treatment; and the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions outside a regularly constituted court.

While acknowledging that GAM have been responsible for human rights abuses, independent confirmation of the allegations about GAM activities has not always been possible to obtain. Observers have claimed that there has been military involvement in provoking some

disturbances which the TNI has subsequently blamed on GAM. Such disturbances are then used by the TNI to justify an increased military presence in Aceh.  
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