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Indonesia: ASEAN Regional Forum members must address mounting violations in Aceh

Amnesty International today called on Indonesia's ASEAN partners, and officials of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) currently meeting in Hanoi to address the rapidly deteriorating security and accompanying human rights violations in Aceh.

If this Forum is to be effective, officials have to be prepared to address the difficult issues - and that includes dealing with human rights violations in Aceh, Amnesty International said.

The security of human rights defenders and humanitarian workers in Aceh has been precarious for many months but in the last weeks the threats and intimidation against them has intensified. Many of them have had to leave the province and others have gone into hiding for fear for their security. Human rights monitoring and humanitarian work is now almost impossible.

Investigations into past cases of violations against human rights defenders have either not been carried out or have not resulted in perpetrators being brought to justice. "Failure to resolve cases of extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detention and other violations reinforces the belief of both the Indonesian security forces and the armed opposition group Free Aceh, GAM, that they can act with impunity," the human rights organization added.

Operations by the Indonesian military and police in villages throughout Aceh, ostensibly to search for GAM members, continue to cause hundreds of people to flee their homes. Others have been forced to flee because of GAM's recent order to all non-Acehnese to leave the province.

One of the stated aims of the first meeting of the ARF in 1994 was the enhancement of political and security cooperation within the region as a means of ensuring a lasting peace, stability and prosperity for the region and its

peoples.@ If this goal is to be met, all the participants in the process must be willing to address the full regional security agenda.

Innocent civilians are being killed every day in Aceh, and the world turns a blind eye. Indonesia's neighbours and dialogue partners have a responsibility to face up to the issue and help bring an end to the misery which has characterised daily life for the Acehnese people for far too long,@ Amnesty said

Background

Widespread and systematic human rights violations have been perpetrated in Aceh during the last decade in the context of counter-insurgency operations by the Indonesian security forces against the armed opposition group, Aceh, GAM. In the months following the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998 the military withdrew some troops from the province and a series of investigations into past human rights violations were initiated.

However, the situation quickly deteriorated again and the conflict between the security forces and GAM has steadily escalated since December 1998. A peace initiative between the Indonesian government and GAM has resulted in several agreements since June 2000 to suspend military operations. However, the violence has continued to rise.

Both sides have committed grave human rights abuses, many of the victims of which are ordinary civilians, including women and children. Local human rights monitors report close to one hundred people killed every month this year. Their bodies have often been found bearing the marks of torture. Others have disappeared@ or been arbitrarily detained.

Human rights defenders and political activists have been increasingly targeted mainly by the Indonesian military and police. GAM are also known to have threatened and intimidated activists. Around 70 activists have been the victim of human rights violations since the beginning of 1999, including at least eight who have been killed. No one has been brought to justice in any of these cases.

Recent cases which have not yet been investigated or brought to trial include:

The killing of Teungku Al-Kamal, a religious teacher and member of the Joint Monitoring Commission for Security Affairs (established to monitor the peace agreements between the Indonesian government and GAM), and his lawyer Sufrin Sulaiman and driver Amiruddin in South Aceh on 29 March 2001. In early April 2001 the Chief of Police for Aceh announced that a team would be set up to investigate the killings. No one has so far been arrested;

The torture and extrajudicial execution of three members of the Aceh based organization, Rehabilitation Action for Torture Victims in Aceh (RATA) in North Aceh District on 6 December 2000 - A police investigation into the killings has taken place and eight people were detained including four members of the regional military command and four civilian military informers. The four civilians escaped from detention in March 2001 and have not been recaptured.

The killing of Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, a lawyer and activist on human rights in Aceh whose tortured body was found in early September 2000 after he disappeared on 5 August 2000 - A police investigation has so far not resulted in the identification of any suspects.

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