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INDONESIA: HUMAN RIGHTS DETERIORATE IN EAST TIMOR AS UN TALKS GO ON

Another year of talks and vague promises of greater openness by the Indonesian Government has brought no relief to the people of East Timor, Amnesty International said today at the United Nations (UN) Special Commission on Decolonisation in New York.

Despite the recent completion of the eighth round of talks between the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal and a visit to Indonesia and East Timor by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the root causes of human rights violations in East Timor remain unaddressed.

Reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, "disappearance", extrajudicial killings, the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and unfair trials have continued. There is particular concern that the authorities may be using disturbances in the territory as a pretext to arrest people involved in peaceful pro-independence activities.

"Instead of committing itself to taking concrete measures to address gross violations by its security forces, the Indonesian Government responds to criticism with cosmetic measures aimed at appeasing international and domestic critics," Amnesty International said.

In 1995, for example, the government agreed to a visit by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Indonesia and East Timor. During the visit the authorities said they were prepared to cooperate further with the mechanisms of UN human rights bodies, but gave no indication of how or when this would be done.

"The international community should not be fooled into thinking this constitutes real progress on human rights in East Timor. Limited concessions as such have not alleviated the deteriorating situation on the ground," Amnesty International said.

Concrete action is urgently required to curb arbitrary use of power by the security forces, end the impunity and remove legislation which allows for the detention of prisoners of conscience.

The international community should also fulfil its responsibility to the people of East Timor by holding the Indonesian Government to account for violations whenever they occur.

"The time for talking is over. The Indonesian Government must now demonstrate a genuine commitment to human rights in East Timor -- and the international community must hold that government to such a commitment," Amnesty International said.

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