

INDONESIA East Timorese refugees attempting to return from Indonesia

Several hundred East Timorese refugees are thought to be planning to return from West Timor over the next week. They are feared to be at risk of attack from militia groups operating in West Timor, who oppose the repatriation scheme and have previously attacked refugees trying to register join it.

Close to 1000 refugees from Ainaro district are said to be planning to return to East Timor, as a result of negotiations between the leader of the militia group, Mahidi, East Timorese political leaders and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). They are due to cross the land border between West and East Timor on 14 September. Non-governmental organizations in East Timor have been told to expect several hundred more returnees in the following days.

Refugees have to register with the Indonesian Refugee Task Force (Satgas PMP) to return as part of this process. Refugees registering on 9 September were reportedly threatened by members of pro-Indonesian militia groups, who took their registration forms and stole their possessions. Other attempts to register refugees in the past week have also been disrupted by militia who are opposed to efforts to repatriate the refugees.

Neither the Indonesian police or the military appear to have taken any action to prevent this intimidation. It is feared that unless security is greatly improved refugees who do attempt to return to East Timor may face threats, intimidation and possibly physical attack.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The people of East Timor voted against continued integration with Indonesia in a UN-sponsored ballot in September 1999. They immediately faced a wave of violent retaliation from pro-Indonesian militia, together with the Indonesia military (TNI) and police. Over a quarter of a million East Timorese fled or were forcibly expelled from East Timor to Indonesia.

A voluntary repatriation program organized by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was repeatedly disrupted during 1999 and 2000 by militia, who attacked UNHCR staff and threatened and intimidated refugees who tried to join the repatriation program. The program was eventually suspended in September 2000 after three UNHCR staff were killed by militia members in Atambua, West Timor. All international agencies, including humanitarian groups, left the province and most, including the UNHCR, have never returned.

In April 2001, at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Indonesian government agreed to a statement in which the Commission called upon Indonesia to complete the refugee repatriation programme in full accordance with international standards. Echoing past UN Security Council Resolutions, it also urged Indonesia to disarm and disband the militia and to restore the security of the refugee camps in East Timor.

The Indonesian government organised a registration process on 6 June 2001, and claimed that only two per cent of the refugees wished to return to East Timor. However, the process was not regarded as credible, partly because a political group with militia links was involved in organizing the registration,

and also because refugees had no access independent information on which to base their decisions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Bahasa Indonesia, English or your own language:

- reminding the Indonesian authorities that the right to return to one's own country is a fundamental human right;
- urging the authorities to fulfil their international obligations to ensure that refugees wishing to return to East Timor are able to do so in safety and dignity, and that they have the opportunity to make a free and informed choice as to whether to return or not;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the refugee camps are humanitarian and civilian in nature, and that refugees are protected against threats or attacks from militia groups.

APPEALS TO:

President
Megawati Sukarnoputri
President RI
Istana Merdeka
Jakarta 10110
Indonesia

Salutation: Dear President

**Fax: + 62 21 345 2685 (via State Secretariat)
+ 62 21 3281693904541/+ 62 21 526 8726**

Minister for Foreign Affairs
Dr. Nur Hassan Wirajuda
Menteri Luar Negeri
Jl. Pejambon No.6
Jakarta Pusat 10410
Indonesia

Salutation: Dear Minister

Fax: + 62 21 3805511/3457782/ 7245354/3855481

COPIES TO:

Minister for defence and security
H Matori Abdul Djalil
Menteri Pertahanan dan Keamanan
Jl. Medan Merdeka Barat No.13-14
Jakarta Pusat 10110
Indonesia

Salutation: Dear Minister

Fax: + 62 21 384 5178

and to diplomatic representatives of Indonesia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 October 2001.