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East Timor: Fear, intimidation and forced relocation in the archipelago

As the international peace-keeping force arrives in East Timor, tens of thousands of forcibly displaced East Timorese are at risk of serious human rights violations throughout Indonesia, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

"The situation of the East Timorese people forcibly displaced to West Timor and other parts of Indonesia is becoming more critical every day, Amnesty International said.

"We should be celebrating the birth of an independent nation, but instead we are witnessing its baptism in blood."

"Independence activists are being hunted down at checkpoints, on boats and in house-to-house searches," the human rights organization added. "Militia and members of the Indonesian army (TNI) continue to intimidate, threaten and attack the displaced East Timorese with total impunity."

In the report, Amnesty International documents patterns of mass human rights violations committed against the tens of thousands of East Timorese displaced within East Timor itself and those forced to flee to West Timor and other areas of Indonesia in what appears to be part of a deliberate policy of forced deportation by the TNI. The report is based on eyewitness accounts and refugee testimonies collected in the field.

The human rights organization has received credible reports that 35 young East Timorese men were killed on board a ship bound for Kupang from Dili on 11 September. According to an eyewitness account, the bodies of the victims were dumped overboard. *Amnesty International has collected accounts of other incidents of East Timorese being beaten and killed on boats leaving Dili.*

Meanwhile, armed militia groups -- mostly Aitarak militia -- operate with almost complete impunity in West Timor. They are mainly concentrated in the border area of Atambua, but they are also present on the streets of Kupang and in Kefamenanu District.

In Kupang and Atambua militia groups are reported to be regularly checking refugee camps, houses and local hotels for pro-independence supporters, humanitarian defenders and human rights workers. There are also credible reports that unlawful killings have taken place in Atambua and that some people have been abducted from the refugee camps by militia or detained by the military.

One refugee recounted to Amnesty International the detention of his cousin in Kefamenanu:

"The next day my family were forced to leave Kefameanu... When they were leaving, a civilian who works for the military in Atambua, stopped my cousin Leonio Guterres from leaving with the rest of my family. I do not know why he was picked - whether it was because he is a young, strong man or whether there was some suspicion about his background. He was detained at Kodim (District Command) in Kefamenanu. I fear he may be dead or in grave danger."

The security of East Timorese displaced, often forcibly, to other parts of Indonesia has also seriously deteriorated. East Timorese in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Flores and Bali are facing serious intimidation, threat of arrest, constant military surveillance and are unable to leave.

Many East Timorese in Indonesia believe they are on "lists" held by the TNI and the militias. In Bali, those fleeing the violence in East Timor are living in fear, continually having to move location to avoid detection by militia or TNI.

"In a climate of rising xenophobia, East Timorese are easily identifiable for discrimination and attack."

Humanitarian relief is urgently required for all displaced East Timorese, in particular in West Timor where efforts are being severely hampered by lack of access and by militia operating in the refugee communities. International humanitarian workers, including UNHCR staff, have been attacked during attempts to visit the displaced persons. Three East Timorese staff of the ICRC were abducted in Atambau on 11 September -- two remain missing.

Amnesty International calls on the international community to urgently press Indonesia to allow international assistance and protection for the East Timorese who have been displaced to West Timor and other parts of Indonesia.

"The UNHCR and other humanitarian assistance agencies who work to assist refugees must be given immediate and unhindered access to the refugees in West Timor and elsewhere in Indonesia," Amnesty International said.

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