



# East Timor & Indonesia *Action* Network/U.S.

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## ***East Timorese Deserve Justice!***

### **Statement by the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN) on the Anniversary of the Liquiça Massacre**

On the tenth anniversary of the massacre at the Catholic Church in Liquiça, ETAN urges the international community to finally respond to the demand for justice of the victims of this and other horrific crimes committed during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (Timor-Leste).

Those responsible for the many crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide committed during Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor between 1975 and 1999 must be held accountable.

The victims of the Liquiça massacre and their families should not have to wait another decade for justice. Calls for justice are not calls for revenge. Only through credible trials and respect for the rule of law will victims find closure. Only through real accountability will genuine friendship flourish between peoples of Indonesia and East Timor.

The brutal attack on those seeking refuge in Liquiça churchyard was part of the ongoing campaign to intimidate the East Timorese people into opposing independence and to create the illusion that any violence arose spontaneously among the East Timorese.

At that time, the Liquiça killings were a clear statement that Indonesia's security forces had no intention of allowing an uncoerced vote. However, a month later, the UN, Indonesia and Portugal signed the May 5 agreement, which called for the Indonesian police to provide security for the coming UN-organized vote and for the Indonesian military to be left in place.

The events of 1999 and the preceding years of illegal occupation continue to affect the East Timorese, who continue to suffer from largely unhealed mass trauma. This is one of the underlying causes of the 2006 crisis in Dili. The failure to hold accountable those responsible for organizing and implementing the violence in Liquiça and throughout the occupation has created a culture of impunity. Perpetrators believe they will not be held accountable for their crimes and victims often feel that they must take justice into their own hands. These attitudes contributed to the attacks on the President and Prime Minister early last year.

In Indonesia, impunity for past human rights crimes undermines the rule of law and democratic progress. Instead of facing trial, key figures in East Timor's oppression are running for prominent political offices.

#### **Background**

On April 6, 1999, hundreds of East Timorese and Indonesian militia, soldiers and police attacked several thousand internally displaced refugees taking shelter in the Catholic church in Liquiça after slaughtering several civilians nearby the day before. According to [a report commissioned by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), the attack left up to 60 people dead, although the precise death toll is still unknown. The refugees had sought shelter in the churchyard after fleeing earlier militia attacks.

Eyewitness accounts and subsequent investigations showed that members of the notorious police unit BRIMOB played an active role in the attack as did the Besi Merah Putih militia (BMP, Iron Rod for the Red-and-White). Military units, including members of its special forces, Kopassus, were also involved. According to the OHCHR report, "Although the attack was carried out mainly by BMP militiamen, eyewitnesses have testified that TNI (including Kopassus) and Brimob troops backed up the militias and fired their weapons during the attack."

The systematic disposal of corpses... [t]ogether with the substantial evidence of TNI [Indonesian military] and Police involvement in the massacre itself, the presence of key officials at the scene of the crime, and the responsibility of those officials for creating and coordinating the BMP... makes it a virtual certainty that the Liquiça church massacre was planned by high-ranking TNI and civilian authorities," the report added.

The assault on the refugees did not end on April 6. Less than two weeks later, more than a dozen survivors and others were murdered on April 17 at the house of Mario Carrascalao in Dili, East Timor's capital. These murders followed an officially-sponsored rally by militia. Those seeking to provide aid and comfort to survivors in Liquiça had their convoys attacked in subsequent months.

All of the security officials tried in Indonesia's Ad Hoc Human Rights Court for their involvement in the massacre and other crimes were acquitted either at trial or on appeal, including police chief Timbul Silaen, regional military commander General Adam Damiri and East Timor military commander Tono Suratman.

In November 2001, the UN-funded [Serious Crimes Unit \(SCU\) indicted nine Indonesian officers and 12 local militia](#) for the massacre. The massacre was also cited in a wide-ranging [indictment issued in 2003](#) by the UN-backed Serious Crimes process. It accused senior officials, including General Wiranto, former Indonesian defense minister, who is now a candidate for Indonesian president, of responsibility for crimes against humanity in East Timor in 1999. All are currently residing in Indonesia. The Serious Crimes process in Dili convicted and jailed one militia member, who had been indicted separately of three murders, including one during the massacre.

Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and brutally occupied the territory until October 1999, with backing from the United States and other powers. The United Nations never formally recognized Indonesia's claim, and as many as 200,000 East Timorese were killed as a result of the Indonesian occupation.

In 1999, Indonesia agreed to a UN-organized referendum on East Timor's political status. After the referendum, in which East Timorese people voted overwhelmingly for independence, Indonesian security forces and the militia they controlled laid waste to the territory, displacing three-quarters of the population, murdering more than 1400 civilians, and destroying more than 75% of the buildings and infrastructure.

Recently, the [Timor-Leste NGO Forum urged the international community](#) to "now implement the UN's repeated promises by allocating the necessary political, financial and legal resources to end impunity for these crimes against humanity."

In February, [representatives of 60 organizations signed a letter to the UN Security Council](#) urging concrete action to ensure justice and accountability for crimes committed during the Indonesian occupation. They decried "a double standard of justice, undermining the rule of law and respect for human rights in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and internationally." They wrote "A decade has passed since Indonesia's violent exit from Timor-Leste, and Indonesia has repeatedly demonstrated that it cannot or will not credibly try or extradite perpetrators of crimes connected with Indonesia's occupation of Timor-Leste."

ETAN was formed in 1991. The U.S.-based organization advocates for democracy, justice and human rights for Timor-Leste and Indonesia. ETAN opposed the [nomination of Adm. \(ret.\) Dennis Blair](#), who as Pacific commander, delivered a message of 'business-as-usual' to General Wiranto in the immediate aftermath of the Liquiça massacre. For additional background on the Liquiça massacre see ETAN's web site: <http://www.etan.org>.