

# East Timor and Indonesia Action Network

## Question the Candidates in Election 2008

THE ELECTION SEASON is already in full swing. Now is the time to challenge or praise incumbents' records on East Timor and Indonesia and to ask all candidates for federal office their positions on justice for East Timor (Timor-Leste), U.S. military assistance to Indonesia, and other related issues.

Speaking out now can have real impact. In 1992, ETAN activists in Wisconsin publicly challenged Republican Senator Robert Kasten's support for U.S. training of Indonesian soldiers. Russell Feingold, Kasten's Democratic challenger, picked up the issue, defeated Kasten, and today remains one of East Timor's strongest supporters in Washington. "I hadn't always planned to become involved in East Timor, because I wasn't always aware of the situation there," Feingold once said. "But then... the East Timor Action Network brought the plight of the East Timorese people to my attention."

Here are a few things you can do (see sample questions for candidates below)

**CHALLENGE** Presidential, House and Senate candidates to state their position on U.S. military training and weapons sales to Indonesia while the Indonesian military continues to evade accountability for crimes against humanity committed in East Timor and elsewhere, block reform to establish civilian control of the military, and carry out brutal acts of repression in West Papua and elsewhere. Urge the candidates to actively support an international tribunal to bring those responsible for decades of crimes against humanity in East Timor to justice.

**RAISE THE ISSUES** at debates and campaign events; write and call the candidates and encourage others to do so. Praise those who've stood up for the people of East Timor and Indonesia, challenge those who haven't, and encourage newcomers to clearly state their positions on these issues. When people ask questions in a variety of public and private fora, candidates see that these issues are important to people in their district or state.

Try to get the candidate to make specific commitments to oppose training — including so-called counter-terrorism training — weapons sales and other military aid to Indonesia and to support justice for East Timor, which must include an international tribunal. Follow up with a letter, reiterating your position and outlining your agreement or disagreement with the candidate. (Be prepared to provide additional information for candidates who may not be familiar with East Timor or Indonesia.)

**WRITE LETTERS** to local newspapers and call in to radio shows calling on candidates to take strong stands on the issues.

Let others know what you learn. If you need assistance, contact us. Send the results of your efforts to ETAN at [etan@etan.org](mailto:etan@etan.org).

### Sample Questions for Candidates

*(These questions are also useful to ask new and returning members of Congress after the elections.):*

**1. BACKGROUND:** The Bush administration in 2005 fully restored U.S. military assistance to Indonesia, lifting limits in place since the Indonesian military's destruction of East Timor in 1999. Reform of the military in Indonesia has stalled since then. No effort has been made to bring to justice those responsible for the devastation in 1999 or the myriad human rights abuses that occurred during Indonesia's 24-year occupation of East Timor. Re-engaging with Indonesia's military has not worked to improve human rights – indeed it has had the opposite effect.

**Question:** *Do you agree that we should stop training and selling weapons to the Indonesian military? To what degree should human rights be a priority in U.S. foreign policy?*

**2. BACKGROUND:** In 1999, after East Timor voted for independence, the Indonesian military and its militias ransacked East Timor. The magnitude of this destruction has been documented in numerous reports. Most recently, the joint East Timor-Indonesia Commission of Truth and Friendship stated that Indonesia's military committed gross human rights violations, including rape, murder, and political assassinations.

Although the President of Indonesia has accepted the report, the government of Indonesia is unwilling to hold its armed forces accountable. All those prosecuted for these crimes in Indonesia were acquitted of all charges in trials widely regarded as a sham, and Indonesia refuses to extradite those indicted by a UN-backed court in East Timor. Several of the military officers accused

of the most horrendous human rights crimes have received promotions.

**Question:** *Do you support going to the UN Security Council to create an international tribunal for East Timor to make certain justice is served? What other steps should the U.S. take to support justice for these serious crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in East Timor since Indonesia invaded in 1975?*

**3. BACKGROUND:** In 2005, the current administration lifted all restrictions on military aid to Indonesia, arguing that U.S. engagement would encourage military reform and human rights progress. In fact the opposite is true. Historically, reform in Indonesia has coincided with U.S. restrictions on military assistance. Since the Bush administration removed restrictions on military assistance, there has been little accountability for past human rights violations and accountability for ongoing abuses remains spotty at best. Military budget and other reforms have stalled and have yet to include an end to the territorial command structure (which involves the military in society at the grassroots level), the dismantling of the military's legal and illegal business empire, or other prerequisites to genuine civilian control.

**Question:** *Do you support restricting U.S. military assistance to Indonesia as a way to encourage accountability and military reform?*

**4. BACKGROUND:** In West Papua, located in the most eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago, the Indonesian government maintains a heavy police and military presence. The security forces regularly intimidate and threaten human rights activists, church leaders and members of indigenous communities who support greater autonomy or independence from Indonesia through peaceful means.

Abuses committed in West Papua include the imprisonment of peaceful activists who raise the "Morning Star" flag, regarded as a symbol of Papuan independence. Amnesty International Prisoners of Conscience Filep Karma and Yusak Package are serving long prison terms for their role in organizing a peaceful protest where this flag was raised. In July 2008, 40 people were arrested during another flag-raising demonstration, six of whom

now face extended prison terms. In August 2008, Indonesian police shot and killed a man during a peaceful protest where the flag was raised.

Such consistent interference of the right to peacefully assemble and express one's political views is a clear violation of international human rights.

**Question:** *Would you support suspension of security assistance to Indonesia until these violations cease? How would you use the influence of your office in order to speak out against such violations?*

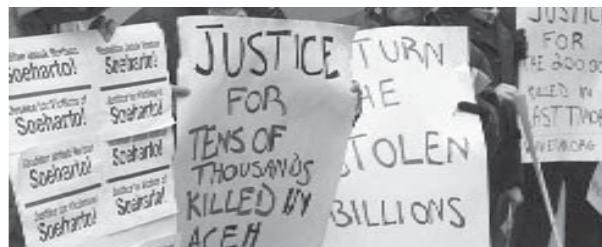
**5. BACKGROUND:** East Timor is a newly independent country. Following decades of exploitation and occupation by external powers, it is

one of the most impoverished in Asia. As a result, East Timor remains highly dependent on foreign assistance despite significant petroleum revenue. Current U.S. assistance to East Timor is biased toward creating an unregulated, export-oriented economy. For example, USAID is promoting export-oriented mono-crop and livestock agriculture. Such programs would shift resources away from small producers, who provide the vast majority of East Timor's local food. These are precisely the policies that have led to a sharp rise in global food prices for many poor countries and could prove disastrous for East Timor in the long run.

The Department of State has sought to cut the aid budget to East Timor by more than half, from \$23.6 million in 2008 to \$9.45 million for FY2009. Yet East Timor needs additional resources and flexibility in order to best use these resources.

East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta recently urged that aid money was better spent on the ground for rural development initiatives, rather than "to cover endless study missions, extremely generous consultant fees, repetitive reports and recommendations stating the obvious."

**Question:** *Would you support expanding assistance to East Timor back to FY 2008 levels, but with greater flexibility, so that East Timor's people benefit more? What should be the top priority of U.S. development assistance? Do you think current policy supports that emphasis? What would you change?*



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