

East Timor

Independence Is Just a Beginning

East Timor, officially now Timor Leste, became the world's newest independent country on May 20, 2002. In 1975, following the end of Portuguese colonial rule, East Timor was denied independence by the invading Indonesian military. The invasion and subsequent occupation killed one-third of the population — more than 200,000 people — through "starvation, epidemics, war and terror," as the Nobel Committee noted when awarding the 1996 peace prize to East Timorese leaders Jose Ramos Horta and Bishop Carlos Belo.

East Timor's brutal annexation was made possible by U.S. backing, through weapons, military training and political support to Indonesia.

On August 30, 1999, the people of East Timor — defying an Indonesian military campaign of intimidation and violence — voted overwhelmingly for independence. Following the vote, Indonesian troops and their militia proxies exacted brutal revenge: destroying 70% of the country's infrastructure, killing at least 1500 people, raping hundreds of women and girls, and forcing hundreds of thousands across the border into Indonesian West Timor.

Today, East Timor, after a period of UN administration, is independent and facing many new challenges.

East Timor is one of the poorest countries in the world. It needs to remain debt-free so that scarce income can be used for reconstruction, education and health care, rather than to pay interest on loans to international financial institutions and banks. Governments, which supported Indonesia's occupation like the U.S., should be generous as East Timor rebuilds, but any aid must suit East Timor's priorities.

East Timor wants to negotiate a permanent maritime boundary with Australia. Australia is exploiting valuable undersea petroleum resources — which under international law, rightfully belong to East Timor. Instead of acting the bully, Australia must

treat East Timor fairly and quickly negotiate the boundary or agree to international arbitration.

Senior Indonesian military officials responsible for East Timor's invasion and occupation have so far escaped justice for crimes committed in 1999 and before. The very few officials convicted in an Indonesian court have been given light sentences that they will likely never serve. Most East Timorese argue that only an international tribunal can deliver justice.

U.S.-Indonesian military ties were suspended in September 1999 as Indonesian troops and militia destroyed East Timor, but the Pentagon is pressing for increased military assistance. Although the Indonesian military has left East Timor, it continues to victimize civilians throughout the Indonesian archipelago, especially in Aceh and Papua. The East Timor Action Network (ETAN) opposes military engagement with Indonesia and works to support justice for East Timor, including a process of U.S. accountability for complicity in the occupation.

What You Can Do

- ✓ *Contact President Bush and Congress.* Urge them to support an international tribunal for East Timor. The U.S. must not provide military training or weapons to Indonesia. (Call the White House comment line: 202-456-1111; fax: 202-456-2883; e-mail: president@whitehouse.gov; or write: President Bush, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC 20500. Call your Senators and Representative at 202-224-3121 or see www.congress.gov.)
- ✓ *Inform others.* Write letters-to-the-editor, organize a video showing or host a speaker at your school, community center, place of worship, or house. Contact ETAN for a video list and speaker contacts or see our website: www.etan.org.
- ✓ *Send a contribution* to support the work of ETAN.

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