

**“No freedom. . . no hope. . .
and also no future. . .”**

— Indonesian humanitarian worker on East Timor’s refugees



An East Timorese family of twelve lives without any privacy in a cramped refugee shelter near Kupang, West Timor (Indonesia).

**The Indonesian military
occupation continues for
East Timor’s refugees...**

***Two years after
choosing independence***

“I left Maliana on September 19th [1999]. I was forced to go on a bus by TNI, militia and Kopassus, who I recognised despite their civilian clothing. People with money paid to get on transport. I paid the driver and got on the bus... Those who didn’t have money walked.”

— 35-year-old former refugee from Maliana, East Timor

Approximately one-tenth of the population of East Timor — over 80,000 people — has been virtual hostages in squalid refugee camps in West Timor (Indonesia) for the past two years. Repatriation has slowed to a trickle, due to the failure of the international community to act, combined with intransigence by the Indonesian military and government. Although East Timor is now free of Indonesian troops, the refugees across the border live under daily militia-imposed terror.

There is overwhelming evidence that the Indonesian military (the TNI), the Indonesian special forces (called Kopassus), and the ferocious militia groups they formed, armed, and trained, forced some 260,000 East Timorese across the border into West Timor (Indonesia) in retaliation for the August 30th, 1999 vote for independence from Indonesia. This forced relocation was only one aspect of the Indonesian military’s “scorched earth” policy in East Timor. In the month following the referendum, untold thousands of East Timorese people were killed, hundreds of women and girls were raped, and the infrastructure of the country was demolished.

In its January 2000 report, the United Nations’ International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor wrote:

“The intimidation, terror, destruction of property, displacement and evacuation of people [in 1999] would not have been possible without the active involvement of the Indonesian army, and the knowledge and approval of the top military command... The Commission is of the view that ultimately the Indonesian army was responsible for the intimidation, terror, killings and other acts of violence experienced by the people of East Timor before and after the popular consultation.”

Two years later, tens of thousands of refugees remain unable to return to East Timor because the camps are controlled by militia and military members who derive their power from their refugee “hostages”. Moreover, as time passes, the refugees become more isolated from their home communities, more susceptible to militia-spread disinformation about conditions in East Timor, and — especially for refugee children — weaker from malnutrition and disease epidemics.



A medical volunteer with a humanitarian organization in West Timor examines a severely malnourished refugee child.

“There are signs of malnutrition in some camps... residents of the camp of Naen are eating a kind of wild vegetable that has to be cooked fifteen times before it can be eaten. Camp residents have to rely on rainwater, share water with livestock, or draw it from dirty sources

that cause dysentery and rashes. Health services have dwindled to almost nothing... On average three to five people are dying each day, mostly from malaria, diarrhea, respiratory infection, and malnutrition.”

— West Timorese humanitarian worker

“Women and children are the most vulnerable groups in the camp. Women endured family members disappeared or killed, and those who were kidnapped by military, police, or militias were often victims of rape. Sexual violence and harassment didn’t end with their arrival in the camps, either.”

— Indonesian human rights worker in West Timor

Refugee woman and her child
in their makeshift shelter near
Kupang, West Timor.



“Better we die in East Timor because of bullets or sharp weapons than have to suffer because we are always raped [in the refugee camps].”

**— A woman refugee in her twenties,
as reported by a local women’s organization**

In many ways, East Timorese women have borne the brunt of the refugee crisis. When the Indonesian military and militias forced the East Timorese from their country in 1999, families were systematically separated. Women who hadn't already lost their husbands or children to military violence had their loved ones taken from them during the forced exodus, leaving them at increased danger for sexual assault. Single mothers in the camps often have to struggle to support their children, and there are numerous reported incidents of refugee mothers turning to begging, prostitution, or even being forced into marriages as a way of providing for their family.

Even if their families remained together during the expulsion from East Timor, women face various forms of violence in the refugee camps. No provisions are made for women's special medical needs in the camps; this care is often critical for pregnant women and nursing mothers. There is also a near-complete lack of privacy for women, especially in the larger camps, and this contributes to a high incidence of sexual assaults. Domestic violence is reported to be rampant in the refugee camps, as well. The cramped living conditions, high levels of stress, and the pervasive atmosphere of violence are believed to exacerbate domestic violence problems.

The powerful military and militia members perpetrate violence against refugee women. One relatively well-known case is that of Juliana dos Santos of Suai, East Timor. Juliana was fifteen years old on September 6, 1999, when militia attacked the Suai churchyard, where thousands of East Timorese were taking refuge from post-ballot violence. Juliana saw militia leader Igidio Mnanek kill her brother in the attack, and she hid with her aunt in the priest's house. Igidio found them and seized Juliana. When the women tried to resist, he fired his gun into the air and took Juliana away. Later that day, Igidio took Juliana to see her mother and aunt. While the four people faced each other, he placed a gold chain around Juliana's neck, saying "now she is officially my wife." He then forced Juliana, his "war prize," into West Timor. She later had Igidio's child, and professed to love her brother's murderer. Juliana has not yet been able to return to East Timor, and it is feared that she has been deeply traumatized by the experience.

One of the main obstacles to resolving East Timor's refugee crisis is the continued presence of armed militia in many West Timor camps. Many human rights workers have observed military recruitment and training of militias, and militia intimidation of refugees wishing to return to East Timor. During the Indonesian government refugee registration on June 6 and 7, 2001, local observers reported militias spreading disinformation about the registration and telling refugees they would be kidnapped or killed if they registered for repatriation to East Timor. This intimidation is the likely cause of the disputed registration results, in which supposedly less than two percent of refugees indicated they wished to return to East Timor. (Local nongovernmental organizations estimate the figure is closer to sixty or seventy percent.) In a May 2001 report to the Security Council, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, "The pro-Indonesian militias based in West Timor have continued to advocate armed struggle to bring East Timor into Indonesia and have not laid down their arms."



Militia training outside of refugee camps near Kupang, West Timor.

“They [Kopassus] forced male refugees to join in the training sessions — they were told it was to continue the war in East Timor.”

— Male refugee in Turiskain camp, West Timor

Recommendations:

- The United States, United Nations, and other world bodies must dramatically increase pressure on the Indonesian government to immediately and verifiably disarm and disband the militias in West Timor;
- The UN must take responsibility for the East Timorese refugees, who were forced from their country due to inadequate security during and after the UN-conducted referendum on independence in 1999;
- The U.S., UN, and other world bodies must reject the results of the Indonesian government's refugee registration;
- No refugee resettlement to other islands must occur without significant international oversight and independent assessment that refugees do want to resettle in Indonesia;
- The UN must continue its work in East Timor to aid returnees and their communities with reintegration, especially as later returnees are more likely to have militia ties and serious physical and emotional needs;
- The U.S. and UN must provide support for West Timorese and other communities affected by the refugee crisis;
- The U.S. must actively work for an international war crimes tribunal for East Timor to hold the perpetrators of gross human rights violations accountable, and the U.S. and UN must support expanding the mandate of the tribunal to cover from the 1975 invasion of East Timor onwards;
- The U.S. and UN must provide increased support and resources for judicial efforts in East Timor and Indonesia, to support nation-building in East Timor, and to further democratic reform in Indonesia. The U.S. must maintain an embargo on all relations with the Indonesian military.

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SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE FOR THE PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR