



# EAST TIMOR REPORT

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## CHURCH CONFIRMS NEW OFFENSIVE IN EAST TIMOR

In a brief message to ACFOA received on September 1, Catholic Church sources in East Timor confirmed that a new, large-scale, Indonesian military offensive is underway in East Timor involving 10,000 Indonesian troops.

This confirmation follows reports received in June and July from Church sources in Baucau that both the Indonesian military and civilians in the area were talking openly of an impending military build-up in preparation for an August offensive.

The September 1 Church message also said that early in August 500 Hansips (Timorese militia working with the Indonesian army) defected to Fretilin taking their weapons with them.

The Church message also confirmed that in August about 15 Indonesian soldiers were killed and 20 others severely wounded in an incident in the Viqueque area and added that in reprisal for this incident Indonesian troops had killed about 200 people (the exact number was not known) in a nearby village.

### Comment

*It is noteworthy that there have been no reports in the Australian media of Hansip defections or an Indonesian massacre of villagers. The killing of the 15 Indonesian military in the Viqueque area, however, has been widely publicised and has even been advanced in some quarters as a perfectly legitimate reason for the new Indonesian offensive.*

*There is evidence, however, that the current offensive has been in preparation since at least June this year and therefore cannot be presented as a response to the alleged 'uprising' near Viqueque.*

*For example, Fretilin claim to have been informed by Colonel Purwanto in May and by General Murdani in June that a new offensive would be launched in August if they did not accept Indonesia's amnesty offer (Age, 3.8.83), and, as already mentioned, Timorese Church sources reported the widely held belief in Baucau in June and July that a build-up was imminent.*

*In his public statements General Murdani (Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces) has spoken of an offensive in terms of forcing acceptance of the Indonesian amnesty rather than in terms of a need to deal with Fretilin attacks. "If this call (amnesty offer made in July) goes unheeded, the Government will use its armed forces and all its arsenal to clean up the remnants of Fretilin rebels" (Sinar Harapan August 16, 1983, cited Age 18 Aug. 1983).*

Further points to be made regarding the offensive

1. There is evidence that East Timor has been sealed off, arguably as part of an information embargo on military activity.

With the exception of the Australian Parliamentary delegation, foreign groups seeking to visit East Timor (they include the London-based Catholic Institute for International Relations, Australian aid agencies and some Religious Order personnel), have been advised to wait until later this year.

As well departures from East Timor for overseas have been curtailed. The '600' family reunion programme has been suddenly halted after several months of regular movement. A group of Timorese expected in Australia for family reunion on or about August 21 did not come. The Australian Immigration Department has made inquiries but has been unable to learn why the families did not come or when they can be expected.

2. The offensive contradicts views put to and reported by the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to East Timor that Indonesia was concentrating its efforts on a peaceful resolution of the conflict .

According to the Canberra Times of August 4, 1983 "Mr Morrison said both Colonel Purwanto and Mr Carrascalao had assured him in East Timor last weekend that the army was continuing its campaign to win Fretilin over by not provoking the guerillas and offering amnesty". Mr Morrison was quoted in the New Strait Times on August 3, 1983 as saying: "There has been an obvious, deliberate change in methods of operation, certainly this year. It's now concentrating very much on psychological operations. It's a hearts and minds programme... (the Indonesian authorities) believe that by using hearts and minds techniques those people still in the hills will gradually be enticed (down)".

An offer of amnesty backed by a threat of major military action is hardly a conciliatory gesture.

3. The deployment of 10,000 Indonesian troops (or more, according to some reports) in East Timor could have disastrous consequences.
  - i. This force is comparable in size to the numbers of troops used in the initial and bloody invasion of Timor in December 1975.
  - ii. Given the understanding of the Indonesian military that the armed resistance has networks in Indonesian controlled villages, it is highly possible that the Indonesian clean-up operation will not be confined to the mountains. Already there have been reports of arrests and deportations to Atauro. (Details of the resistance network were publicised in the Canberra Times on July 20, 1983 based on captured Indonesian army documents).
4. It is not clear whether the International Committee of the Red Cross (as distinct from the Indonesian Red Cross) is present in East Timor or has access. The humanitarian services of such an organisation are obviously crucial in times like this.

EAST TIMOR REPORT is issued to bring you items on East Timor which have not been publicised in the mass media. Please circulate it to appropriate sections of your organisation, to concerned colleagues, friends etc.  
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