

OCCUPATION OF EAST TIMOR CONCERNS U.S. CHURCH COMMUNITY

East Timor, a half-island at the far southeast tip of the Indonesian archipelago, is deceptively beautiful. Green hills plummet down to sparkling ocean along miles of pristine empty beach. Dili, the capital, is spacious and quiet with wide clean streets and well-kept buildings.

Yet there is something unsettling about East Timor. There is little visible sign of an indigenous culture in this culture-rich part of the world. Nor are the streets of Dili bustling with people and activity. Roads are all but deserted except for army vehicles. The military presence is pervasive, and police stations are the largest establishments in every town and village.

Invaded and occupied by Indonesia in 1975, East Timor remained closed off to the outside world until 1989. Last year, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to two East Timorese drew world attention to the silent struggle taking place there.

In 1995 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) became the first U.S. denomination to pass a resolution on East Timor. The 207th General Assembly criticized the military occupation of East Timor and called for the

United States to end military aid and place an embargo on arms sales to Indonesia.

Legislation currently before the U.S. Congress is consistent with this approach. Introduced by Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.), the bill would make U.S. arms sales and transfers to Indonesia contingent on human rights improvements and democratic progress in East Timor and the rest of the archipelago nation. At stake for

ACT NOW

URGE YOUR
REPRESENTATIVE TO
SUPPORT H.R. 1132,
THE INDONESIA
MILITARY ASSISTANCE
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

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the Indonesian government is \$26 million in U.S. military assistance for the current fiscal year, as well as \$600,000 for international military education and training.

Invasion and Occupation

The differences between Indonesia and East Timor begin with separate colonial histories. East Timor was a Portuguese colony, while the other islands of the present-day Indonesia were all under Dutch rule. After Indonesia won its independence in 1949, East Timor continued under Portuguese control.

In 1975 East Timor began a process of decolonization. Just as independence was at hand, Indonesia launched a massive invasion of East Timor. Ninety percent of the weapons used by the Indonesian army in the invasion were provided by the United States.

The United Nations responded to the invasion by adopting resolutions affirming the right of the East Timorese to self-determination and calling on the Indonesian government to withdraw its troops. These resolutions still stand, although Indonesia has ignored them.

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Map reprinted by permission of Amnesty International

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It is believed that more than 200,000 people, a third of the East Timorese population, have died as a result of the invasion and subsequent military operations in the territory. Meanwhile, thousands of Indonesians have arrived in East Timor. This has occurred as part of the Indonesian government's practice of "transmigration," moving people from the overcrowded islands of Java and Bali to less populated areas. This population influx has displaced indigenous East Timorese from land and jobs. In addition, the Indonesian army has enforced an almost total suppression of the East Timorese language and culture.

Human rights abuses against the East Timorese reported by Amnesty International and other groups include torture, abduction, rape, extrajudicial killings, and imprisonment for any acts of political expression.

On Nov. 12, 1991, in Santa Cruz cemetery in the capital, Indonesian troops opened fire on a peaceful demonstration, killing between 50 and 250 people. The number is uncertain because many of the demonstrators disappeared and have never been found. Western journalists covering the event were also attacked and injured by the troops. Broadcasts of the massacre showed for the first time to the outside world the horrors taking place in East Timor.

International Response

Since that event, the international community has slowly turned its attention to this forgotten corner of the world.

In January 1995, a delegation from Church World Service and Witness visited East Timor. As guests of the Christian Church of East Timor, the largest Protestant church there, the visitors travelled in the countryside and met with

church leaders and ordinary people, as well as with Indonesian military officials. Upon their return, the delegation called for the demilitarization of East Timor and the full participation of the East Timorese people in determining the political status of the territory.

An estimated 90% of East Timorese are Catholic. The Roman Catholic bishop of East Timor, Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, has emerged as spokesperson as well as spiritual leader for the East Timorese people. In 1996 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with José Ramos-

Horta, special representative of the National Council of Maubere Resistance, the umbrella resistance organization working for East Timorese liberation.

Amnesty International continues to report widespread abuses in East Timor. The U.S. State Department's Human Rights Report for 1996 conceded that the Indonesian government "continue[s] to maintain an excessive military presence in East Timor," and "police often resort to physical abuse."

The Indonesian government has rejected calls for a referendum to allow the East Timorese people to determine the political status of the region. The United Nations has declared Indonesia in violation of two Security Council resolutions and eight U.N. General Assembly resolutions. However, to date neither the U.N. nor any other part of the international community has taken strong

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The Indonesia Military Assistance Accountability Act (H.R. 1132) seeks to promote democratization and human rights in Indonesia and East Timor. Urge your Representative to co-sponsor and vote for this bipartisan proposal. If he or she is already a co-sponsor, express your thanks. Co-sponsors as of 4/11/97 were: Gilman (R-N.Y.), Christopher Smith (R-N.J.), Lantos (D-Calif.), Evans (D-Ill.), Frank (D-Mass.), Joseph Kennedy (D-Mass.), Lowey (D-N.Y.), Porter (R-Ill.).

After writing, you may wish to call your House member's Washington office and outline your concerns to the foreign policy aide. Capitol switchboard: (202) 225-3121.

URGENT ACTIONS!

The 207th General Assembly (1995) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

Raises its voice of concern, not only to speak to our own government or to the government of Indonesia, but also, by the rights and duties of partnership, to challenge Indonesian partner churches to stand in solidarity with those who are oppressed in East Timor ...

Rejects the argument that economic development of East Timor is justification for Indonesian control ...

Affirms that economic aid to East Timor should meet the stated needs of the East Timorese and help develop the necessary educational and technical capacity for present and future development;

Calls for the participation of the East Timorese themselves in the resolution of the political problems with Indonesia as essential to their liberty and to the stability of the entire region;

Calls on the United States government to cease military aid and to place an embargo on the sale of arms to Indonesia (Minutes, p. 342).

SAMPLE LETTER ON EAST TIMOR

Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. _____:

I write to urge your support of H.R. 1132, the Indonesia Military Assistance Accountability Act. The United States, a military ally of Indonesia, must no longer stand aside while the Indonesian government continues its atrocities, specifically in East Timor.

Since the Indonesian government invaded and occupied East Timor in 1975, over one-third of the East Timor population has perished as a result of the military occupation of the territory.

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned Indonesia for its illegal occupation of East Timor. However, it appears that only major steps by allies such as the United States can persuade Indonesia to change its ways. The proposed legislation would limit U.S. military assistance and weapons sales to Indonesia until the Indonesian military regime substantially improves its current human rights practices.

I urge you to support H.R. 1132.

Sincerely,

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enough action to give Indonesia a reason to withdraw from East Timor.

Targeting Military Cooperation

The Indonesian armed forces have historically played a pivotal role in blocking democracy and abusing human rights, using U.S.-made weapons. If further military cooperation is made contingent on democratic reform and human rights improvements, Washington will have sent a clear message to the Indonesian government.

The Indonesia Military Assistance Accountability Act (H.R. 1132) currently before Congress calls for specific democratic changes in Indonesia. First, opposition parties should be allowed. Second, the armed forces must refrain from interfering in elections. Third, the government should respect the rights of nongovernmental and labor organizations, ending its practice of harassing these organizations through raids on the offices and homes of members. Fourth, the rule of law must be followed and political prisoners, including Mukhtar Pakpahan, released. In particular, the legislation calls for individuals to be held accountable for a July 27, 1996 attack on the Indonesian Democratic Party headquarters that killed five people.

Regarding East Timor, the legislation calls for a dialog involving Indonesia, Portugal, and East Timorese leaders, under U.N. auspices, seeking a negotiated resolution of East Timor's political status. It also demands the release of East Timorese political prisoners, such as Fernando DeArujo, who have been imprisoned for political dissent.

The Kennedy bill also calls for steps to reduce the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor. Indonesian Major General Theo Syafei said in 1993 that there should eventually be a complete withdrawal of Indonesian armed forces. However, significant immediate reductions are needed.

Finally, H.R. 1132 demands that the Indonesian government respect religious rights. While the majority of East Timorese are Christian, the Indonesian migrants and troops are mainly Muslim. During the occupation there have been frequent conflicts between them. There are also differences between the Catholic majority and the approximately 50,000 Protestants in East Timor. However, the Indonesian government and security forces appear to be exaggerating these differences as a means to divide the East Timorese.

H.R. 1132 is concerned with government-to-government weapons sales and transfers and does not affect U.S. corporations operating in Indonesia or commerce between U.S. weapons manufacturers and Indonesia. Rep. Kennedy said, "It is imperative that we work with, not against, U.S. businesses if we are to truly make a lasting change in Indonesia." He has called for a discussion with U.S. corporations that do business in Indonesia, to solicit their opinions on how to achieve democratic change.

However, human rights advocates would like to see H.R. 1132 strengthened by suspending Indonesia's eligibility for direct commercial sales. They will push for separate legislation to close this loophole if the Indonesian government fails to reform after implementation of H.R. 1132.

Indonesia has claimed that the economic development of East

Timor is justification for its control. The 1995 Presbyterian General Assembly rejected this argument, pointing out that current development patterns are used to marginalize the East Timorese and weaken their language and culture. The Presbyterian resolution concluded that the East Timorese must have a voice in deciding their political future.

Consistent with this view, the PC(USA) has supported the application of the Christian Church of East Timor for individual membership in the World Council of Churches. Such status would enable the East Timorese church to speak for its own people.

Commenting on the 1995 ecumenical visit to East Timor, the General Assembly concluded that "... The churches should not remain silent in the face of such severe and critical abuses of human rights in East Timor." Since passage of the Presbyterian resolution, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the National Council of Churches have issued statements of their own. ■

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