

January 6, 1985

Dear Friends,

Enclosed is a draft of an article on Indonesia that I have written for the Maryknoll magazine (monthly magazine of the Maryknoll Roman Catholic missionary society; readership = 5 million). I'd appreciate your comments, criticisms, and corrections.

Please realize that I have had to work within severe limits:

- 1,500-word limit
- an audience that (I'm presuming) knows nothing at all about Indonesia
- though the regime deserves it, I wanted to avoid giving the impression that I was out to do a hatchet job on them. It's important that the facts speak for themselves. The facts are--after all--damning enough.

Please address your comments to me c/o Third World Resources, 464 19th Street, Oakland, CA 94612 USA.

A final word: this article is the fruit of all the long hours of dedicated work that people like yourselves have devoted to this cause. Be assured of my personal appreciation and comradely support.

Sincerely,

Tom Fenton

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P.S. If you have photographs that you would be willing to let the magazine use (for a fee) contact FRANK MAUROVICH, MARYKNOLL MAGAZINE, MARYKNOLL, NY 10545. No guarantees, but worth a try.

The Unknown Indonesia

by Thomas P. Fenton

There is much that is little known about Indonesia:

- Indonesia is the world's fifth most populous nation (over 160 million), with more than 300 ethnic groups speaking an equal number of languages and dialects.
- The chain of 13,670 islands includes the second, third, and sixth largest islands in the world (New Guinea, Kalimantan, and Sumatra).
- Though Indonesia is classified as a poor country (official figures list 58% of the population as living in "absolute poverty") it is also one of the richest Third World nations in natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, and timber.
- With 90% of its people professing a belief in Islam, Indonesia boasts the largest concentration of Muslims anywhere in the world.

Equally unknown is the horrendous human rights record of the military government that has governed Indonesia since the mid-1960s.

Rights and Liberties

In the 1984-85 edition of its annual survey, the politically conservative Freedom House (New York City) cataloged these abuses of civil rights and political liberties under the rule of General Suharto:

- Campaigning and organization by political opponents of the military government is "severely restricted." Candidates of both government and opposition parties "require government approval" and "all civil servants are expected to vote for the government."
- Newspapers "are subject to fairly close government supervision; there is heavy self-censorship and [government] censorship in some areas. Criticism of the system is muted by periodic suppressions. Radio and television are government controlled."
- "Thousands of released [political] prisoners remain in a second-class status, especially in regard to residence and employment."
- "Recently, there have been many murders of nonpolitical criminals [over 4,000 in 1982-84], apparently at the hands of 'hit squads' allied to the [government] security services."
- "Union activity is closely regulated. . .many people are not allowed to travel outside the country for political reasons. . .movement, especially to

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the cities is restricted. . .[and] the Indonesian bureaucracy has an unenviable reputation for arbitrariness and corruption, practices that reduce the effective expression of human rights."

Gross Violations

International human rights organizations focus their heaviest criticisms of the Suharto regime in three areas: the 1965-66 massacre and its aftermath, East Timor, and Irian Jaya (West Papua).

The 1965-66 Massacre:

"In four months, five times as many people died in Indonesia as in Vietnam in twelve years." British peace activist Bertrand Russell was describing the reign of military terror that engulfed Indonesia following the suppression of a leftist revolt within the military in the fall of 1965. Fearful that the revolt would spread and put an end to their considerable influence, the rightwing military unleashed one of history's greatest single massacres: more than half a million Indonesians were murdered and more than three-quarters of a million were arrested and imprisoned without trial.

The military directed its wrath at the three-million-member Indonesian communist party and its supporters. In less than a year the legitimately constituted communist party--then the largest political party in Indonesia--was dismantled and the rightwing military reigned supreme. Twenty years after the massacre, Amnesty International was still expressing concern (in carefully measured tones) "about the lack of uniformity in the application of policy regarding the sentencing of and the granting remission and parole to these [political] prisoners; the imposition and carrying out of the death penalty; and the continuing detention for long periods of prisoners held under sentence of death [in connection with the events of 1965]."

"Still alive, but nearly dead" is the way one political prisoner described the condition of those who escaped the bloodbath in 1965-66, but who remain in Indonesian prison camps today--most without benefit of trial. At least 46 longterm political prisoners await execution; 4 were executed in 1985. The government's own figures place the number of released political prisoners at 1.7 million.

East Timor:

"The world's most difficult problem." Afghanistan? Nicaragua? Terrorism in the Middle East? None of these, according to Pope John Paul II.

In late June 1985 the Pope was reported to have told the visiting Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, Mgr. Carlos Belo, "Now, Timor represents the world's most difficult problem."

The pope's reference was to the eastern half of the island of Timor, just north of Australia in the Indonesian archipelago. When the Portuguese left East Timor in the fall of 1975 (after 250 years of colonial rule) the Indonesian military invaded and annexed the territory. In the aftermath

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of the invasion, according to the former bishop of East Timor's capital city, Dili, 200,000 people--one-third of the population of East Timor--lost their lives. "About 60,000 were killed," Mrg. Martinhu da Costa Lopes told *The Irish Times* on Sept. 8, 1983, "and about 140,000 died as a result of starvation caused by economic disruption and inability to grow food."

According to a report prepared in 1983 by the Center for Defense Information (Washington, D.C.), this level of casualties placed East Timor second on the list of the world's most violent continuing conflicts--just after Kampuchea, but ahead of Afghanistan, Iraq-Iran, and Lebanon. Ten years after the Indonesian invasion Amnesty International released a thorough, well-documented study condemning the "systematic" and "persistent" violation of human rights in East Timor by Indonesian troops.

"Amnesty International has received reports from a variety of sources of the 'disappearance' and arbitrary killing of non-combatants; of the torture and ill-treatment of people taken into the custody of Indonesian forces, including their detention in cruel and inhuman conditions; and of the imprisonment without charge or trial of people most often held on suspicion of opposing the Indonesian occupation." (Amnesty International. *East Timor: Violations of Human Rights*, p.10.)

Following the breakdown in mid-1983 of a cease-fire between the Indonesian military and Fretilin, East Timor's principal opposition force, the army launched "Operation Clean-Sweep" in an attempt to finish the task it began with its invasion of December 1975. Whether they succeed or not depends--in part--on the force of world opinion. On the occasion of the release of the Amnesty International study of East Timor in June 1985, the auxiliary bishop of Baltimore, Bishop Francis Murphy expressed concern about the world's inattention to East Timor. Calling for a full congressional hearing on the allegations of human rights violations in Amnesty's report, he said: "We need to break down the walls of silence about a forgotten place."

Irian Jaya:

In the early 1960s the western portion of the island of New Guinea was surrendered to Indonesia by the Netherlands with the understanding that the population would be given the option for independence. "In 1963," writes a correspondent for *The Economist*, "the Indonesians claimed that West Irian wanted to be ruled by them, and the United Nations trustees weakly agreed." The 1.2 million people of Indonesia's easternmost province are culturally and ethnically part of the Melanesian racial stock of the South Pacific. As such they feel an affinity with their neighbors in independent Papua New Guinea.

Efforts to cut ties with Indonesia and form a "Free Papua" have met with harsh reprisals by the Indonesian military. Since February 1984 an estimated 11,000 West Irianese have fled across the border to Papua New Guinea to escape, what an International Commission of Jurists report describes as, "atrocities committed by Indonesian troops."

In August 1984 the executive secretary of the Bishops' National Committee for Development and Peace in Papua New Guinea, Gregory Mongi, publicized reports accusing Indonesian soldiers of burning Catholic schools and raping nuns at Mindiptana and Waropka in June 1985 and of beheading 15 villagers in

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their drive against guerrillas of the Free Papua Movement.

Human rights workers are also concerned about Indonesian government plans to move up to one million people to Irian Jaya from the overpopulated islands of Java and Bali. The World Bank-sponsored plans for "transmigration" threaten the ethnic and cultural values of 1.2 million people who are at a very primitive stage of development. Moreover, the predominantly Roman Catholic inhabitants fear that an influx of Muslim Javanese will also make them a religious minority in their own land.

Concerned Americans might well wonder why we hear so little about events in Indonesia. We are justifiably outraged at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but the Indonesian invasion and annexation of East Timor goes virtually unreported. And this, despite the fact that well-documented reports show that the Ford administration gave its blessing to the invasion beforehand and that the CIA actually played a part in the events.

We might also question why three reputable international human rights organizations recently branded the U.S. State Department's 1984 review of "human rights practices" in Indonesia as "a seriously and consistently distorted view of the human rights situation in that country." The government of General Suharto is politically and militarily allied with the United States. It has also welcomed enormous investments from U.S. and other foreign corporations. To what extent do these realities influence State Department perceptions and reports about Indonesia?

Finally, those who treasure freedom of speech and political practice might well ask why the 1965-66 massacre of over half a million people who belonged to or supported a large and legitimate political party in Indonesia was treated so dispassionately--and even cynically--by the U.S. media? "The West's best news for years in Asia," was *Time* magazine's reaction to the brutal suppression of the left in Indonesia in 1965. *New York Times* columnist James Reston wrote of the events as "a gleam of light in Asia."

We clearly need to learn much more about Indonesia if we are to judge, criticize, and respond to human rights violations with fairness and consistency.

Thomas Fenton is co-director of the Data Center's Third World Resources project and editor of *Asia and Pacific: A Resource Directory* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, forthcoming spring 1986).

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