



international peace bureau
bureau international de la paix
internationales friedensbüro

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STATEMENT BY ABE BARRETO SOARES
AT THE 49th SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

I am grateful for the opportunity I have to address this Commission on behalf of the International Peace Bureau.

My name is Barabe Barreto Soares, a fourth-year English student from the well-known Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Central Java, Indonesia.

Talking about human rights abuse in East Timor is like "pulling a scab off an old wound." For any East Timorese like me who experienced the brutal invasion and occupation of their country by the Indonesian military, it is hard to make a decision to choose between speaking out or not speaking out about human rights abuse in East Timor. I chose the latter and so I am here free to talk about my experience.

Even though I am free to speak out about conditions in East Timor since the invasion in 1975, I feel rather scared as it might cause trouble to my family back home: my family could be harassed by the Indonesian military because of my being out-spoken. But that is a risk that I have to face.

I was nine years old when East Timor was invaded by the Indonesian military on December 7, 1975. I had to flee to the countryside with my family to avoid the Indonesian military onslaught.

I started a new life under Indonesian occupation in my father's hometown after 1975 and I went to primary school under the Indonesian education system.

Already while still a small boy living in my father's hometown I began asking: "If the Indonesian military say that we are brothers and sisters, why do they kill people in the jungle, kill people who surrender, kill innocent people who know nothing about politics?"

Let me tell you what I personally experienced about human rights violations during my

childhood and while I was a teenager:

- people who I knew in my father's hometown 'disappeared' after surrendering to the Indonesian military;

- relatives of mine lost their livestock; a close relative of my father's discovered that his buffaloes had been killed by Indonesian soldiers. Because he protested he was accused of being a Fretilin member. This frightened him so much that he decided to remain silent about anything else that happened to him;

- the troops often steal our people's livestock to feed themselves, saying that this 'helps them carry out their duties in East Timor; such a thing often happened to the inhabitants of the town where I spent my childhood.

- our people had to carry a travel document whenever and wherever they go

- people were not allowed to listen to foreign broadcasts. If they did, they were punished;

- people's houses were raided in the early morning or late at night;

- people suspected as members of Fretilin were arrested and put in prison.

But one incident stands out vividly in my memory. One afternoon as I was playing football with my friends in the street, I saw an army truck drive past full of Hansip soldiers (army-trained militia). The men were shouting and singing and holding high so that everyone could see, the severed heads of several guerrillas. This was meant as a warning to all of us not to support the resistance. I can tell you, I felt very scared when I saw this terrible scene.

When I moved to Dili in 1981 and went to high school, I continued to hear more and more stories about the atrocities committed by the Indonesian army.

In 1985, before leaving for Java to continue my studies at university, I had to take a screening test, to indicate whether I was part of Fretilin or not.

In 1989 I went back to East Timor for a holiday. I attended the Mass celebrated by the Pope John Paul II in Tacitolu, on the outskirts of Dili. Right after the Mass, there was a pro-independence demonstration. I saw the demonstrators being beaten up by Indonesian security forces. Later I heard that the demonstrators were put in jail for interrogation.

I returned to East Timor again in 1991. My movements were closely monitored by the Indonesian secret police. I felt very uneasy in Dili. I asked myself: "If the Indonesian military claim that everything is fine in East Timor, why is there always all this surveillance?"

I left for Canada to participate in a cultural exchange program for three months in September

1991. The massacre of November 12 1991 in Santa Cruz, Dili, East Timor took place just as I was about to finish my program. A week after the massacre, I realized that the situation in East Timor was becoming worse and worse. I also realized that my friends who joined the East Timorese students' organisation (Renetil), the group which I was associated with, had been arrested for conducting a peaceful demonstration in Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. They had been protesting about the massacre and human rights abuses since the invasion in 1975.

I began to feel afraid about going back to Indonesia. Finally, I made up my mind to stay in Canada. That was the hardest decision I have ever made in my life.

In my view, human rights abuses in East Timor cannot be separated from the East Timorese struggle for self-determination and independence. There will be more human rights abuses in East Timor as long as there is no peaceful solution for the East Timor problem. I really hope that the this UN Commission will take meaningful initiatives to put an end to the human rights violations in East Timor.

The people of East Timor feel helpless in their own homeland. They look to you to do everything in your power to help them.

Thank you.

GOODBYE

(The story of a Timorese girl)

The soul of my daddy
already hanged around
somewhere in another world
His corpse was a great companion to me
in the brushwood
the other night

His head was cut off
and brought into the town
for showing to the crowd
that my daddy, the traitor--
his life already taken away

Seemed my daddy
was still with me
Not a single teardrop rolling down
on my cheek
It was fun, talking with him
in that cold night

Morning broke. I dug a grave
I buried his corpse
I scattered my grief
along with a bundle of flowers
on his grave. A teardrop began rolling down
on my cheek as a gesture of
GOODBYE

-ooo-

1992

A TEARDROP

A teardrop
falling down on the floor of +) Komarka
retells the ancient story,
HOMO HOMINI LUPUS
which as if
we bury alive
in the graveyard
of our fantasy

-ooo-

1991

- +) Komarka is the name of a
prison in Dili, East Timor
where political prisoners
are detained

+) BALBINA

Balbina, a young
guerrilla woman
fighting to the last drop
of blood
in the bank of a small river

She had a chance
to leave me her lyrical cry
through the lines of her poetry,

UM GESTO SOLIDARIO

*Ào Fragar da guerra
que*

On the pages of your history
it is obvious
you did not write down her name
But Balbina
existed between the lines

-oo-

1992-1993

- +) Balbina was killed
by the Indonesian army
in East Timor in October
1989

I SAW MY OWN REFLECTION

- +) Ramelau,
I came over to your
transparent pond

At its shore
I saw my own reflection
naked
welcoming me
then told me
the winding story
of the roots
of my seed

-ooo-

1991

- +) Ramelau is the name of a
mountain in East Timor

ZOE CRIED OUT

Zoe a kid with German background
crying out in that winter night,

INDONESIA YOU CAN'T HIDE
WE CHARGE WITH GENOCIDE

His mother a young activist
joined the act of demonstration
as well

Along with his mother
plus other colleagues Zoe
tended to cry out more and more
loudly

Zoe the innocent boy
cried out enthusiastically
Zoe the innocent boy
echoed the voice
of the kids at his age
having no chance
to do what he did
when seeing
their country's heart
being torn into pieces

-0000-

1993

Toronto, 3 May 1993
Apt Sambo's