

Nationalists fight Indonesian control

Witnesses tell of torture on East Timor

BY JILL JOLLIFFE
Special to The Globe and Mail
LISBON

Refugees in Lisbon say that Indonesian authorities in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor have systematically tortured prisoners and that the practice is continuing.

The tiny southeast Asian colony was invaded by Indonesia in 1975 and has been the scene of a resistance war ever since. The United Nations does not recognize Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, although leading Western powers, including Canada, do.

Poedji Koentarto, Indonesian ambassador to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, said in a telephone interview that such allegations are not new but are "part of a general campaign against Indonesia."

As early as 1976, refugees in Lisbon said Indonesian authorities systematically tortured nationalists fighting Indonesian control over East Timor.

At the time, it was hearsay, but

now details of the torture are provided by eyewitnesses and by the victims, who have waited years to escape the territory.

Because Indonesia has sealed the half-island territory off from the world, the time-lag in documenting claims means it may be another decade before today's allegations are documented fully.

In the early days after the invasion, the most well-known torture house was a warehouse in Dili, the East Timorese capital, known as the San Tai Ho building.

Several people now living in Lisbon were prisoners there.

In a recent interview, Betty Sarmiento told of the torture and rape of her teen-aged sister, Maria Gorete Joaquin, who was imprisoned with her and later executed in a country churchyard.

Ms Sarmiento said she was arrested in February, 1977. On arrival at the San Tai Ho building she was taken to a bedroom where instruments of torture were laid out—a whip, sticks, and electric wires for administering shocks.

During her interrogation, Ms Sarmiento said she was threatened but not beaten. Afterward, she was allowed to see her sister, who had been arrested a few days before.

"Maria Gorete . . . had cigaret burns on her arms and chest and had had electric shocks applied to her neck, ear and arms. We embraced and cried and that night we shared a cell, sleeping in the same bed."

Ms Sarmiento was released, but when she later returned to visit her sister, she found Maria Gorete crying in her cell.

"In my absence she had been raped by the prison commander



Maria Gorete Joaquin

. . . She was 14 and a virgin and she had resisted but he had a black belt in karate."

Ms Joaquin was held another eight months, and then released in December, 1977, under a general amnesty granted by President Suharto.

She went back to school and resumed a fairly normal life, except that she continued underground work for the liberation movement FRETILIN, the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor.

On March 11, 1979, she and her uncle, Leopoldo Joaquin, were taken from their homes by Indonesian military officers and transported by helicopter to Baucau, 100 kilometres east of the capital.

There, they entered Amnesty International's list of the "disappeared" of East Timor. Their story was brought to Lisbon by refugees.

The Indonesian Government denied any knowledge of the case, although according to the allegations, Mr. Joaquin and his niece were in the hands of a senior military commander.

The fate of Leopoldo Joaquin has never been confirmed, although it appears he was executed some months later at Laclutar village.

Only last year, when Ms Joaquin's family reached Lisbon, was it discovered she had communicated with them from Baucau until her execution. The night before, she was permitted to write farewell letters.

This sad family keepsake dated May 1, 1979, tells of her last night.

"Betty, I can't find words to say much, because I have a lump in my throat and in my heart. How are my beloved nephews? I want to say more, but it's impossible, because I have more letters to write . . . so, goodbye . . . As for what I'll suffer, I submit myself to God, hoping for the final reward."

Timorese in the town of Quallcal, near Baucau, later told her family that Ms Joaquin was shot behind the church there.

Another torture victim, a 51-year-old man who asked that his name not be published because he still has family in East Timor, arrived in Lisbon in 1986.

He said he was strung-up from a cross-beam in the San Tai Ho prison in July, 1977, and beaten for two hours by an Indonesian intelligence agent and his assistant, who carved patterns on his back with a knife.

Moved to another prison, a military officer fixed him to a wall in a crucifix position and again beat him for hours.



COMMENTARY

Bishops Join Hands in Condemning Timor Tragedy

At its spring meeting, the Administrative Board of the United States Catholic Conference expressed concern over conditions in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. The conference, which reflects the views of the 50 American Catholic bishops, issued the following statement:

* * *

The brutal invasion and takeover of East Timor by Indonesia, which started in 1975 after the collapse of the Portuguese colonial administration, has in recent years begun to receive the attention it deserves, but this attention has not yet been translated into the action needed to right the wrongs which continue to this day.

In July 1984 Pope John Paul II expressed grave concern over the East Timor situation while receiving the credentials of the new Indonesian ambassador to the Holy See. Bishops' Conferences and Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions in Western Europe—in Portugal, West Germany, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands—as well as in Canada and Japan, have made statements or otherwise communicated support and sympathy for the East Timorese and concern over the armed conflict that persists in the territory.

This conflict has seen an estimated 100,

000 East Timorese (of a population of less than 700,000 before the Indonesian invasion) perish as a result of the Indonesian occupation.

There is a pressing need to guarantee freedom of expression for, and an end to intimidation of, the Roman Catholic Church in East Timor. The church has the heavy responsibility of attending to the spiritual needs of a people that has suffered grievous losses since 1975 and has seen its tasks multiplied during this period. A serious effort to bring a just and authentic peace to East Timor should be made.

Forced birth control measures introduced by Indonesia in East Timor are especially disturbing—and not only because of the Church's abhorrence of unnatural birth control. Given the great loss of life that has already taken place among a largely Catholic people, this Indonesian policy takes on the character of genocide. Accounts of sterilization of East Timorese men and women without their informed consent and an array of other evidence, impel us to call for an immediate end to this policy: "For in view of the inalienable human right to marry and beget children, the question of how many children should be born belongs to the honest judgment of parents. The question can in no way be

committed to the decision of government" (Gaudium et Spes 87).

While East Timor has received increased notice in recent years, it is nonetheless undeniable that this issue exists far from the great political debates of the day and is all too likely to be overlooked as pressing national and international issues compete for public attention. East Timor's remoteness and isolation from the outside world make its inhabitants all the more vulnerable. It is therefore crucial that the East Timor tragedy be highlighted whenever possible and that efforts continue to enhance the dignity of life in East Timor and the right of the territory's inhabitants to live in peace and freedom.

The United States, which has had friendly relations with the government of Indonesia since 1965 and which has contributed much economic and military assistance to Indonesia, surely has the right to raise these issues with that government. Appropriate representations by the United States could influence the government of Indonesia to take measures that would help to bring a just and authentic peace to the territory, end any policies of forced birth control in East Timor, and in other ways ameliorate the suffering of these unfortunate people.

The New York Times

Sunday, August 9, 1987

40 Senators Voice Concern for Timor Fighting

By RICHARD HALLORAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — A bipartisan group of 40 senators has written to Secretary of State George P. Shultz about what they called "a renewed Indonesian military offensive against Timorese insurgents."

It was unusual for that many senators, led by Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Democrat of New York, to express concern for a situation that draws little public attention.

Mr. Durenberger said in a statement that "by sending this letter, my colleagues and I want to insure that East

Timor receives international attention that will help to alleviate the tragic suffering of the Timorese people."

Timor is an island at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago. During the colonial era, it was under Dutch rule in the west and Portuguese rule in the east. Indonesia inherited the Dutch portion when it gained independence and invaded East Timor in 1975.

Since then, according to repeated reports by Roman Catholic and humanitarian organizations, the Indonesians have sought, often with military force, to subdue East Timorese nationalist insurgents, many of whom are Catholics. Indonesian is largely Moslem.

The statement by Mr. Durenberger said "international human-rights organizations and church bodies estimate that 150,000 East Timorese, one fifth of the island country's population, have perished from warfare and famine over the past 12 years."

In their letter the senators urged that "at the very least, international humanitarian organizations should have full access to East Timor so as to insure the maximum degree of relief and protection to the civilian population and political detainees alike."

The senators made three specific points:

1. "We have received reports that

Indonesia's World Bank-funded population control program in East Timor is coercive in some instances. There have been accounts of involuntary sterilizations in some instances."

2. "We are concerned about the situation of individuals seeking to leave East Timor to join family members in Portugal who have thus far not been allowed to do so."

3. "We are also particularly interested in the cases of four East Timorese students in Jakarta who wish to leave Indonesia but have thus far been denied exit visas by the Indonesian authorities."

Although noting that some aspects of the situation in East Timor had improved, the senators said that "we would like to insure conditions do not deteriorate as a result of an increased level of Indonesian military activity."

AUSTRALIAN 2/11/84, page 1.

Indonesia 'torture, rights abuses' attacked

By foreign affairs writer ROY ECCLESTON

INDONESIA'S human rights record has been subject to a scathing attack by a United States-based human rights group, Asia Watch, in a report to be released in Washington today.

The 346-page report documents a variety of abuses, including torture, deaths in custody and financial sanctions against Indonesians who oppose the policies of President Suharto's Government.

Asia Watch says that while it appears that 13 years after the invasion of East Timor "the worst excesses of the occupation forces have abated... the Timorese continue to suffer daily violations of fundamental rights".

The report is likely to spur Labor MPs who have been arguing for a parliamentary debate on human rights abuses in Indonesia - a move not favoured by the Government, which is hoping for smoother relations with our neighbour.

But the report mentions nothing like the allegations of 200 children dying from drug overdoses in an East Timor hospital, as published by Victorian Labor MP, Mr Tony Lamb last month.

Asia Watch is an independently funded body considered highly reputable by Australians involved in the human rights field, including the human rights director for the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Mr Pat Walsh, and former Australian consul in the East Timor capital of Dili, Mr Jim Dunn.

The report was written by a lawyer, Ms Diane Orentlicher, and is based on information from three visits by Asia Watch to Indonesia this year, and a visit to Portugal, to interview East Timor refugees.

"Throughout the 1980s, formal controls on political life in Indonesia have expanded," the Washington director of Asia Watch, Mr Eric Schwartz, says in the report.

"A broadening cross-section of Indonesian society has suffered politically motivated human rights violations."

The report describes Indonesian elections as a rubber stamp to legitimise government, and says physical abuse of prisoners appears to be common throughout Indonesia, with some prisoners killed or crippled by violent interrogation.

"In one area several criminal suspects have been wounded monthly since 1983 in accordance with the local governor's 'shoot to wound' policy," it says.

Indonesia's courts are not in any meaningful sense independent, Asia Watch says.

A pliant judiciary has repeatedly acquiesced in sham prosecutions of government critics.

Muslim activists, particularly, have been prosecuted in trials "lacking any semblance of fair process" and even some of the children of former

members of the banned Indonesian Communist Party suffered discrimination and restrictions.

Mr Suharto's rule has become "increasingly undemocratic", the report says.

In one case study, Asia Watch spoke to lawyers representing two men - Jonaton Bimamora and Tagor Bibagstriang - caught soliciting potential passengers at a Jakarta bus terminal in January.

While the offence incurs only a fine, eight army security agents tortured them throughout the night, cutting off parts of their ears, the report says.

Both men's heads were shaved, they were beaten and kicked, and one man's leg was allegedly broken.

In another case, Bambang Supriyanto claimed he admitted to being a Muslim activist only after torture.

Asia Watch reports that the man's lawyer said the only witness to testify about Bambang's religious ac-

tivities said he belonged to a prayer group.

On April 29 this year, 19 year-old Bakri Budi Gusanto was detained by police who suspected him of stealing stereo speakers, Asia Watch says.

He was held for 10 days and mysteriously died in custody. When returned to his parents, his father claimed the boy's legs both appeared broken, there were deep wounds on both legs, both wrists were broken, and his mouth was swollen.

The names of journalists from newspapers which published the story were sought by police, the report says.

Asia Watch says it was unable to judge the situation in East Timor because access had been denied.

Many political prisoners had been released, but "like reports of arbitrary arrest and detention, reports of torture of detainees in East Timor persist, but are difficult to verify".

Indonesia 'abusing rights'

By JAMES DALLMEYER, of AAP

JAKARTA: A US human-rights organisation has accused the Indonesian Government of imposing sweeping restraints on civil and political rights and has called on the US Government to take a more active role to prevent human-rights violations in the future.

In a major 348-page report, Asia Watch, a Washington-based organisation, said physical abuse of detainees appeared to be common throughout Indonesia, with severe abuses periodically resulting in deaths or permanent disabilities.

The use of excessive force in effecting arrests was a recurring feature of Indonesian law enforcement practices. Sweeping restraints had crippled the development of independent

institutions necessary for genuine democracy, the judicial system had been abused to silence opposition figures who were the subject of "sham prosecutions" and the Government had fashioned an electoral system so heavily weighted in its favour that polls served as little more than controlled acts of legitimisation.

"Army support for the Government-backed party, Golkar, has made the coercive power of the state an integral part of the political process," the report said. "Throughout the 1980s, formal controls on political life in Indonesia have expanded and a broadening cross-section of Indonesian society has suffered politically motivated human rights violations," said Asia Watch program director Eric Schwartz.

The Indonesian press was governed by an

extensive regime of formal controls, and press organs operated under the pervasive threat of closure, while journalists, enveloped by the "culture of fear", censored themselves.

Peaceful opposition figures who publicly questioned the Government were subjected to prosecutions on subversion charges or became the victims of extra-judicial sanctions when their business licences were not renewed, lines of credit at state banks were refused or they were dismissed from their jobs in academia.

Although independent observers agreed there was no prospect of a religiously motivated revolution in Indonesia, Government policy continued to reflect a basic mistrust of Islamic political intentions.

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Rights 'abused' in Indonesia

Continued from Page 1

"Throughout the past decade, scores of Muslims have been prosecuted on political charges in trials lacking any semblance of fair process," the report said.

The organisation was also sharply critical of Government policy on those suspected of past involvement in the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

These restraints included restrictions on employment, movement, speech, residence and political participation.

"Some of the restrictions extend to the children of the former detainees; the youngest victims were not yet born at the time of their parents' alleged involvement in the PKI."

The PKI was banned in 1966 after being accused of involvement in the previous year's coup

after Indonesia invaded and annexed it.

However, it said East Timorese rights to freedom of speech, association and movement were subject to severe restriction.

"Residents consistently describe a climate of fear, reinforced by a pervasive security apparatus," the report said.

Jakarta failed to account for any of the thousands of disappeared East Timorese believed to have been killed while in the custody of Indonesian forces.

Asia Watch said the Indonesian Government's record on human rights had not been the subject of serious scrutiny within the US and it hoped its report would be read carefully by US policy makers.

"Neither the US Embassy nor the US State Department has placed promotion of human

THE WORLD

US 'ignored Indon abuses and torture'

WASHINGTON, SUNDAY

The US has failed to speak out against illegal executions, torture and other abuses by the Indonesian Government, the human rights group Asia Watch said today.

It said that in the past eight years the Reagan administration had failed to halt deaths in detention, violent arrests, political interrogations and restraints on freedom.

"In many parts of the world the Reagan administration has used public statements, diplomatic approaches and in some cases application of US laws respecting human rights," Mr Eric Schwartz of Asia Watch said.

"In Indonesia, these efforts have been lacking."

He said the few times the US had spoken out in Indonesia came after repeated prodding from members of Congress.

The major 348-page report cites alleged abuses in East Timor, which Indonesia annexed in 1976.

"Over the past 13 years, the people of East Timor have experienced tremendous suffering including extra-judicial execution, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention," Mr Schwartz said.

While acknowledging abuses had abated in East Timor, he said freedoms were still severely restricted.

The new-order government of Indonesia's President Soeharto has presided over more than two decades of political calm and economic development, the report said.

But, it added: "Soeharto and a small core of close associates, supported by the military, continue to maintain a tight grip on political life."

Sweeping restraints had crippled the development of independent institutions necessary for genuine democracy, the judicial system had been abused to silence opposition figures who were the subject of "sham prosecutions" and the Government had fashioned an electoral system so heavily weighted in its own favor that polls served as little

more than controlled acts of legitimisation.

Hundreds of thousands of former political prisoners, especially those suspected of past involvement in the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), faced severe restraints on basic rights, including restrictions on employment, movement, speech, residence and political participation, it said.

Asia Watch said physical abuse of detainees appeared to be common, with severe abuses sometimes resulting in death or permanent disability.

"Army support for the Government-backed party, Golkar, has made the coercive power of the state an integral part of the political process," the report said.

Peaceful opposition figures who questioned Government policies were prosecuted or became victims of sanctions — business licences were not renewed, lines of credit at state banks refused or they were dismissed from their jobs in academia.

The Indonesian press was

governed by an extensive regime of formal controls and publications operated under the threat of closure, while journalists, enveloped by the "culture of fear", censored themselves.

Government policy continued to mistrust any Islamic political intentions.

"Throughout the past decade, scores of Muslims have been prosecuted on political charges in trials lacking any semblance of fair process."

The report said US Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz was widely regarded as an effective and highly involved emissary. It was more critical of the rest of the US administration.

"Neither the US Embassy nor the US State Department has placed promotion of human rights high on its agenda of foreign policy goals in Indonesia," Asia Watch said.

The State Department had no immediate comment.

Asia Watch is a private, non-governmental organisation that monitors Asia.

REUTER

Indonesians abusing human rights, says American group

An American group yesterday released a scathing report on human rights abuses in Indonesia, detailing "common" instances of people being beaten and abused in detention, deaths in custody and widespread Government restrictions on democratic freedom.

The Asia Watch Committee of the Washington-based Human Rights Watch group, established in 1985, released the 348-page report in Canberra through the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, year.

The report alleges growing Government clamps on Indonesia's political life and politically motivated human rights violations against a widening cross-section of the community.

Asia Watch says the Government exercises sweeping restraints on opposition politicians, the press, the courts and other organisations. Scores of Muslim activists have been prosecuted on political charges in trials "lacking any semblance of fair process", and hundreds of thousands of former political prisoners suspected of involvement in the failed 1965

"Political candidates are vetted by the Government, and are prohibited from criticising Government programs during election campaigns."

The report says that 13 years after the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, the Timorese "describe a climate of fear, reinforced by a pervasive security apparatus. Despite severe limits on access to and information from the territory, available evidence indicates that arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as mistreatment of prisoners, have continued."

"The Government has failed to account for any of the thousands of disappeared persons who are believed to have been killed while in the custody of Indonesian forces," it says.

The report details alleged jail beatings and deaths in custody, some as recent as early this year, and is strongly critical of the regime of President Suharto and the state ideology of "pancasila".

"Indonesia has enjoyed more than two decades of political calm and economic development under the New Order Government of President Suharto," it says. "Nevertheless, Suharto and a small

US rights group hits Indonesia

By BRONWYN YOUNG

A US based group has released a report accusing the Indonesian Government of sweeping human rights violations and widespread restraints on civil and political rights.

The 348-page report on Indonesia, prepared by the human rights group Asia Watch, detailed torture and death in detention, sweeping restraints on freedom of speech, a judiciary acquiescing in sham prosecutions of government critics, an electoral system so heavily weighted in the Government's favour that polls serve only as "controlled acts of legitimisation" and continuing fundamental human rights violations in the annexed territory of East Timor.

The report said that with other Asian nations being transformed by democracy, it seemed only a matter of time before Indonesia was.

But despite two decades of political calm and economic development under the New Order Government, the President, Mr Suharto, and a small core of close associates, supported by the military, had continued to maintain a tight grip on political life.

"The New Order Govern-

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SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 21/11/87 page 1

Indonesia accused of torturing and killing critics

By HELEN OWEN
CANTBERA: Torture, killing and widespread physical abuse of prisoners are part of sweeping restraints on civil and political rights in Indonesia, including East Timor and Iran Jaya, according to a new US study.

In a lengthy dossier of restraints on opposition political groups, press restrictions, torture and physical abuse in Indonesia in the 1980s, the respected Asia Watch group found that restrictive controls have expanded throughout the decade. Asia Watch is a privately-funded group based in Washington.

A pliant judiciary has repeatedly acquiesced in sham prosecutions

The report emphasised that East Timorese students in other parts of Indonesia were also subject to harassment.

Indonesia appears to have changed its harsh policy on East Timor recently, leading to a lessening of reports of abuse of civil rights. It also says the Indonesian Government has been making greater efforts to curb abuse of prisoners throughout the country. But it says more action is needed "to eradicate this pervasive practice".

It appears that police have been prosecuted for torture only when the victims died. The report notes the treatment of criminal detainees is probably worse than for political prisoners. In one case a retired nurse, Vicente de Sousa, was arrested, beaten and submerged in a tank after being accused of collaborating with Fretilin as recently as 1986. It says there are reliable reports of torture after a crackdown on Fretilin independence fighters in 1983, and of those accused of collaborating with Fretilin as recently as 1986. The report notes a clampdown on student political activity, including demonstrations in 1987, and says continuing restraints on Muslim political activity and media reporting are part of widespread restrictions on freedom of expression. It also says Amnesty International has obtained a detailed account of "severe" physical abuse of eight prisoners in Iran Jaya early last year. Two of the group, both Iranian refugees living in Papua-New Guinea, were arrested after a border-crossing to make arrangements for a marriage. After beatings, the men were detained for more than four months. The Indonesian press is governed by an extensive regime of formal controls, and press organs operate under the pervasive threat of closure, the report said. Journalists, enveloped by the culture of fear (Budaya Takut), censor themselves.

The Canberra Times

Tuesday, November 22, 1988

Indonesia's record on human rights

THE abuses of civil and political rights in Indonesia documented by the United States-based human rights group Asia Watch in a report released yesterday are not exactly surprising. Such abuses have been long suspected and alleged. The value of the report is that it is the work of a privately funded and internationally respected organisation.

The report, based on three visits by Asia Watch to Indonesia this year and interviews with East Timorese refugees in Portugal, alleged, among other things, that physical abuse of detainees, with some being crippled or killed, and the use of excessive force in effecting arrests, appeared to be common throughout Indonesia.

The judicial system was "pliant" and had acquiesced in sham prosecutions of government critics, who were also subject to extra-judicial sanctions, such as having their business licences cancelled. The press was stifled and journalists, enveloped by a "culture of fear", censored themselves. There were "reliable" reports of torture in East Timor from 1983 to 1986 and although the Indonesian Government had softened its policy in recent times, the people of East Timor continued "to suffer daily violations of fundamental rights".

Indonesia is hardly alone in the South-East Asian region in some of these abuses. Malaysia for example has imprisoned five opposition politicians without trial for over a year. Even a country such as Singapore, whose leader Mr Lee Kwan Yew expressed his opinions on the immigration debate in Australia recently and was duly reported, does not have a free press and uses the Internal Security Act to harass government opponents. Eight young Catholic workers arrested under the act last year said they had been tortured.

The Australian Government has been noticeably silent on such alleged abuses — in the case of Singapore and Malaysia because these countries are close friends, and in the case of Indonesia largely through fear of upsetting a powerful neighbour.

The 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor, though it caused widespread public concern in Australia, was accepted quietly by the Whitlam Government due to pragmatic foreign policy considerations. East Timor was within Indonesia's sphere of influence, the Portuguese authorities had abandoned the country to civil war and Indonesia filled the vacuum. It was not worth straining relations with Indonesia by protesting.

Some diplomatic questions were asked when five Australian journalists disappeared after Indonesian troops stormed the town of Balibo and a sixth was killed soon afterwards, but the answers were accepted by the Australian Government.

Six years after the event a former ambassador to Indonesia, the late Sir

Keith "Mick" Shann, went so far as to repeat as fact an Indonesian claim that the five journalists killed at Balibo had been dressed in Fretilin uniforms and had "asked for it and got it". He undoubtedly had a genuine concern about relations between the countries, but his over-reaction in that case was an illustration of the tendency of foreign affairs officers to promote the Indonesian line at the expense of legitimate criticism.

Continuing reports of human rights abuses in East Timor were also something to be ignored. Australia had to avoid offending Indonesia.

The Australian press has frequently been accused of insensitivity to the Indonesian way of thinking by those concerned to develop "good" relations with Indonesia. The press must understand, so the argument goes, that criticism of Indonesia by the Australian press is regarded by the Indonesians as a hostile act towards them by the Australian Government.

This line of thinking, if adopted, would result in just the sort of self-censorship the Asia Watch report described in Indonesia's press.

Human rights abuses should be documented wherever they occur and they are a matter of international concern. Certainly the Australian Government loses no opportunity to criticise the human rights abuses of countries such as South Africa.

THE PRIME Minister in particular likes to display his highly developed moral sensibilities on this subject. He adopts his statesman-like pose and spits out such words as "obscene". But South Africa is a long way from home and is the outcast of the world. Every time a politician wants to gain a few easy points he or she can criticise South Africa.

The sincerity of the Prime Minister and the Government would be more readily accepted if they were to adopt a firm policy on human rights in our region. Recently, Mr Hawke did belatedly chastise the Indonesians over the killing of Australian yachtsman David Blenkinsop, perhaps after being advised that the Australian public was getting tired of its Government's servile responses to Indonesia's bully-boy antics.

The fact that the Indonesians responded positively to Australian concern in the Blenkinsop case indicates a fact that seems to have escaped Australian governments so far. The Indonesians respect strength and governments which are prepared to be firm and treat them as equals on issues of genuine concern, rather than cringe before them.

Australia should make it clear that human rights are important enough to risk the displeasure of near-neighbours as well as attempting to gain kudos by criticising them outside our region. If not, it is not really genuine about the issue.