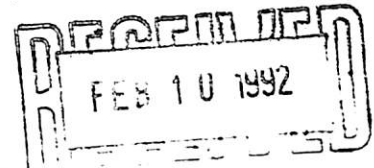




# Third World Network FEATURES

## DEATH IN EAST TIMOR



A mother whose son was the only foreigner killed by the recent army shooting in East Timor, writes of her experience.

By Helen Todd  
Third World Network Features

My son, Kamal Bamadhaj, a 20-year-old student, was shot and killed by Indonesian soldiers on Tuesday, 12 November, in East Timor. Indonesia admits another 18 people were killed by its troops the same morning, when they opened fire on a procession in Dili, the capital of the former Portuguese colony that Jakarta annexed in 1976 and has been struggling to assimilate ever since.

Witnesses to the shootings tell another story. They estimate 50 or more Timorese, mainly young people calling for Timor's independence, were killed. Jakarta has promised a 'full inquiry' into the affair. But Timorese, as well as diplomats and journalists who have visited the territory in recent days, report that dozens of youths have been rounded up by the Indonesian military and that their fate is unknown. So I may be only one of many mothers who have lost their sons. But I am one of the few who are free to speak out.

My experience in trying to find out what happened to my son, and why, has given me a first-hand glimpse of the misinformation, stonewalling and, on occasion, outright lying that has characterised Indonesia's initial efforts to play down the killings and the disastrous impact they may have on Jakarta's image.

I was holidaying in London when I first heard that Kamal had been shot in Timor, from a friend of his in Australia. All night the phone calls came, each worse than the last: Kamal was in a military hospital, but no one was allowed to see him; he has three shots in the head; the Red Cross says he is dead. Indonesia said nothing officially. Throughout the 16-hour flight from London to Singapore the next day, Kamal's 13-year-old sister and I hung on to the thinnest thread of hope.

When we arrived in Singapore on 14 November, we called the New Zealand ambassador in Jakarta and that thread broke. He said that the Indonesian military command had just confirmed that Kamal, a New Zealand citizen of Malaysian origin, had died in Dili on Tuesday morning, and had been buried there the same day. Meanwhile, newspapers in Jakarta were still quoting military sources as saying no foreigner had been killed.

My objective was to go to Dili immediately to recover Kamal's body and bring it home to Malaysia. En route, my husband and I were met in Jakarta's airport by the New Zealand ambassador, who had arranged our onward flights to Timor and had been promised by Indonesian authorities complete cooperation in recovering Kamal. We also met and were given a personal letter from Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Sudomo to the chief of the East Timor Operational Command, R S Warouw, directing him to help us.

But the next day as we were about to board a flight to Dili, we were stopped by a military intelligence officer, who ignored Mr Sudomo's letter and said he had orders from Brig. Gen. Pandji Soesilo, head of foreign liaison for the Indonesian armed forces, to stop us. Kamal's body was flown to Jakarta late that night by military aircraft and released to the ambassador the following day.

The last time I saw Kamal was in mid-October, on a few hours' stopover in Sydney on my way to New Zealand. It was the day before he left for East Timor. Kamal had just completed his second year at the University of New South Wales, studying Indonesian and Asian politics and history. He was an honours student, but his heart was in a group he and fellow Indonesia enthusiasts had founded to support student organisations and human-rights workers in Indonesia. He told me his group had heard from Timorese students that the military in East Timor was rounding up anyone who might present a dissident view to a Portuguese parliamentary fact-finding mission due to visit East Timor on 4 November.

The mission, brokered between Lisbon and Jakarta by the United Nations secretary-general, would have been the first by Portuguese officials since the Indonesian annexation, which was condemned in several UN resolutions in the 1970s and early 1980s. The visit was cancelled during the last week of October after Jakarta objected to the inclusion of an Australian journalist who had written harshly of Indonesia's role in East Timor.

The Indonesians have Timor sewn up, Kamal told me. The big powers had turned a blind eye to Indonesia's annexation of the territory and have blocked discussion of it in the UN since 1982. For much of the last 16 years, East Timor has been closed to outside visitors, while

the military tried to end a stubborn armed Timorese resistance and terrorise the general population into silence.

(With the jaded 'realism' of a 48-year-old, I thought my son was a bit carried away. But I have since read an Amnesty International report presented to the UN in October of this year, which documents in detail the recent wave of arrests, tortures and 'disappearances' of people who have dared criticise the Indonesian occupation. Amnesty has estimated that as many as 200,000 Timorese have been killed or have died of hunger and disease since December 1975, one-third of the population at the time Indonesia invaded.)

The Portuguese parliamentary mission, in the context of a renewed world interest in human rights and self-determination, was a chance for the Timorese to be heard, Kamal argued. If the military was, in fact, intimidating Timorese, in contravention of an agreement between the Indonesian and Portuguese governments setting out terms of the visit, then outsiders should be there to document it, he said. Kamal, whose Indonesian was fluent, also hoped to offer his services as an interpreter to those journalists with the delegation who wanted to step outside the official itinerary and get beyond the laundered Indonesian version of reality. I'll be careful, he said as he hugged me goodbye.

Two weeks later Kamal wrote this to his friends in Sydney: 'The Indonesians (especially the Javanese) seem to have a well-rehearsed script when explaining East Timor to the outsider. They say it was a hapless colonial backwater under the Portuguese. Its inhabitants were uneducated, culturally backward and generally unhygienic people .... oppressed until Indonesia helped to liberate them. Since then East Timor has shot ahead in leaps and bounds. But scratch beneath the surface of uncomfortable Javanese smiles and silent Timorese faces, and the grim reality of this place will jolt even the most casual observer.'

Kamal said he found the military rounding up people in every part of East Timor for public lectures, where they were threatened with imprisonment or worse if they spoke to the Portuguese delegation. He commented on the heavy surveillance surrounding Roman Catholic churches and he wrote about an attack on the Motael church in Dili on 28 October, in which a young Timorese, Sebastio Gomes, was killed.

Kamal noted the Indonesian-built new roads and schools in East Timor, but asked: 'Will the construction of new roads placate the humiliation and bitterness, or compensate for the denial of Timorese language in schools, or the domination of political decisions, local administration and the economy by the Javanese? The Timorese say no.'

I have tried to piece together what happened to Kamal that Tuesday morning. The picture is incomplete. But the following account is what I've been able to discover, as related to me by eyewitnesses, a New Zealand diplomat who went to Dili and the doctor who treated Kamal in a Timor military hospital.

The only official version of the events of 12 November I have received came from Mr Sudomo. He said that on that morning members of a procession commemorating Sebastio Gomes's death were armed with 'hundreds of long knives' as they marched toward a cemetery

where he was buried. He also said that a grenade was thrown at Indonesian soldiers and that a deputy battalion commander was slashed by the Timorese and seriously wounded. 'It was a mob. The soldiers fired in fear of their lives,' he said.

My family and I have now spoken to three people who were with Kamal in the procession. I have talked to Bob Muntz, a sober 44-year-old official with a private Australian organisation, Community Aid Abroad, for whom Kamal worked as an interpreter during the three days before he was killed. My stepdaughter has talked to Amy Goodman and Allan Nairn, American journalists on the scene who walked between the crowd and the soldiers in an attempt to prevent violence and were badly beaten.

Each of these eyewitnesses independently said that the procession had stopped along a road hemmed in on both sides by high walls. They said there was a '100-metre' gap between the front of the procession and a line of troops that moved forward and opened fire on the Timorese. Mr Muntz, who was standing on a fence taking photographs, saw no grenade thrown and no 'long knives'. 'It was an unarmed crowd of mostly young people,' he told me. 'I saw no military contact or even presence during the three- to four-kilometre march from the church to the cemetery.'

Mr Muntz did see the military truck drive up, the soldiers jump down and line up facing the crowd, just before the shooting began. The two American reporters walked forward into the gap. Kamal, who was standing beside the Americans, did not follow. Mr Muntz and another British national began to drop back.

Then the soldiers raised their rifles and shot into the crowd, according to Mr Muntz and the Americans we spoke with. If the deputy battalion commander was slashed in the cemetery as reported, it could not have been before the firing started, Mr Muntz said. But it might have occurred later, when soldiers went into the cemetery in pursuit of those who had taken refuge there.

None of these witnesses saw Kamal hit. He was found half a kilometre away from where the massacre took place, shot through the right portion of the chest. It's not clear whether he was shot when the military fired into the crowd, or later, when soldiers fanned out shooting at people running away.

According to a report compiled in Dili by a New Zealand diplomat, Kamal was found by Anton Marti, the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Dili. He was lying on a deserted road, still conscious, desperately waving his New Zealand passport. Mr Marti drove him toward the Dili general hospital, but was almost immediately stopped by a military roadblock near the cemetery. Although his vehicle had Red Cross markings, when Mr Marti identified himself and said he had a wounded man with him, the soldiers threatened to shoot him and yelled at him to 'get out of here'. He drove in the opposite direction and was again stopped outside a police station and directed into the police compound. Again Mr Marti explained Kamal's condition and again he was prevented from continuing to the hospital, or even getting out of the car. After a long wait, he was directed to drive to a military hospital.

The delay was fatal. Diplomats told me that the shooting began soon after 7:50 a.m. It seems likely that Mr Marti picked up Kamal around 8:00 a.m. He was admitted to the hospital, by then unconscious and bleeding profusely, at 8:40 a.m. Kamal was the first casualty to be admitted to the hospital and, according to the official medical report, he got immediate and professional treatment. But he died 20 minutes later.

Why did Kamal join the procession that cost him his life? Mr Muntz told me that a handful of foreigners staying in Dili met on Monday night to discuss whether they should go to the next morning's procession. Although the situation in Dili was extremely tense and all of them said they were 'scared', they decided they had to go. They reasoned that a foreign presence might restrain the military and prevent them from attacking the crowd.

Kamal, who had admitted to Bob Muntz earlier that he was feeling very exposed and frightened after three weeks in East Timor, argued strongly for going. Kamal himself explained the atmosphere in notes he wrote 3 November: 'It has been a tense two weeks in East Timor — a kind of lull before the storm as Timorese prepare themselves for the visit of the Portuguese parliamentary delegation .... Youths in Dili and in other towns have been secretly painting pro-independence banners, organising demonstrations and, as many have admitted to me, preparing to die for their people if the Indonesians try to stop them. Timorese of all ages and walks of life have been signing up to be on the list of interviewees for this Portuguese fact-finding mission. Considering that talking to foreigners about the situation in East Timor is risky, there are large numbers who have decided to take the plunge and talk to the Portuguese when they come. However, less than a week before the delegation was supposed to arrive, news started filtering in that the Portuguese were not coming. Hearts sank. People could not believe it. The disappointment here today is not only the deflating of many high expectations, but, more worrying still, the indefinite delay gives the Indonesian military the perfect opportunity to eliminate all those Timorese who had exposed their identity while preparing for the visit.'

I think that was the desperation that lay behind the 12 November memorial procession. As people who believed they were already 'marked' by the military, they made a last-ditch attempt to attract world attention through the United Nations Rapporteur on Torture, who was visiting Dili. During the procession they unfurled banners supporting Fretilin, the guerilla independence movement that has dropped much of its leftist rhetoric in recent years to stress Timorese nationalism. They shouted 'Viva Timor Eoeste'. This outright support for independence by a crowd of thousands had never been dared before.

That, I believe, was the provocation that the military would not tolerate. I believe that the shooting was a deliberate act by the armed forces in response to this political provocation.

Sometimes young people see these issues of social justice and freedom more clearly than we do. The *Realpolitik* view of East Timor is that one might as well accept the *fait accompli* of Indonesian control — at least the Indonesians can bring Timor more development than Portugal ever managed to do. Indonesia has persuaded much of the world to accept this kind of realism. But the events of the last few months have made it very clear that they have not

persuaded the East Timorese. So long as the Timorese prefer to control their own lives, military terror will be needed to keep Indonesia in control, and the killings will continue.

So that is where *Realpolitik* leaves us, with a crowd on the street shouting 'Viva East Timor!' facing a line of soldiers holding American-supplied M-16s. The alternative is for the UN to accept its responsibility toward the East Timorese, call an immediate Security Council meeting on the killings and press for a genuine referendum on Timorese wishes.

In his last notes, Kamal predicted 'another wave of genocide against the Timorese people'. He wrote: 'Whether total genocide occurs in East Timor or not depends not only on the (remarkably powerful) will of the East Timorese people, but also on the will of humanity, of us all.' — Third World Network Features

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About the writer: Helen Todd is a Malaysian freelance journalist.

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