

RECEIVED OCT 10 1991

STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR

by: Beryl Gaffney
Member of Parliament
House of Commons (Canada)

to
United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization
August 7, 1991

As a Member of Canada's Parliament and as the Liberal Party Critic for Human Rights, I would like to express my gratitude to the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of the many friends of East Timor.

East Timor, geographically, is thousands of miles from here and it would be easy for us in the North American hemisphere to dismiss the Timorese atrocities as being none of our concern. However, with the advent of world-wide telecommunications and travel, the world has become a much smaller place. We are now on each other's doorsteps, and the problems of the East Timorese and like peoples, is very much our business. This is why we are here and this is why we have a United Nations - to do something about it.

Since the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, some 15 years ago, the reports of killings, oppression, and abuses of human rights have reached a scale that is unconscionable in a civilized world. This tiny nation in 1975 was struggling towards independence and self-determination after the disintegration of the Portuguese empire only to be invaded when it was at its weakest moment in history.

The people of East Timor have suffered one of the most ruthless attacks in modern history. On a per capita basis, the atrocities committed against the small population of less than a million people are higher than those committed by, as an example, the Khmer Rouge.

As much as one third of the people of this tiny south pacific island have perished due to the initial war, and subsequent acts of violence, starvation and disease perpetrated by the Indonesian army against the Timorese peoples.

This is a holocaust. This is genocide in its worst form. We would not allow it in our own countries, so why are we sitting back and allowing it to happen in East Timor.

Amnesty International, in its 1990-91 report, verifies these atrocities. It claims there are serious doubts about the fairness of trials. It is increasingly concerned about a pattern of short-term detention, ill-treatment and torture of alleged political opponents of Indonesian rule. This pattern has actually gained momentum since August of 1990. Amnesty has repeatedly asked to be allowed to enter East Timor. It continues to be denied access.

Indonesia, by its invasion and occupation of East Timor, has embarked on gross violations of the United Nations two most basic principles of integrity of territory and the right to self-determination. Now the government of Indonesia is mounting a more pervasive assault on the East Timorese through such methods as an aggressive birth control program, carefully planned infrastructure development, and so-called resettlement programs. In essence, a slow and deliberate genocide.

As a woman, I find their method of enforced family planning absolutely repugnant. I do recognize the importance of family planning if it is an honest choice of the persons involved. However the way in which the program is carried out in East Timor - by force - is but another example of the unacceptable way in which a people held prisoner under this unwelcomed military occupation are being treated by their guards.

Consider that this is already a country where one third of its people - mostly males - have been slaughtered, where female students are purportedly being injected with a dangerous contraceptive. Consider also another insidious form of genocide: prevention of the propagation of a race.

We pride ourselves on our understanding of the cruciality of people being free and equal under law, and we have tried, through organizations such as this - the United Nations - to see that others in less fortunate situations and locales can also know basic human rights. We try, but we sometimes fail. We hope and pray that the winds of change are about to blow in East Timor.

Indonesia must be condemned for its disregard and disrespect of the rights of the East Timorese to self-determination and independence, along with the constant verifications of violations of fundamental human rights. In 1989 Pope John II also condemned in the strongest terms the invasion of East Timor and called for a halt to the aggression. And yet we know there has not been an improvement. We continue to learn of ongoing oppression and violence such as the arrests and torture that followed the Pope's visit.

In 1990 Indonesia was elected to the UN Human Rights Commission. You can rest assured that it will do everything in its power to render useless any initiatives or resolutions in support of East Timor that will come before the Commission. The Commission itself must be encouraged to take strong action on any recommendations that come before it from the sub-commission.

The UN has requested the Indonesian authorities facilitate access to the territory of international humanitarian and developmental organizations. The Commission has also appealed to all sides to be guided by the spirit of dialogue and negotiation. Indonesia has ignored this plea.

My country, Canada, has also been accused of participating in an international cover-up. For countries like Canada and Australia to continue to do business with Indonesia, is a breach of their obligation to accept and apply Security Council Resolutions regarding East Timor's right to self-government and the respect of territorial sovereignty.

Canada is a relatively new player at these hearings, I am the third Canadian Parliamentarian to appear before this Committee on behalf of East Timor. Myself and others will continue to speak out, both at home and abroad, until there is change in this situation.

Why does my government refuse to recognize what the invasion and occupation has meant. Canada has voted against United Nation resolutions calling for the right to self-determination. It has lobbied to have the issue removed from the agenda. My party has spoken on this on the floor of the House of Commons. We have asked why Canada's third largest recipient of foreign aid dollars is Indonesia. We have asked if it is because there are approximately 300 Canadian companies operating in Indonesia from large ones like Inco.

May I be so bold to suggest that any country that is doing business with Indonesia and is not participating in actions against the aggressor, is doing so because of the very high level of economic investment and trade. To address the human rights abuses would be at the peril of losing important trade and economic benefits.

At the 47th session on Human Rights in Geneva earlier this year, Canada's representative at the Commission, Ambassador Raynelle Andreychuk stated: "With regard to Indonesia, Canada welcomes recent initiatives such as the UN-sponsored Conference on Human Rights held in that country on January 21-22. These are encouraging signs of Indonesia's new commitment to human rights observance.

"We regret, however, that unhindered access to East Timor by international non-governmental organizations is not yet possible. We also regret the continued allegations of human rights abuses in East Timor and elsewhere in the country, and urge Indonesia to address the problems of excessive force, arbitrary arrest and disappearances that have occurred over the last year."

The United Nations must encourage its member countries to develop coherent policies which link international human rights to aid, trade, and refugee determinations. Observance of human rights must be a basic criteria for receipt of foreign aid. The human rights performance of recipient countries should be subject to public review and should enter into decisions regarding official development assistance allocation. In other words, Indonesia, clean up your act, or be cut off from foreign aid. To do less is to bring shame upon the donor country.

Last year, when the Iraq invasion of Kuwait moved the UN Security Council into adopting a string of resolutions; we watched virtually the entire international community mount a campaign to remove one aggressor, Iraq, from an invasion-occupation situation in Kuwait. We are possibly seeing the end of apartheid and strides towards self-determination in South Africa. We are working towards a peaceful solution amongst the nations in the middle east.

What must the East Timorese be thinking? They are still living in an occupied territory. War rages on. Genocide is alive and well. And yet the UN remains on the sidelines, lacking the political will to uphold the UN Charter. It is as if the UN is saying: "let's close our eyes to naughty Indonesia - you are a bad child, but you have lots of toys, so we will just pretend you are a good clean player." The hypocrisy! The audacity to deny relief to a suffering people is the shame of us all.

In closing, I do have hope. The world community must hold Indonesia to account. This United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization holds the key. The East Timorese community cannot survive under a continual campaign of violence. You must work towards the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from East Timor. The people of East Timor must then be allowed to decide their own future. In reviewing the presentations before this committee for the previous two years, I notice we continually make the same request and yet nothing is done. Committee members, the door is now open to you. You have opened the door yourselves in Kuwait, South Africa, the Middle East and others. Allow the Timorese to get to the door also.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation. I hope your deliberations are positive, so much so that I and all others making these presentations today will not have to be here next year.