

**Press Statement**

13 May 1994

**The East Timor Conference: Forging  
a People-to-People Asian Solidarity**

ON DECEMBER 7, 1975 journalists monitoring a radio post in Australia intercepted a broadcast from Fretilin's radio in Dili:

"The Indonesian forces are killing indiscriminately. Women and children are being shot in the streets. We are all going to be killed ... This is an appeal for international help. Please do something to stop this invasion."

It was the day Indonesia launched a full-scale invasion of East Timor.

It took almost two decades and more than 200,000 deaths before that call is heard in Asia, or more specifically, the Philippines.

The plea will resound — and will be heard once more in the whole world — as some 200 human rights advocates and supporters of the Maubere resistance meet at the University of the Philippines on May 31 to June 4 for the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor.

**Indonesia's Arrogance and Power Tripping**

Indonesia, Big Brother to members of the ASEAN, tried hard to keep the East Timor situation from scrutiny of the international community.

Despite three UN Security Council resolutions and eight from the UN General Assembly, the Suharto government remains in control of what it claims to be its 27th province following the results of a 1976 plebiscite which can be comparable only to the bogus "democratic" exercises under the Marcos dictatorship.

Indonesia has since claimed that the East Timor issue is its "internal affair."

This is still the same line the Indonesian government is using to stop APCET, which it claims to be an "interference" that may imperil official RP-Indonesia relations.

In a desperate attempt in diplomatic blackmail, an Indonesian spokesman threatened that the holding of the East Timor conference in Manila may affect the Jakarta-hosted peacetalks between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Unfortunately, it is the same line now being used by Philippine government officials. Despite the administration's official position that recognizes the inalienable right to freedom of expression, misinformed sectors within the Philippine government has maligned the APCET to be "insensitive to Indonesian sensibilities." Legislators, even those formerly aligned with the progressive block, have charged that the conference will jeopardize Mindanao trade relations with other ASEAN countries.

But official relations is not the concern of the conference. It is the task of the government to keep its partnership with other states while upholding the rights of its citizens. And it is most unfair, not to say diplomatically immature, of the Indonesian government to quell private initiatives in expressing solidarity with its Asian neighbors.

**Knowing Our Neighbors**

For indeed, East Timor is more than just a neighbor. Among other peoples in Asia, it is with the

Timorese that Filipinos can find a lot of similarities.

Both East Timor and Philippines are predominantly Catholic, owing to centuries of colonization by Iberian powers — Portugal for Timor, Spain for the Philippines. Both have long history of struggle for freedom and democracy.

The APCET was clinched when Jose Ramos Horta, special representative of the National Council for Maubere Resistance (CNRM), met with who are now the Philippine Convenors Group during a PP21 meeting in Bangkok in 1992, before Jakarta offered to host the MNLF-GRP peacetalks.

The idea of Philippines hosting the East Timor conference is no different from what Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Alatas said in his opening statement at the formal MNLF-GRP talks on October 25, 1993, and we quote:

(The) Philippines is an integral element of the ASEAN body-politic, and any pain or setback that is suffered by one part of that body politic, caused by internal strife or upheaval, is acutely felt by all the other parts.

Filipinos, too, particularly those within the progressive movement, are concerned with regional peace and stability. The revolutionary situation in East Timor in the wake of continued Indonesian presence will remain a threat to a comprehensive and genuine regional growth unless addressed to upfront.

As citizens of the world who have experienced—and have shown—how it is to fight a dictatorship and boot out colonial masters, we cannot turn a deaf ear to the cries and wailing of widows and orphans; we cannot just close our eyes in the face of children who may never fully realize their human potentials; we cannot be insensitive to the pain of the murdered who are being reduced to statistics.

We have to reach out and extend our "kapitbisig" to our neighbors, not only those who are rich and powerful as what government wants us to do, but with those like us — the poor, deprived and oppressed, but struggling — like the people of East Timor.

That, we are sure, is the essence of a people to people solidarity.

**Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor  
Press Statement**

28 May 1994

**APCET Will Go on as Scheduled**

IT was not surprising. As early as last week, we already knew that there were elements who wanted to try the legal path to stop this legitimate conference. We have in fact, through our legal counsel, Atty. Alexander Padilla, petitioned Quezon City Executive Judge Pedro Santiago, as early as May 20, 1994, that we be immediately notified of any petition seeking a restraining order against APCET and not to issue such. We were confident that the courts will uphold basic constitutional rights or at the least its due process. It appears we were wrong.

We will not comment on the alleged petitioner's background, one Jose Laurel III, the chairman and president of the so-called Philippine-Indonesia Friendship Society who virtually labeled us collaborators and cohorts of the brave East Timorese resistance movement, a distinction actually, rather than an indictment. Nor will we comment on this group's history or objectives. We will not even comment on the composition of PHILINDO, four of whom are said to be the children of this Jose Laurel III.

There are even other desperate moves to sow confusion about the conference. We have reports that an invitation letter purportedly signed by me has been circulating in Mindanao announcing APCET's postponement to next month at the Sheraton hotel. This is untrue.

Suffice it to say that I shall have to personally receive the so-called restraining order and our battery of lawyers are preparing for our own legal moves — if there should be any.

Suffice it to say that the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor will go on as scheduled.

And if I may quote one high government official who boasted about government's other recourse to this magnified issue: we too, the organizers, are not defenseless. We will never follow any unlawful order. But other supporters have indicated their desire to contest this alleged restraining order at the Supreme Court.

The conference will go on. The truth that Indonesia and its collaborators and cohorts in the Philippine government vainly want to suppress about East Timor will be told. And that truth is sadly what is also happening now in the Philippines, the 28th province of Suharto's Indonesia.

For more than 200,000 East Timorese killed since 1975, the conference will be their vindication, their resurrection.

And surely, ours too.





## Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor

18 June 1994

THE Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor has successfully concluded. But the Ramos government's "damage-control" efforts seem to never end.

After Indonesian President Suharto had said he is satisfied with the way Fidel V. Ramos handled the East Timor "fiasco" in Manila, here comes the presidential "manang," Sen. Leticia Shahani, delivering a promise to Jakarta that there will not be another APCET in Manila. Scratch my back and I'll lick your boots is the name of friendship in this game of the generals.

Ramos' message to Suharto is not just a meek apology and comforting reassurance, it smacks of betrayal of our sovereignty, denigration of national dignity, and a threat to the Constitutional right to organize and the freedom of expression.

But here is "bad news" for the Suharto's administrators in Manila: APCET, the conference has given way to APCET the coalition with Manila as base office. Our chair, Bishop Emeritus Aloisius Nobuo Soma, will be flying in from Nagoya, Japan regularly and definitely not just to say mass. The Philippine Convenors, in turn, now forms the nucleus of the local counterpart, the Philippine Solidarity for East Timor (PSET).

Then Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor is the most logical conclusion to advance the conference objective of bringing into focus the East Timor situation. After the papers have been read and the situation has been presented, it has now come to effecting concrete measures to help stop the killings, the arrests and tortures and bringing back to the Maubere people their collective dignity and right to chart their own future.

This is very well in accordance with the United Nations charter on the International Declaration of Human Rights to which the Philippines is a signatory. This is the same principle the Philippines adapted in support of Indonesia's struggle against the Dutch. And the very principle that the United Nations has reaffirmed in the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, it has passed in condemnation of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor.

The international community has recognized the Filipino people's tradition of upholding democracy. Only its government, blinded by its myopic view of national interests, fails to see this. Instead, it chooses to kowtow to the wishes and caprice of the dictator's "friends."

But as we have proven in EDSA, in APCET and in our numerous struggles, democratic ideals always triumph. These are the lessons we share with the East Timorese. These are the victories the struggling peoples of the world eventually achieve. ☸

## Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor Press Statement

24 June 1994

THE Philippine Convenors of the recently concluded Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET) view with grave concern the Suharto government's closure of two news weeklies and a tabloid in Jakarta.

While Indonesia is not necessarily known for democracy which upholds freedom of expression, it is not nonetheless vital for a modern and civilized society to guarantee a free exchange of information and ideas.

No reason was given for the closure except that "the publications have been reminded...and thus are considered to be aware of the government's warnings."

Indonesia's information ministry also said there will be sanctions against "several publications" who do not apply the journalistic code of ethics and who "cover stories that upset national interest."

It may be expected of an authoritarian regime to clamp down on whoever or whichever runs counter to its set rules no matter how absurd or whimsical these may be. But that the closures came in the aftermath of APCET make the motives unmistakably clear to observers of Indonesian policies.

After failed desperate attempts to stop the APCET meeting in Manila, Suharto turns his wrath to his own people whom he suspects of rocking the Indonesian boat. But as in the APCET, this too will soon backfire on him.

But tyrants do not learn their lessons easily. Or could it be true that whoever God wish to destroy, he first makes mad? Suharto is blinded by his rage and embarrassment that he is no longer just desperate—he has become maniacal in trying to hold onto his power.

Marcos committed the same error then. And history has judged him. The people's will triumphed in the end. ☸

## OPINION TODAY

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## Son of APCET

FROM the very start of the APCET controversy last month, TODAY had always taken the position that East Timor—for us and quite apart from its other salient aspects—had become a free speech issue. It was also one of those issues regarding human rights about which there cannot be two sides, so far at least as journalists are concerned. There is only a side that is wholly right and another which is completely wrong.

Despite a sudden rash of APCET-induced *realpolitik* among many of our misguided fellow editorialists, we stood firm on the principle that the conference should have been allowed to push through without any government interference whatsoever, because our own constitutional rights had come on the line and our duty as journalists had been sounded.

Comes now the news that a follow-up conference on East Timor will soon be held again in Davao, which happens to be that Philippine city closest to East Timor's tormentor and occupier, Indonesia. For sheer bravado, nothing can beat that, short of holding the conference in Dili or Jakarta itself. But that, of course, would be very foolish. You wouldn't be going to a conference but to a massacre, or, in the very least, to a congress of fellow prisoners.

On the other hand, we now have to wonder if holding another APCET in Davao might be such a bright idea, after all.

Sure, you'll raise hackles in Indonesia, and nervous jitters in Malacañang, plus the press coverage that will be certain to trail anything with the promise of a controversy. But what else is there to gain, for the conference organizers and for the people of Davao, by such a pointed action?

Southern Mindanao is said to be standing on the brink of gaining or losing several hundreds of millions of dollars in investments from Indonesian and other Southeast Asian partners. (Of course, we don't know if this is in smuggling or in productive activities. But let that pass for now.)

If the conference pushes through, and the Indonesians react the way you can safely predict them to, it won't be East Timor that will suffer, but Davao itself.

We know: that sounds suspiciously like the very same arguments that we stood up against the first time around. We can't afford to stand head to toe with Indonesia, ergo, we shut up. And whatever happened to all that highflown rhetoric about free speech? Have the Indonesians bought us out as well?

Not for all the rupiahs in Manado. Let's get this clear: APCET II, or III, or IV, should have a right to be held anytime, any place, for as long as it assists the East Timorese regain their freedom and independence.

If the organizers insist on pushing through with it in Davao, then let them do so. But a right is one thing and its judicious exercise is another.

We'd have to ask the organizers: why Davao? And why just now?

Why not the Netherlands, or Australia, or Malaysia, or New York, where the tragic pleading of the East Timorese—the central issue, remember?—might fall on the ears of peoples and governments in a much better position to do something about it? Granting that APCET's main function lies in its being a propaganda forum, Davao isn't exactly the center of the communications universe. The Manila meeting was good for the exposure; a Davao—or Tuguegarao, or Catbalogan—APCET can only bring in diminishing returns, or worse, a progressive alienation of Filipino sympathies for the East Timorese.

And why just now, hot on the heels of the inadvertent success of the first APCET? A second one, so soon and so close to Indonesia, smacks of Filipino sensationalism and that quintessential Filipino flaw of overdoing everything.

Less is more. A second APCET so soon and in that place smacks of insincerity and cheap thrill-seeking. Not to mention political opportunism. We predict it will fall flat in the press.

It will appear as what it probably is: an attempt by self-seeking, would-be politicians to capitalize on a rousing success, but this time only for themselves.

It will be ignored by the foreign press and panned by the local. It will do a disservice to the very worthy cause of East Timorese freedom and human rights.

So, was that free-speech, journalist's-first-duty business a onetime thing?

Hardly. We used it well, and we made our point. There will be many other points to make that will require a similar exercise.

The first APCET didn't and couldn't solve East Timor's problem, but it did better than anyone expected to bring that problem to the fore. Was that enough? Not for East Timor, but this isn't East Timor.

Free speech should belong to every man—the genius, the mediocre and the idiot alike. He who employs it bravely and wisely, we admire and call a hero. He who squanders it on insults, we call a fool. The right to speak should carry with it a measure of self-restraint, a capacity for measured response and a sense of timing. All of which bespeak a maturity that alone deserves to be listened to.

The next APCET should be held in a white country because we Filipinos, despite our vulnerabilities, hosted the first and crucial one. We have proven ourselves. Now it is the turn of the countries that were upset because they were prevented from attending the conference. Madame Mitterrand, *s'il vous plaît*.

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We made it!

APCET, the conference has now given way to APCET, the coalition. Although the work ahead is daunting, it is likewise challenging and inviting.

May we take this time to thank you for being part of APCET's historical evolution.

We could not have pulled this off without your support, concern, advise and company.

Soon, East Timor will be free.

Soon, Jakarta will also be free.

And perhaps, soon, we shall be freer ourselves.

Thank you again so much.

Mabuhay!

A luta continua!



Initiatives for International Dialogue  
Secretariat of the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor and  
Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET)

