

Letter on the situation in Aceh, Indonesia

9 September 1999

Dear Friends,

For the past two weeks I have been in Aceh. It was hard for me to believe that the distressing atmosphere I felt there is part of Indonesia. Post DOM era (Military Operational Zone) has not brought peace to the people of Aceh. Its people still live in fear of any contact with the military, almost every week clashes and shootings occur, usually with innocent civilians as victims, or the GAM forces (Free Aceh Movement), and sometimes also from the military.

When I watch a horror film, I can control my fright, I can estimate when the film will be over, or just walk out if I don't like the film and curse the director for making such a plot. But in Aceh, no one can get out of the horrific situation that scrutinizes their lives, the best they could do is run and hide in refugee camps. But they have no idea when the sadistic plot will end. Although General Wiranto (Defence Minister) said he will pull out the PPRM (the anti-riot forces), whom many do not trust, the fact is the military and the PPRM still dominate the woods, forests, villages and suburbs.

Now more than 180,000 refugees seek shelter. Almost one third of them are children. When clashes occur, it is almost certain that more will fall victim to this madness, many more will flee to mosques, schools and even compounds. Classrooms are being used for those who fall ill and are not able to find space in hospitals or clinics. Those strong enough, resort to emergency tents made of plastic bags and rice sacks. Children have been creative enough to make tents from cardboard. But when rain falls they clearly cannot seek shelter. When night falls they cannot protect their bodies from mosquitoes and insects.

Life without a home can become unbearably hard, especially on the children and the elderly. It is even worse when their environment is not healthy. Food in the refugee camps are far from decent. It is understandable how their health deteriorates so quickly, some contracting respiratory problems, diarrhea,

typhoid and malaria, but many more fall victim to psycho-traumatic problems, a natural result among those living with uncertainty and an unending fear.

Now school children are starting to play in the pools and rivers to find fish to add to their daily nourishment. There are some who read the Holy Quran, but none can pursue their education, although their teachers, who also seek refuge at the same camps, are willing to teach. But there are no teaching utensils or books or paper to do so.

Each day humanitarian aid comes to the refugee camps. Almost all non-governmental organisations and foundations in Aceh have given their full support, but as the saying goes, it has become an activity that is like spreading salt in the sea. Once the aid reaches the locations, it quickly disappears, because the amount of help cannot accommodate the number of people needing it. In Teupin Raya alone there are 700 refugees. Each day they need about 2.5 tons of rice to eat. Imagine how many tons are needed to feed 180,000 refugees each day. Up till now donations have been given through private channels. (swadaya)

Help comes from neighboring villages, but help from the government is usually refused. If the refugees had it their way, they would throw or burn anything that the government brings them. That is how much distrust and hatred they feel.

If you can find it in your heart to give a helping hand, this would be the right time to share. At the end of this letter I enclose a list of NGOs who are ready to help. They can be trusted to distribute your help to those still suffering in Aceh. They will find any route they can, because buses and public transportations have stopped operating due to fear of more riots, attacks and clashes. The tensions and security issues have made the routes to refugee camps very dangerous. They have thought of leasing private planes to transport humanitarian aid, but it has become too costly to operate on a daily basis.

Regards

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List of NGOs:

Tim Kemanusiaan LSM Aceh

Jalan Singgah Mata 18 Blower Banda Aceh 232243
Indonesia

TEL: 62-651-46001

Yayasan Sekapur Sirih

Jalan Pejaten Barat 71 Jakarta Selatan Indonesia

Tel: 62-21-71791894

Yayasan Nurani Dunia/Foundation for Humanitarian
Aid to the Victims of social and Natural Disasters

Jalan Proklamasi 37 Jakarata 10320 Indonesia

Tel/Fax 62-21-3913768



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact