

Investigations announced into alleged Indonesian atrocities in West Papua

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The Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) announced in mid-November that it is establishing inquiries into alleged cases of human rights abuses by the security forces in Papua. While only two incidents will be probed, the investigations provide a glimpse into the ruthless methods used by the military and police to shore up Jakarta's control over the province.

Komnas HAM spokesman Saifroedin Bahar told journalists in Jakarta that the commission will investigate alleged atrocities in April 2003 by the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) at Wamena, near the border with Papua New Guinea, and abuses by Indonesian police at Wasior, in Papua's north west, in 2001.

Referring to the incident at Wamena, Bahar said: "A preliminary investigation shows that the army was involved in summary killing, torture and rape against civilians." A Reuters report indicated that 16 Papuans were killed when troops were searching for weapons stolen from a TNI weapons store by people who the military claimed were members of the separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM).

A *Jakarta Post* article based on the Komnas HAM preliminary inquiry indicated that seven were killed and 48 tortured by the military in a large-scale operation in which 7,000 locals were forcibly evacuated. The local TNI commander denounced the proposed investigation, stating that operational norms were not violated and that the preliminary Komnas HAM report was inaccurate.

There were a series of incidents at Wasior in 2001. The area had been the scene of conflict between the police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) and local military over the control of timber industry. In May Brimob police attacked civilians on their way home from a celebration

after logging company staff had been killed by an armed Papuan mob.

In June 2001 a Brimob unit indiscriminately attacked villages after five Brimob members were killed in an attack on a police post. A local rights group reported 12 Papuans were killed and that others went missing. An International Crisis Group report published in September 2002 stated that the Papuans involved in the initial attack on Brimob may have been allies of the local military.

Senior Papuan senior police commander David Sihombing condemned the Komnas HAM inquiry into the Wasior raid, claiming his officers had followed standard operational procedure.

When the commission has finished its investigations, it will present a report to the attorney general and the parliament, where a decision will be made if a special human rights court should be convened. So far only two such special courts have been established—one over the TNI-organised violence in East Timor in 1999, and a second ongoing trial over the Suharto-era massacre of Muslim protesters at Tanjung Priok in 1984. The military effectively obstructed the East Timor proceedings which concluded without the conviction of any senior TNI officer.

Concern over the new Komnas HAM investigations was not confined to Papua. Chief Security Minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono insisted that the inquiry into the Wamena incident had to be fair. "In conflict areas such as in Papua or in Aceh... it cannot be avoided that there are clashes and actions beyond the acceptable levels, even human rights violations," he declared.

TNI spokesman Colonel Djazairi Nachrowi went even further, issuing what amounted to a direct threat to the Commission. He warned that the military would

conduct its own investigation and if the allegations proved to be untrue the TNI would take unspecified legal action against Komnas HAM. “We will not be slandered,” Nachrowi told the media. Komnas HAM, a state-funded body set up under the Suharto dictatorship in 1993, is unlikely to conduct any serious investigation into the brutal record of the security forces in West Papua.

Since the installation of Megawati Sukarnoputri as Indonesian president in mid 2001, Jakarta has pursued an increasingly tough line against any manifestation of separatist sentiment in Papua. She was installed in office with the help of the military, in part, because she promised to reverse the move by her predecessor Abdurrahman Wahid to offer concessions and negotiations to separatist movements in Papua, Aceh and elsewhere.

Within five months of Megawati assuming the presidency, Kopassus special forces troops murdered the prominent Papuan leader Theys Eluay in November 2001. While a military tribunal eventually convicted the seven soldiers, they received light sentences of between 24 and 42 months in jail and no investigation was conducted into the involvement of the top brass in Jakarta.

As a series of recent media reports make clear, the two incidents being investigated by Komnas HAM are just part of a far broader pattern. In early November, the *Jakarta Post* reported that at least 12 people had been killed in Papua in clashes with security forces, also near Wamena.

On November 29, the same newspaper reported that seven of 42 Papuans arrested for defying a ban by the provincial governor J. P. Salossa on flying the separatist Morning Star flag were to be tried for treason. Local Papuan police commander Dedy Kusnadi told the *Jakarta Post*: “The seven will be charged with treason as stipulated in article 106 of the Criminal Code, which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.”

In an open letter to the New Zealand foreign minister on November 30 on behalf of the Indonesian Human Rights Committee, Maire Leadbeater provided details of a pre-dawn raid on November 5 in which security forces killed 10 Papuans in the Baliem Valley area. Among the dead was OPM leader Yustinus Murib, who days earlier had been calling for peaceful dialogue. The

troops put Murib’s body on display along with the nine others.

Some 8,000 Indonesian troops and 9,000 police are currently stationed in Papua. The Indonesian Human Rights Committee open letter claims that another 2,600 troops are being sent to the province. The military has formed local militias, including the Barisan Merah Putih. Among these militiamen are native Papuans, who are used to carry out some of the TNI’s dirty work and to act as agents provocateur.

The fact that Komnas HAM has announced investigations into the incidents at Wamena and Waisor indicates some concern in ruling circles in Jakarta that the activities of the security forces in Papua may have dangerous political repercussions. Far from reining in the TNI and police, however, the Megawati administration has fully backed the use of military repression against separatist movements in Papua, Aceh and elsewhere.



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