

# UN-backed report indicts Indonesia, Australia and US for Timor atrocities

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Despite its limited framework (see: “Incriminating documents looted in East Timor”), the report of the East Timor Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) made a series of damning findings against Indonesia, the US and Australia.

The report indicted the Indonesian government and security forces for the deaths of as many as 183,000 civilians—more than 90 percent of whom died from hunger and illness—between 1975 and 1999. It documented 18,600 unlawful killings or disappearances and 8,500 cases of torture, with public beheadings, mutilation of genitalia, burying and burning alive of victims, use of cigarettes to burn victims, and ears and genitals being lopped off to display to families.

The deaths amounted to almost a third of East Timor’s pre-invasion population. As well as napalm and other US-supplied weapons, the Indonesian security forces “consciously decided to use starvation of East Timorese civilians as a weapon of war”, the report says. “The intentional imposition of conditions of life which could not sustain tens of thousands of East Timorese civilians amounted to extermination as a crime against humanity committed against the East Timorese population.”

Thousands of East Timorese women were sexually assaulted. “Rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence were tools used as part of the campaign designed to inflict a deep experience of terror, powerlessness and hopelessness upon pro-independence supporters,” the CAVR found.

A culture of impunity prevailed in the occupied territory. “The violations were committed in execution of a systematic plan approved, conducted and controlled by Indonesian military commanders at the highest level.”

It was not credible to maintain that rogue elements in

the military were acting on their own initiative without the knowledge of superiors in Jakarta. “In 1999 Indonesian security forces and their auxiliaries conducted a coordinated and sustained campaign of violence designed to intimidate the pro-independence movement.... Military bases were openly used as militia headquarters, and military equipment, including firearms were distributed to militia groups.”

The report concluded that, “Justice and accountability must involve those who planned, ordered, committed and are responsible for the most serious human rights violations [who] in many cases have seen their military and civilian careers flourish as a result of their activities.”

The United States was indicted for backing the 1975 invasion to bolster the Suharto regime in the wake of the US defeat in Vietnam. “As a Permanent Member of the Security Council and superpower, the US had the power and influence to prevent Indonesia’s military intervention but declined to do so. It consented to the invasion and allowed Indonesia to use its military equipment in the knowledge that this violated US law and would be used to suppress the right of self-determination.”

The CAVR condemned Australia for its long-term de jure recognition of the Indonesian occupation and its failure to try to prevent the use of force in East Timor. It concluded that Australia was influenced by a desire to get the most it could out of maritime boundary negotiations affecting oil and gas reserves.

Australia gave Indonesia economic and military assistance throughout the 24-year occupation and advocated on its behalf in the international community, the commission found. The report also made special mention of the more recent role of Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer prior to the vote for

independence in 1999.

“The commission finds that, even when (former president BJ) Habibie was moving towards his decision to offer the East Timorese a choice between remaining part of Indonesia and independence, the Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made it clear that his government believed that it should be several years before the East Timorese exercised their right to make that choice and that it would be preferable from an Australian point of view if Timor-Leste remained legally part of Indonesia.”

The CAVR recommended reparations from Indonesia and the members of the UN Security Council, including Britain and the US, who gave military backing to Indonesia between 1974 and 1999, as well as those nations that provided military assistance to Jakarta, including Australia. Reparations should include, “business companies which profited from war and related activities in Timor-Leste between 1974-1999.”

Compensation to victims should last for “an initial period of 5 years, with the possibility of extension” and a scholarship program for children “until the last eligible child turns 18 years old, that is, in 2017.”



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