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Indonesian Military Terror In Aceh: From Bad to Worse

By Curt Gabrielson

NOVEMBER 16, 2002

JAKARTA, Indonesia—At the beginning of November, just in time for Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, my partner Pamela and I traveled to the north-Sumatran province of Aceh (pronounced AH-chay). We found the situation there even worse than that of West Papua in terms of military repression and intimidation. In preparing for our trip, we heard of tourists being routinely searched, and police forbidding tourists to make contact with local organizations, saying such contact is not tourism.¹ Police had beaten and detained two foreign women a few weeks before our arrival, claiming they had been doing subversive activities on a tourist visa. We also had tourist visas, but reasoned that these others had been gathering information much more sensitive than we planned to gather. We dressed like tourists, did a bit of sightseeing, kept notes in Tetum, East Timor's language, and did not collect any documents or sensitive publications. In the end we were not searched, but noticed that we were often being watched.

We met with many people from a variety of civic groups working to stop the violence and bring justice to the region. We found little optimism, and a multitude of reasons for despair. To illuminate the complex situation, I'll first present a brief timeline outlining events important to understanding the present conflict.

Aceh Timeline

1500's and 1600's – Sultanate of Aceh rules broad coastal regions of northern Sumatra, resisting any colonial intrusion.

1873-1903 – Acehnese make a reputation fighting tenaciously against Dutch East Indies Army despite a lack of modern weapons.

August 17, 1945 – Indonesia declares independence from the Netherlands and begins fighting to drive out Dutch forces.

December 17, 1949 – Acehnese establish Aceh province and elect Daud Beureueh governor.

December 29, 1949 – Dutch formally accept Indonesian independence.

August 8, 1950 – Council of Ministers in Jakarta divides Indonesia into ten provinces, incorporating Aceh into the province of North Sumatra. The decree on the establishment of Aceh province is disregarded.

January 23, 1951 – Indonesian Prime Minister M. Natsir announces the dissolution of the Aceh province and its absorption into North Sumatra.

September 20, 1953 – Daud Beureueh declares Aceh independent from

¹ A few months back an Indonesian government spokesperson complained of all the "problem tourists" in Papua and Aceh, and said if tourists want to come to Indonesia, they should go to Bali.

Indonesia. Numerous Acehese back the rebellion.

1959 – After prolonged conflict with rebels, the central government gives Aceh “special territory” status, re-establishing it as a separate province and conferring on it a higher degree of autonomy in religious, educational and cultural matters.

October 1965 – General Suharto takes power as Indonesia’s second president. His ascension to power, which came about in a plot ostensibly to foil a communist coup, was followed by government-sanctioned killing of around a million Indonesians alleged to be communist sympathizers. With strong support from Washington, Suharto’s regime was marked by increasing militarism, repression and an opening to multinational companies.

December 12, 1965 – Mobil Oil Indonesia, a joint venture between Mobil Oil (USA) and Pertamina (Indonesia’s state oil company), sign a contract to explore and extract oil and natural gas resources in the region near Lhokseumawe, North Aceh.

1976 – The Free Aceh Movement — *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or GAM — is founded and begins open armed resistance against the central Indonesian government.

1989 – Aceh is designated a “military operations zone” (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, or DOM). Indonesian military forces carry out widespread repression and human-rights abuses for the next nine years.

1998 – After Indonesian President Suharto is forced from office, DOM status is lifted from Aceh and both Suharto’s successor B.J. Habibie and the head of the Indonesian military, General Wiranto, apologize for any “excesses” under DOM. Wiranto later states that no officer would be brought to trial over activities in Aceh, “because they were merely carrying out their duties.”

January 1999 – Inspired by Habibie’s acceptance of a referendum for East Timor, students in Banda Aceh, capital of Aceh province, begin a popular movement calling for a referendum in Aceh to choose between independence and “Autonomy” under Indonesia.

1999 – Mobil merges with Exxon to become the largest petroleum company in the world.

October 1999 – Abdurrahman Wahid is elected president of Indonesia. He soon makes a widely quoted statement to the effect that, if East Timor

got a referendum, why shouldn’t Aceh?

May 18, 2000 – A human rights tribunal in Banda Aceh convicts 24 Indonesian low-ranking soldiers and one civilian of murdering 57 villagers during an “uprising” in 1999.

June 2000 – On the initiative of President Wahid, negotiations are held between the Indonesian government and GAM, leading to a “Humanitarian Pause,” supervised by the Henri Dunant Centre in Geneva (now called the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue). The Indonesian military violates the “Pause” with the assassination of several Acehese leaders, including Jafar Hamzah, who called for human rights and peaceful solutions.

March 2001 – ExxonMobil suspends operations due to violence and turmoil surrounding its Lhokseumawe oil fields. Facilities remain closed for three months causing the company to delay some US\$350 million in production.

April 2001– In a desperate effort to restore Indonesian control over Aceh, President Wahid issues a “presidential instruction,” giving a free hand to the military in Aceh. By the end of 2001, around 2,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the region.

June 2001 – The International Labor Rights Fund files a U.S. lawsuit charging human-rights abuses against ExxonMobil on behalf of 11 plaintiffs living near its petroleum plants in Lhokseumawe.

July 2001 – Megawati Sukarnoputri succeeds Wahid as President of Indonesia in an abrupt move by the Indonesian Parliament. Megawati apologizes for “mismanagement, for prolonged conflicts and abuse of human rights” in both Aceh and West Papua.

August 2001 – Megawati government signs “Special Autonomy” law for Aceh, promising more political power, a greater share of corporate profits from the area and the commencement of Islamic (*Syariah*) Law.

April 2002 – President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s government dispatches 1,850 fresh troops to Aceh to reinforce army and security forces. Today an estimated 30-40,000 security personnel patrol the region. (GAM fighters are thought to number 1,800.)

May 2002 – Indonesian officials and GAM exiled leaders begin a new round of peace talks in Geneva, again with the support of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

September 2002 – Death toll in Aceh averages

15 people — mostly civilians — per day for the year 2002. Lesley McCulloch, a Scottish academic, and Joy Lee Sadler, an American health worker, are detained with their Indonesian translator for carrying video and written information about GAM while traveling on a tourist visa.

November 2002 – Indonesian army surrounds several hundred GAM fighters as well as some local civilians in a swamp 35 kilometers from Lhokseumawe, Aceh.

“It’s The Military, Stupid.” This is the title of a paper presented by Indonesian Liem Soei Liong to a conference on “Violence in Indonesia” in Holland in 2000. Liem is a member of one of the foremost Indonesian human-rights groups, Tapol.² The case he presents is as clear-cut as one can ever achieve in the social sciences: the Indonesian military is the terror of millions of people throughout the nation it is supposed to be protecting, and this violence has not increased significantly since the fall of Suharto.

Aceh has a population of around four million. Current levels of army, special forces, police, riot police and various other armed security personnel, the vast majority of whom come from outside Aceh, amount to about one for every 100 locals. We saw blotches of green military uniforms everywhere we went, and reports of the same situation in more remote locations. Thus, as a local

civic leader pointed out to us, there is plenty of “security,” yet no one is secure.

Considering the many deaths, disappearances, illegal detentions, tortures, rapes, displacements of families³ and other human-rights abuses we heard of, it would be accurate to state that Aceh is a region at war. The military insists that it is doing its legitimate duty, that of putting down an armed threat to its territory. Unfortunately, plenty of evidence shows that the military is advancing its own economic goals, creating chaos in order to justify its continued presence in the region, as well as violating the human rights of Acehnese civilians on a daily basis.

The Indonesian military is a for-profit organization. Across the archipelago, it is involved in business far beyond merely defense. Military-owned companies mine, fish, log, pump petroleum, and otherwise exploit all manner of Indonesian resources. Military officers are involved in a wide range of illegal operations including drug sales, smuggling, gambling, prostitution and trafficking of women and children. And the Indonesian military rents its services as security for foreign companies. ExxonMobil uses military as security in Aceh just as Freeport Mining uses it in West Papua.⁴ It is as if these companies are paying the mafia to protect their operations.

The mafia nature of the Indonesian military is manifest elegantly in General Endriartono’s statement about the recent siege of a GAM-held area near Lhokseumawe:



² Tapol means “political prisoner” in Bahasa Indonesia. This UK-based organization is one of the best sources of well-researched information about human-rights violations throughout Indonesia.

³ Tapol estimates tens of thousands of people are currently displaced by military violence in Aceh. The provincial government refuses to recognize these internally displaced people, so they rely heavily on extended family and humanitarian organizations.

⁴ See my newsletter CG-22 of November 1, 2002 for more information on Freeport and the military.

“Should they [GAM] fail to sign the peace agreement by the deadline, we will bombard [the area].”

And as with the mafia, serious conflicts exist *within* the armed forces of Indonesia.⁵ In late September, several hundred soldiers from the army attacked two police compounds near Medan, just south of Aceh. It wasn't just a bomb or a couple shots — they stayed at it for hours, severely damaging the compounds, wounding many and killing at least two passing civilians. This embarrassing escapade was rumored to be the result of a fiercely competitive illicit drug business, apparently with unclear guidelines on profit sharing.⁶ For another example, Indonesian police were until six months ago employed as security for various parts of ExxonMobil's Aceh operations, but had trouble dealing with continued attacks by unknown assailants. The military then stepped in to replace the police, and mysteriously, the attacks abruptly stopped.

The military's dealings with GAM have a sickening similarity to its activities throughout 24 years of Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Extra-judicial killings of civilians are commonplace, especially at times when GAM has carried out a successful operation against the military. The military makes wide use of rape as intimidation and torture against wives and girlfriends of suspected GAM members. The area surrounding ExxonMobil's operations has reported a recent increase in rapes by military personnel.

Although Aceh's DOM, or martial-law status was officially ended in 1998, armed forces still have a clear green light to do as they please. All locals we talked with said the current situation is more repressive than at any time under the nine years of DOM, and that the Megawati government in Jakarta seems to be doing its best to reinstate conditions that existed under Suharto. They noted that since 9/11, the military has cockiness unheard of before. In several recent cases, locals inquiring after missing persons were told by military personnel not to bother looking any longer — they'd already killed them. Megawati herself urged a military audience in December 2001 to “do your duty... according to your oath of service and your vows as a soldier. In this way you can carry out your duty without having to worry about human rights.” More solid assurance of impunity could hardly be asked for.

This came at the same time that Indonesia's

state-sponsored Human Right Commission (Komnas HAM) reported 163 disappearances, 368 cases of torture and 15-20,000 children orphaned as a direct result of military activity in Aceh up to 1999. Further, the Aceh provincial government has recently agreed to pay \$5,000 each to 4,400 Acehnese victims of state human-rights abuses. No one seriously believes that anything has changed in the behavior of the military, and one may wonder if the local Aceh government is taking steps to make such compensation a yearly line item in their budget. (One may also wonder if this money will ever make it to the victims.)

Human-rights workers and other civil society members active in trying to bring peace to the region bear a disproportionate brunt of this military repression. My partner Pamela visited Aceh in April 2000, and on our recent trip found that most of the contacts she had made on her earlier trip were either dead or had been forced into exile. Police or military have raided the offices of many local civil-society organizations, and have frequently detained their members for unstated reasons.⁷ This sort of repression makes it impossible to accurately monitor ongoing human-rights abuses by the military. It also makes life as a human-rights worker extremely difficult.

Yet the people we met with in Aceh were organized and well-informed and possessed a sophisticated strategy for their work. Most were under 25, and many had been to jail for their human-rights work. Most were involved with organizations forced to work underground, as well as officially sanctioned



Orphans, Banda Aceh

⁵ A few years back, Indonesia formally separated its military and police forces. However, it was difficult for us to see where the line was drawn between their activities. No one we talked to in Aceh had anything good to say about either one, nor any of the other shadowy branches of Indonesia's “security” forces.

⁶ Initial response to this incident by military authorities in Jakarta: “If the military is found to be at fault, the officers in charge will be punished.” One would hope so, but would be unwise to wager on it.

⁷ It is common knowledge to Acehnese, as it was for East Timorese and is for many in other parts of Indonesia, that detainment by the military is nearly synonymous with torture.

ones. Fully half were women. All were Muslim.

What they had to say was very straightforward, and their stories corresponded well from one to the next. They said they want peace. They were careful to define that peace: not a ceasefire, not a “win,” but a peace with justice, an enduring end to all hostilities. They said that currently there is only the tiniest space for them to work toward this goal. The military is determined to silence their voices, voices that have the respect and backing of a broad community of Acehnese. They said that, due to military repression, the community has no chance to add its collective voice to the discussion of current problems, and until it does there can be no resolution, no peace.

We heard, in a unified chorus, that the number of troops and security personnel in Aceh must be significantly reduced to bring about any positive change. In fact, several noted that *just* removing the military would solve a great number of problems. Military involvement in politics is endemic, despite Indonesia’s recent national plan to remove military representatives from national parliament. Combined with the military’s economic interests, this amounts to very thorough control over the region. (Again, this same situation exists throughout Indonesia.)

Our sources pointed out that the military’s current stated strategy — increasing military force until GAM succumbs — has a very poor likelihood of success. From a theoretical viewpoint, military action can not control the minds of the masses and actually stands a good chance of making more enemies among ordinary Acehnese and thus more supporters of GAM to take over as their ranks are killed off. Empirically speaking, for over 100 years state military action has not solved the problems of Aceh (or East Timor or Vietnam or many other nations), and it is not likely to do so in the future. For this reason, nearly all of our informants offered their earnest desire to begin a dialogue inclusive of the community, the government, the military and GAM, along with international observers. Only in this way do they see hope for a better future.

Our informants do not trust the local provincial government. Unlike Papua, there are very few “moles” or people on the inside waiting for key opportunities to push political events in positive directions. We heard only of the near-complete control of local leaders by military powers and other forces from Jakarta.

It was not surprising then to find that most of our informants were pro-independence. One laid it out plainly: “What are the possibilities of us reforming the Indonesian military and government, then redirecting the wealth that is currently flowing out of Aceh back to us, while still remaining part of Indonesia? Next to zero. But East Timor received independence, so this is defi-



Pamela gets a ride from a friend.

nately possible.” Not one high-ranking military officer has ever been tried for any crime in Indonesia, and only a tiny handful of low-ranking scapegoats have been punished, even for the heinous destruction of East Timor. It is extremely hard to even visualize the reform of the Indonesian military. It is like proposing to tame a full-grown bear: a much more realistic plan would be to kill or cage it.

Nearly every human-rights worker we talked to did not support GAM (nor were they supported by GAM). Unlike FALINTIL, the armed front of the East Timorese resistance, GAM has not demonstrated a high respect for human rights or justice. GAM members have killed hundreds of civilians and committed many other human-rights abuses, usually justifying themselves by accusing the victims of being agents of the Indonesian military or sympathetic to Indonesian government policies. We heard that many civilians are afraid of GAM, but many others support GAM.⁸

Unlike the OPM, Papua’s armed resistance, GAM has some clandestine support from abroad, an extensive arsenal and active, unified strategies. Some of our informants said, however, that GAM has had many new recruits recently, since thousands of Acehnese civilians have fallen victim to Indonesian military violence. Together with these new recruits come problems of discipline and chain of command. It seems many reckless individuals, some with criminal pasts, have signed up and are only slowly being brought under control.

Though not a Robin Hood band, GAM is a force to be reckoned with, and we sensed that many Acehnese are generally content to have any force at all to counter

⁸ We learned that the military sometimes uses GAM’s existence to their advantage: By accusing a village or region of GAM affiliation, the military can enter and carry out any sort of economic exploitation with impunity.



The main mosque in Banda Aceh. This same morning we posed for this picture, a crowd of about 200 were refused entrance for a group prayer.

the military. GAM has achieved international recognition for Aceh through the peace talks in Geneva. Though the military is sending representatives, other leaders in Jakarta protest even sitting at a table with armed secessionists. Our sources complained that neither GAM nor the Indonesian military represents the majority of Acehnese. (Several women also pointed out that Acehnese women's voices are completely lacking from the talks in Geneva.) At the same time they pointed out that international press coverage resulting from these talks is extremely important, in that Aceh has few supporters in other nations. Aceh has the same problem as Papua and East Timor, in terms of foreign governments prioritizing (lucrative) good relations with the government of Indonesia, the largest, richest nation in Southeast Asia.

And whereas both East Timor and Papua have Christian majorities, with churches that can spread news rapidly across the globe, we learned that the mosques of Aceh do not serve a similar function. In fact, it seems the mosques of Aceh are being used against the Acehnese. When Pamela and I tried to clarify whether some *Imams* (Muslim leaders) were anti-Jakarta and some were pro-Jakarta, our informant corrected us: "Not pro-Jakarta, but an integral part of the military / government structure that oppresses us." We saw a swarm of soldiers attending a service at a mosque within a military compound, and we heard nothing of Islam being used as a liberating force. It seems unlikely that a "liberation-theology" mosque or *Imam* would last long in the current political environment.

Many people who know little about Aceh have heard

that its citizens are "fundamentalist Muslims." As this has become a very significant and dangerous label since 9/11, we were anxious to determine its validity. We learned that 94 percent of Aceh is Muslim, saw many mosques and many women wearing the Islamic head covering (called *jilbab* and worn in many parts of Indonesia) and noticed that most everyone was honoring the dawn-to-dusk fast of Ramadan. But at the same time, we noticed none of the extreme, unaccepting behavior that defines other "fundamentalist" religious groups. We saw no women with veils or clad head-to-toe in black, heard of no exclusion of women from education or stonings, met people who rarely went to a mosque and found immediate acceptance of our *not* being Muslim and not honoring the

fast.⁹ In general, people were utterly friendly and helpful wherever we went. There has never been a foreigner killed in Aceh.

Despite these conspicuous signs of tolerance and understanding, Acehnese have been stereotyped as violent, uncompromising, hard-line Muslims. When Jakarta offered "Special Autonomy" to Aceh, Islamic (*Syariah*) Law was included in the package. GAM and many civil-society groups protested that this was a distraction from the primary goals of economic justice, democratic process and human rights. Many we spoke to emphasized that Islam is an integral part of their culture, not part of their political agenda.

Yet Jakarta can gain much from calling the Acehnese fundamentalist Muslims, especially in this post 9/11 world of terrorist-hunting. Such a label makes it much harder for human-rights supporters in the U.S. and other western nations to gain support for the Acehnese people. Also, if Acehnese are seen to be Muslim fundamentalists, it is but a small step to calling them terrorists and thus justifying increased military action in their region.

This step has already been taken, though it came across as a bit of a farce. Shortly after 9/11, some leaders in Indonesia were working to get GAM listed by the United Nation as a terrorist organization. However, when reports came out recently that Al Qaeda had entered Aceh, GAM, the local government, civil-society groups and a military official denied it. Still, Jakarta now refers to GAM as a band of terrorists. Absurdly, some officials

⁹ I speculate that my body would last for only one or two days without eating or drinking during the sweltering daylight hours of Aceh.

even publicly suspected GAM of the October bombing in Bali, despite a lack of evidence for the link and the fact that GAM is anxiously courting mainstream international support. (A great many Acehnese and Indonesians immediately suspected the military of the Bali bombing, and two officials have been implicated in relation to it. According to history in Indonesia, It's The Military, Stupid, with or without connections to other terrorist groups.)

One source that GAM can forget about receiving any support from is the executives at ExxonMobil's operation in Aceh. Continually decrying "instability" in the region, ExxonMobil's corporate spokespersons deny any awareness about the situation Pamela and I heard so much about.

"We don't get involved in politics," said Ron Wilson, head of ExxonMobil's operations in Indonesia, in a recent *Wall Street Journal* interview. A more flat-faced lie is rarely heard in corporate PR. ExxonMobil (incidentally, the second largest contributor to President Bush's election fund) had to play top-level politics just to enter the country here, which it did in close coordination with the worst of Suharto's government. A sweet deal was obtained for both Mobil and Suharto's cronies, but not for the Acehnese. In the early nineties, Mobil is reported to have produced almost one quarter of its global revenue from its gas fields near Lhokseumawe. Yet, only around two percent of the plant's revenues went directly to the region of Aceh. With "Special Autonomy" that number is being grudgingly changed in favor of the Acehnese, and it is easy to understand their "too little, too late" reaction.

On June 20, 2001, the International Labor Rights Fund filed a claim in Federal District Court for the District of Columbia, on behalf of 11 villagers from Aceh who were victims of human rights abuses by ExxonMobil's security forces. The general theory of the case was that ExxonMobil knowingly employed brutal military troops to protect its operations, and the company aided and abet-



A photo in the house of a man who once worked for ExxonMobil. The boat is somewhat symbolic as it hauls liquid natural gas away from the Acehnese people.

ted the human-rights violations through financial and other material support to the security forces.

ExxonMobil's strategy of defense in the U.S. lawsuit of June 2001 was an amazingly dirty use of politics. ExxonMobil petitioned the judge to seek intervention from the U.S. State Department on the grounds that the case could potentially have a negative impact on US/Indonesia relations. ExxonMobil inferred that the plaintiff victims were "fundamentalist insurgents trying to break a country apart by bombings and other terrorist activities." As we have seen, the military itself has carried out most of the activities that could properly be described as terror in Aceh. As noted in *Down to Earth Newsletter*, August 2002:

"[Appealing to the State Department] is an attempt to divert attention from the real substance of the case which has nothing to do with international terrorism, but concerns human rights violations including rape, torture and the murder of unarmed civilians living near ExxonMobil's operations. ExxonMobil's characterization of the victims of torture, killings and rape as "fundamentalist insurgents" is again a deliberate attempt to cover up the fact that civilians, not armed guerrillas have suffered the most in the Aceh war."

Sixteen members of Congress and two senators sent letters to the State Department saying that intervention would send exactly the wrong message to Indonesia: that its military is free to act with impunity in the post 9/11 world. Nevertheless, the U.S. State Department recommended dismissing the case, saying that U.S. interests would be harmed in that Indonesia may be alienated in the "War on Terror." (See: <http://www.laborrights.org>) The plaintiffs are now fighting this move.

Meanwhile, ExxonMobil says it isn't aware of any incidents involving the troops guarding its facilities harassing villagers. Nearly everyone we talked to, however, was aware of such incidents. One group in Aceh told us of receiving eye-witness accounts from people who had seen Indonesian armed forces using ExxonMobil heavy equipment to dig and cover mass graves of people killed by military operations. Some of these mass graves, very near to ExxonMobil's operations, have been opened and verified by Komnas HAM. Spokespersons for ExxonMobil then claimed that they were not responsible for what the military did with borrowed equipment. (It is difficult to imagine them using this sort of argument if the situation had occurred in the US.)

Some of our informants characterized ExxonMobil as not only paying for military protection, but also facilitating a much broader military presence in Aceh.¹⁰ If ExxonMobil was not there to "protect", or if it was not threatened, the military would have much less excuse

¹⁰ Some of our sources made the Freudian slip of referring to the military guarding ExxonMobil as "ExxonMobil's military."

for its enormous presence in Aceh. But since ExxonMobil invited the military forces, they are free to generate as much violence and chaos as necessary to justify ever increasing numbers and involvement in economic and political control of the region.

(Beyond the rampant human-rights abuses allegedly committed by their hired guards and the wholesale removal of Aceh's resources, ExxonMobil has committed some serious environmental abuses. Walhi, an Indonesian environmental group, pointed out to us that ExxonMobil workers, the majority of whom are imported from outside Aceh, don't live near the plants where the air- and water-pollution is terrible, but that next-door villagers had no choice but to live with it. The group reports abnormally rapid corrosion of sheet-metal roofing, as well as plant and animal sicknesses, reduced production and growth rates of plants, greatly reduced fish population in surrounding rivers and the ocean, and hair loss, skin diseases, respiratory diseases and eye problems in local people. Can they show systematic evidence and tests to prove that ExxonMobil is to blame? According to this well-respected, national organization, no, ExxonMobil won't even allow such studies to be carried out on its property. What's more, studies such as these are expensive, and ExxonMobil is not paying. It is not even ready to take the minimal step that Nike took a few years back, and allow independent monitoring of its operation.)

We asked each person we met what sort of support they hope to receive from the international community. We observed great thoughtfulness and strategy in their answers. At a fundamental level, many people said they wanted the international community to know Acehese people and culture, and to understand the truth about what is going on. They want to repair the fundamentalist terrorist reputation that has been attached to them. They want it clear that their religion is *not* the issue, *not* the problem. More practically, they want a larger international presence in Aceh: observers to report to the world about the ongoing tragedies. They also want protection on a

day-to-day basis from the violence of the military as they carry out their work.

Several of our informants were working on setting up an "Aceh congress," a group of representatives from all parts of Aceh that are more in tune with the desires of the masses than the local governing officials. This congress would then sit together and discuss means of attaining peace in Aceh. These sources emphasized that the Aceh congress would need much support from abroad.

While walking around the main mosque in downtown Banda Aceh, we noticed a demonstration at one of the gates. We learned that these people wanted to enter the mosque to have a group prayer for peace on the second anniversary of a larger demonstration asking for a popular referendum. Police prevented them from entering the mosque. If a peaceful group of citizens cannot get permission for a group prayer, it can be seen that the proposed congress has a chance of success *only* if foreign solidarity, both governmental and nongovernmental, is strong and consistent.¹¹

We were impressed by the number of strategies and ideas our informants have devised about using the existing narrow space for action and continuing the peaceful fight for justice in Aceh. Many expressed great pessimism, pointing to the fact that the U.S. is supporting Jakarta, Jakarta is supporting the military, and any constructive



Pamela and I study the art of choosing durians in Banda Aceh.

¹¹ In recent months, the Indonesian military has sponsored several mass "Prayers for Peace" at mosques throughout the region, apparently to increase their image of working for peace. One human-rights worker told us that Acehese were forced to attend these prayers and in one case the week before we arrived, the military, displeased with the low level of participation in one village, held around 700 captive in a mosque for hours and killed several of them.



I did some science activities with these street kids at their after-school program. They were a lot like the California kids I work with and not much at all like “fundamentalist insurgents.”

civic action in Aceh may compromise the military’s position of domination. In the same breath, they vowed to continue to do all they can for peace and justice.

Raihana was one of these inspirational persons. She is a soft-spoken student who has just turned 21 in prison. She was detained in July after participating in a demonstration in which she held up a poster of Megawati’s face with an X scratched over it. Now she is being tried (slowly) for insulting the president. She spoke to us together with her lawyer on the day before we left Aceh. She said she certainly had no regrets and did not consider herself a criminal, in that the evidence is clear that Megawati is puppet of the military. Further, she said she would not let her jail time slow down her commitment and action for peace in Aceh. She outlined very clearly her goals for Aceh’s future peace, and re-

solved to keep fighting until they were achieved.

Raihana spoke of the great influence Washington has with Jakarta. The U.S. could press Indonesia’s leaders for military reform, prosecution of past crimes, cessation of current violence and more serious work with civil society. Alternatively, it could begin funding the Indonesian military’s criminal activities again, as the Pentagon is now proposing (<http://etan.org/action/issues/miltie.htm>).

The U.S. government has to decide whether to side with Raihana and her people or with the military forces of Indonesia. I think it is not so difficult a choice for most U.S. citizens. The only question is whether we citizens still hold enough power in the U.S. to require our government, military and corporations to put human rights first in foreign affairs. □

Additional resources:

- <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/aceh/> Human Rights Watch’s page on Aceh
- <http://tapol.gn.apc.org/bulletin168.htm> Tapol’s recent report on Aceh
- <http://www2.exxonmobil.com/corporate/> ExxonMobil’s site
- <http://www.stopexxonmobil.org/> An international organization against ExxonMobil
- <http://www.pressurepoint.org/> Corporate monitoring group targeting ExxonMobil
- <http://dte.gn.apc.org/news.htm> Down to Earth newsletters

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Fellows and their Activities

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Andrew Rice (May 2002 - 2004) • **UGANDA**

A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew will be spending two years in Uganda, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

Matthew Z. Wheeler (October 2002-2004) • **SOUTHEAST ASIA**

A former research assistant for the Rand Corporation specializing in South and Southeast Asia, Matt will spend two years looking into proposals, plans and realities of regional integration (and disintegration) along the Mekong River, from China to the sea at Vietnam. With a B.A. in liberal arts from Sarah Lawrence and an M.A. from Harvard in East Asian studies (as well as a year-long Blakemore Fellowship in Thai language studies) Matt will have to take long- and short-term conflicts in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia into account as he lives, writes and learns about the region.

James G. Workman (January 2002 - 2004) • **Southern Africa**

A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

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