

Displacement in Indonesia

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As of mid-November 1999 almost 640,000 people were in government-established displaced persons camps in 8 provinces across Indonesia. The camps are in East Nusa Tenggara, Aceh, North Sumatra, North Sulawesi, West Kalimantan, Southeast Sulawesi, South Sulawesi and East Java. These people have been displaced as a result of five main conflicts.

East and West Timor: Violence erupted following the E. Timor referendum on 26 August in which over 90% of the ET population voted for independence. Killings, arson and looting by militias reportedly supported by the Indonesian military forced around 260,000 people to flee to WT between August and October. By mid-December 117,000 refugees had returned home. Around 150,000 remained, most of whom support the former Indonesian administration and will stay, but perhaps 50,000 will eventually cross back to ET.

Aceh: Local newspaper accounts estimate 50,000 transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia such as Java and South Sulawesi have left Aceh since the outbreak of the latest round of violence in mid-1999. They fled as a result of threats made against them by the Free Aceh Movement. Some have been murdered, more had their houses burned down. The government has done little for them except offer help to relocate elsewhere. Internally, some 20,000 are reportedly displaced, but this figure varies from week to week.

West Kalimantan: Further east, Dayak tribesmen attacked Madurese migrant farmers in March and April 1999, in which indigenous Malays also joined in. Five hundred may have been killed in the first round, approximately 200 in the second round, the majority of them Madurese. From 20,000 to 40,000 Madurese were displaced from their homes. They are now being resettled with government assistance in a special reservation at Tebang Kacang near Pontianak, but the area is too small for the large number of families involved.

Ambon/Buton: Fighting between Christians and Muslims on Ambon broke out on 19 January and has produced thousands of mainly Muslim refugees, many of whom have gone to the island of Buton, off South Sulawesi, whence their ancestors came. The 103,347 displaced persons there, who include 3,698 East Timorese, greatly outnumber the local population of around 450,448.

Another 13,000 have become refugees in remote Tual, southeast Maluku. The violence continues daily, despite a peacebuilding visit in December by President Abdurrahman Wahid and Vice President Megawati. 657 civilians and 14 security officers have been killed in Ambon since Jan 19, 1999, according to media reports in December.

Many Christians have also become refugees in Maluku province, for example in the majority Muslim island of Banda, where there are now practically no Christians left.

West Irian: This is not a refugee crisis. The basic issue here is one of a long-standing demand for greater autonomy. The twenty-seven year old war in the province has killed many thousands, particularly around the Freeport copper and goldmines in the central highlands. Annual influx of over 10,000 families of transmigrants threatens to reduce the West Papuans to a minority. Conflicts over land between the military and locals have occurred regularly since the 1970s.

The province has the poorest health standards of any province, include highest infant and maternal mortality rates. It also has the highest HIV-prevalence country-wide.

On Dec 1, 1999, the Morning Star flag was raised in West Papua, at a ceremony attended by thousands. In the days following, several people died in clashes with police, who also arrested key leaders of the OPM (Free Papua Movement).

Causes of the Crises

- Enormous economic disparities between the centre and the regions, although revenues have largely been earned from regions. Widespread poverty, unemployment, food shortages, etc., in the past 2 years. Also, a rise in religious fundamentalism in some parts of the country, but this is

nowhere close to what has come to be associated with, say, Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East or Pakistan.

- Feelings that Jakarta has tried to “Javanise” the regions by the transmigration programme over the years, as well as suppressed anger over widespread human rights abuses in the regions, have come to the fore in the post-Suharto, post-Asian economic crisis, leading to widespread violence and anarchy.
- A common locally cited reason is that of ‘provocateurs’, people (who for whatever reason or consideration) incite ill-will and thus violence. This as opposed to violence resulting from verifiable, tangible, causes. This explanation is typically Javanese, in that nothing is what it seems to be.
- Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism (aka KKN in Bahasa Indonesia), entrenched during the Suharto regime, have additionally galvanised those at the short end of the stick.

Two crises brewing which have not received much publicity outside Indonesia are that of Madurese people settled in West Kalimantan and of the Acehnese in Sumatra. As such, some detailing of these issues follow, both as examples of the complex nature of displacement, as well as to give them the wider publicity they cry out for.

Aceh: the Crucible?

But Indonesia’s big issue continues to be the restive region of Aceh, on the western island of Sumatra. Aceh’s demand for independence has a long and tortured history: it is among Indonesia’s richest provinces in terms of natural resources, though this has not translated into wealth for its people, making this problem a prime source of separatist discontent.

The main resource is natural gas with the province providing a fifth of Indonesia’s export earnings from oil and gas. Oil and gas revenues form a major component of Indonesia’s national budget, leading many analysts to question whether Jakarta can afford to lose Aceh.

The gas mostly comes from the huge Arun plant on the eastern coast, which is partly owned by U.S. and Japanese

firms. In 1976, when Arun started, fury that the deal did not involve Acehnese sparked the establishment of the Free Aceh Movement, at the centre of a separatism movement ever since. Initially a low-level rebellion, it flared up in 1989.

Repression and Resistance

Former President Suharto embarked on what turned out to be a brutal attempt to crush separatist rebels. During a nine-year military operation, which ended in 1997, human rights activists estimate at least 2,000 people were killed and thousands tortured or raped. The fall of Suharto in May 1998, followed by the discovery of mass graves of army victims in the province, unleashed a fresh wave of separatist sentiment.

The rebel Free Aceh Movement, also known in Indonesia by the acronym GAM, was founded in 1976. Its elderly leader Hasan Tiro lives in Sweden. They have strong support in some areas but have also been accused of human rights abuses, although not on the same scale as the Indonesian security forces.

Free Aceh accuses Jakarta of neo-colonialism. An attempt to get peace talks going in Bangkok earlier this year failed. Free Aceh leader Tiro subsequently refused to meet a government-backed team sent to Sweden specifically to meet him.

Violence has also escalated this year, leaving several hundred people dead. Two massacres by Indonesian security forces in May and July brought international condemnation and the brutal military action has only further alienated the Acehnese.

Many analysts blame the hardline tactics of the Jakarta government for encouraging what has become widespread support for the separatist movement. A number of analysts say the majority of Acehnese would choose independence if given the choice.

Aceh is nominally an 'autonomous region' within Indonesia, but this supposed autonomy in the past has meant little. The current government of President Abdurrahman Wahid has pledged to change this and give Aceh true autonomy. So far there has been little progress in that direction.

Current Situation

Energised by the East Timor referendum, Acehnese staged a mass demonstration on November 8 in Banda Aceh to demand their own referendum on independence. An estimated half a million people took part.

Over the latter half of 1999, the calls for an East Timor style referendum grew louder by the day, and while negotiations and talks have been held between senior government officials and the Acehnese, it is not clear precisely what the government is willing to concede.

Whilst there is strong international pressure to resolve the Aceh issue by peaceful political means, the still-powerful Indonesian army has stated that it will deal with any move towards independence 'with blood and lives', so far the strongest statement it has made. At the average Indonesian level, there is deep concern that giving in to demands from Aceh and Irian Jaya, over and above East Timor, will herald the break-up of the nation-state.

Newspapers daily report killings in Aceh, and though the numbers are small compared to the past, Aceh remains a troubled, violent, region.

West Kalimantan

'Dayak' is a collective and often confusing term for several ethnic groups on Borneo related to one another by language and culture. Most of the Dayak in West Kalimantan are sedentary swidden (slash-and-burn) cultivators who produce rice but continue to derive a substantial part of their livelihood from forest products.

Fruit crops are often grown within community forest reserves in which village cemeteries are also located. Rubber trees, one of the most important year-round sources of income for farmers, are grown in plots managed by individual households. Much of the community forest reserves and garden plots, however, are on what the government considers state land, available for commercial use. Indonesia has never recognised traditional Dayak land tenure in its own system of land registration.

More timber concessions have been granted in West Kalimantan than in any other province. According to reports, this follows a pattern: logging companies persuade a corrupt local official or gullible group of villagers to sign away large chunks of land. Soon after, signs go up banning local farmers from trying to harvest fruit or tap rubber in the area, and often the trees in question are cut down. When the farmers protest, the local government accuses them of 'obstructing development.' No benefits accrue to the dispossessed Dayaks.

Ethnic balance

With a population variously estimated at 3.5 to 4.1 million, West Kalimantan is the most highly populated of Kalimantan's four provinces, though with a low population density of twenty persons per square kilometre. Figures on its ethnic breakdown are difficult to obtain. Reports from 1979 and 1980 say the indigenous Dayaks, mostly in the more sparsely populated interior, made up 41 percent of the population. The ethnically similar but Muslim and largely coastal Malays made up 34 percent; Chinese, concentrated especially in coastal towns like Singkawang but found in small numbers in all built-up areas, made up 14 percent. Javanese, largely in government and government sponsored transmigration areas, made up 3 percent; Buginese from South Sulawesi 5 percent; and Madurese, living mostly in coastal areas and to a lesser extent also in the interior, made up 2.5 percent.

In the provincial capital of Pontianak, which today has a population estimated at 400,000, Dayaks constituted only 1.4 percent of the population in 1980, as compared with 13 percent for the Madurese and 40 percent for the Malays.

Transmigration, both government-sponsored and spontaneous, has tipped the population balance against the indigenous Malays and Dayaks since then. By 1980, about 1.4 percent of the province's population consisted of transmigrants. By 1985 the proportion was up to 6 percent, unevenly distributed. In Sanggau Ledo, where the violence broke out, a full 15 percent of the population was settlers by 1980, and the proportion is likely to have risen since. By 1984, the percentage of transmigrants going to West Kalimantan as opposed to other provinces had risen from

14.6 to over 25 percent. In 1994, an estimated 6,000 families, or about 25,000 persons, migrated to West Kalimantan.

Madurese

While most transmigrants who arrived in government programs were Javanese, the Madurese were more likely to come on their own. Most Madurese in urban areas work in cheap transport (river crossing ferries, pedicabs), and as coolies, stevedores or day labourers. In the countryside most are small-time wetland rice farmers. The Madurese, in other words, are mostly poor, but they are not so obviously the dispossessed, having acquired, not lost land in their new home.

Violence between Dayak and Madurese has occurred several times in West Kalimantan - eight times in the last two decades. 20-40,000 Madurese were displaced from their homes in West Kalimantan after being attacked by both Malays and Dayak tribesmen, in 1997 and early 1999. Although the Madurese were clearly the victims, tribal leaders for months refused to allow them to resettle. In addition, government authorities did not allow the Madurese to return to their homes. According to Dayak sources, a Madurese stabbing a Dayak to death triggered each clash. Nevertheless, the Madurese invariably appeared as the losers in these clashes.

One Dayak grievance heard repeatedly was that Dayaks have been politically marginalised since the 1960s. Many Dayaks were eliminated from government administration for their alleged leftism after Suharto's 'New Order' came to power in early 1966. In 1997, only one of the province's six districts was headed by a Dayak. In addition, Dayak economic marginalisation has long been a factor. Exploitation of the forests has gone further in West Kalimantan than anywhere else. 'Dayaks can only listen to the sound of chainsaws', is the way one Dayak puts it.

The Violence in 1999

The bloodletting claimed more than 160 lives this year. Many victims reportedly met grisly ends - mutilated, decapitated – some say cannibalised. One report states that five hundred may have been killed in the first round of

violence, and approximately 200 in the second round, the majority of them Madurese. No one has been convicted for murder.

The violence in early 1997 in the same area north of the provincial capital Pontianak resulted in a death toll of around 300. This time the tension apparently began with ethnic Malays. Reports pin the start earlier this year to a revenge attack on Malay homes by a group of Madurese after residents beat an accused Madurese thief. An incident in March involved a quarrel between a Malay bus driver and a Madurese passenger.

In early April, West Kalimantan officials stated more than sixteen-and-a-half thousand ethnic Madurese had taken refuge in shelters set up to protect them from attacks by other ethnic groups. Following the attacks, Indonesia suspended the resettlement of Madurese to West Kalimantan. By mid-April, the refugee figures had risen to some thirty-thousand, and the Indonesian government promised to resettle them to another island. They are now being resettled with government assistance in a special reservation at Tebang Kacang near Pontianak, but the area is too small for the large number of families involved.

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