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E P R E S S

Out of the Ashes: Destruction and Reconstruction of East Timor

Abstract for chapter 12

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The information in 'East Timorese refugees in West Timor', dealing with the East Timorese refugees' settlement in West Timor and repatriation to East Timor, is based on the author's observations in the field as a medical officer working together with eleven doctors from Yogyakarta in the refugee camps along the border between West and East Timor from October 1999.

As well as references to refugees' own accounts, the chapter covers issues of dispersal, the camps, self-help projects in the camps, the Indonesian government's response to the camps, conditions in the camps: violence and health, and the repatriation of refugees.

The information was gathered through in-depth interviews with refugees, priests, nuns, militia leaders as well as with Indonesian military and civilian leaders.

Keywords

Australians, Betun, Dili, evacuation, Interfet, International Red Cross, Kupang, Los Palos, militia, pro-independence, pro-integration, refugees, Secretary-General, Tuapukan refugee camp

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East Timorese refugees in West Timor

Januar Achmad

*Exodus from East Timor*¹

The gunshots started on 3 September 1999, one day before the result of the referendum was known. Residents of Dili had already started to leave their homes, although all the shops were still open. Most of the Indonesian bureaucrats' families had left for West Timor before the 30 August referendum. At 9.15 am, in Dili, on 4 September 1999, the result of the referendum was announced by Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the UN in New York. Despite the Habibie government's naive belief in a positive outcome, the pro-independence group had won with a huge 78.5 per cent of the vote.

The gunfire intensified on the night of 4 September. More people were leaving their homes on foot, on motorbikes and in cars, seeking refuge in the nearby churches and schools within their neighbourhoods. Sister Yulia ADM from Los Palos was in Dili with her congregation at SCMM (one of the many orders of sisters in East Timor) on that

¹ The information in this chapter on East Timorese refugees' settlement in West Timor and repatriation to East Timor is based on the author's observations in the field as a medical officer working together with eleven doctors from Yogyakarta in the refugee camps along the border between West and East Timor from October 1999. The information was gathered through in-depth interviews with refugees, priests, nuns, militia leaders as well as with Indonesian military and civilian leaders.

night. As she reports, the church compound was full of refugees. The houses of pro-integrationists were burnt by their owners themselves, as well as by the militia as revenge for their loss in the referendum.

Sister Yulia packed her belongings and tried to leave Dili for Los Palos on 5 September. On her way to Baucau, she witnessed thousands of militia gathering near the museum as she continued her journey. After a while, her car was stopped by a group of young people who warned her that she must be careful because at Hera, 50 km in the direction of Los Palos, there was a road block set up by Aitarak militia. This information turned out to be true. At Hera, her car was stopped by two men armed with samurai swords.

My heart was trembling so hard. I prayed God would protect me and the driver and I bowed our heads as the Balinese Hindu do when they ask for mercy. That was how I asked for permission to pass the checkpoint in front of these young men. I thought I would be killed instantly. If that happened, I was mentally prepared since my mission was only to serve God. Finally, it seems my prayers were answered. The militia just let the car pass without comment.

Meanwhile in Dili, another Indonesian, Yeni Rosa Damayanti was in her office, Solidamor (Solidarity for East Timor). She was the chairperson for the Indonesian Independent Electoral Watch for the Referendum in East Timor (or *KIPER* in Bahasa Indonesia). She also felt unsafe in her office on 5 September 1999. She decided to move to the predominantly Indonesian official residential area in Delta Komoro. She assumed it would be well protected by the Indonesian security forces since most of the residents were Indonesian officials and their families working in East Timor.

As Yeni explained, 'On 6 September 1999, the shops in Dili were looted, ransacked and destroyed by the militia. Most of the merchandise was moved out and transported in military trucks.' Meanwhile, as she reports, her friend came in the early morning to warn her to leave immediately for the church, because there were rumours that the Delta Komoro area would soon be burnt down. So Yeni and her friends made another move to the Protestant church. The church was already full of refugees.

The idea was to leave nothing for these ungrateful East Timorese who voted overwhelmingly for independence. As one pro-integration leader stated: 'Why should we leave all these things built by Indonesia for these Timorese people who choose to leave us? Let the Falintil build from scratch' (pers. comm., 20 January 2000). This was the justification

behind the destruction of all of the official houses, offices and public utilities which had been built by the Indonesian government since 1975.

Even some of the doctors in Belu district, West Timor, helped to empty the government store house for medicine in Suai district, East Timor. Moreover, the destruction was wider than the official buildings, and included private empty homes too, after they were looted by the militia and elements of the military and police force.

The Indonesian police came the next day on 6 September 1999 to the Protestant and other churches in Dili. They warned the refugees that the churches were not safe any more and they must immediately move out to the police stations, military camps, seaport and airport for transit to West Timor and other places in Indonesia. Those who did not want to be evacuated soon left the churches and went to the mountains to hide. Most of these people were pro-independence supporters. They believed that they would be killed on their way to or in West Timor.

Sister Yulia meanwhile arrived safely in Los Palos on 5 September 1999. Soon after she arrived in Los Palos, she was told to go to the seaport and to wait for evacuation. A farmer, who came from Los Palos, illustrates how the people in East Timor were forced to leave their homes. He was a refugee at the Tuapukan refugee camp outside Kupang. His name was Fernando da Costa from Zaeivaca, Zoro village, Los Palos, East Timor. His story was very similar to those told by many refugees interviewed in West Timor during these last three months.

The militia and elements of the military invited all the villagers in Los Palos to come for a meeting at the village hall. The message was clear that everybody must immediately register and then leave East Timor. Those who stayed on would be considered pro-independence followers and would be killed. In one case, the militia took all the medicine from the hospital in Los Palos and forced three nurses working there to register at Los Palos district military office. If not, they would kill all their family members. The objective was clear. The militia needed the nurses to help them in exile in West Timor.

All buildings constructed after the integration in 1975 must be destroyed. Our things such as food, clothes, or any belongings that could not be taken away were left behind. Livestock were killed and burnt. Many people, before they left, tried to hide their belongings by burying them. The militia came to search and later on dug them up and destroyed them.

For Sister Yulia in Los Palos, each day she had to suffer more anguish.

The militia and soldiers from the indigenous East Timorese army battalion 742 came to intimidate her into registering for evacuation at the district military (*KODIM*) headquarters in Los Palos. It was alleged that those who did not register would be killed. Finally, Sister Yulia went to complain directly to the battalion commander. She told the commander that as a sister she could only take orders from her superior in the Catholic order. She would not obey a military order. Without the consent of her superior she could never leave her work place. The deputy commander was very sympathetic and allowed her and her fellow sisters to stay on in their convent in Los Palos. She came to Kupang, West Timor, at the end of December 1999 to visit people from the Los Palos parish, who were then in the Tuapukan refugee camp. She came to persuade them to go home. Many did immediately follow her home. One of those who followed her back was the farmer, Fernando da Costa. He left Tuapukan secretly and silently together with 18 others at night and went to the Catholic church for transit in Kupang organised by the Jesuit Refugee Services. This was the first group to leave Tuapukan in the last days of December 1999.

Fernando had to leave his house, farm and his entire herd of 30 cows, pigs and chickens in order to survive. All his livestock was killed by the militia. He and his family of nine people were then evacuated by the Indonesian navy ship from Com, Los Palos, on 14 September 1999. They arrived in Kupang the next day after one night's journey at sea. He and his family were transported by waiting military trucks to Tuapukan, one of the most crowded refugee camps in West Timor. He left the camp for Los Palos one day after Sister Yulia visited them in December 1999.

In Dili, the evacuation started *en masse* immediately on 4 September 1999 by land, sea and air for the refugees already gathering at the seaport and airport as well as in police stations and the military camps. In Baucau the evacuation by the military started on 9 and 10 September 1999. Yeni and her colleagues left Baucau on 10 September 1999 by Indonesian airforce Hercules to Kupang. In the western part of East Timor and Ambeno, the enclave surrounded by Indonesian territory where a large number of the population were pro-integration, people spontaneously moved to West Timor together with their leaders.

On Christmas eve, I went to visit refugees in Tuapukan carrying presents for the children of Januario from Los Palos and his relatives. Suddenly, a woman approached me and asked my help to find her husband, who had been a truck driver for one of the shops in Los

Palos. He had disappeared on 2 September while at Batugade on his way to Los Palos from Atambua, West Timor.

As the story goes, he entered East Timor with a convoy of four trucks full of merchandise from Atambua on 2 September 1999. But he never reached Los Palos that day nor did his eleven companions, including the shop owner's son. No one knows what happened to them, even though the trucks they had driven have been sighted in Kupang many times. The families assume that the men were killed by elements of the Indonesian military and their trucks confiscated in Batugade, East Timor.

One of the last refugees to leave from Dili on 19 September 1999, the night before Interfet arrived in East Timor, was a retired senior medical doctor. Dr Longuinhos Monteiro was one of two doctors to remain in East Timor in 1975 after the territory was seized by Soeharto's regime. He was originally from Goa, India, and had married a local East Timorese woman. His brother-in-law is Lt General Yunus Yosfiah from Kopassus, the former Minister of Information during President B.J. Habibie's tenure. I met the doctor and his wife, Rosa, the night before they went back to Dili from Kupang at the end of October 1999.

I asked him then why his powerful and infamous brother-in-law did nothing to protect him and his family in Dili. It was surprising to see him, a senior doctor and a relative of an Indonesian minister now living as a refugee in the small room provided by the Catholic church together with other refugees. He did not answer my question directly. He said the family sent many trucks from Atambua to help evacuate them, but they failed to reach Dili.

Many of the trucks were robbed by the armed militia, and especially the military and police personnel on duty in East Timor before and after 4 September 1999. The robbers used the trucks to transport the goods they looted from the shops and wealthy families in East Timor. It was always the case that shops or houses were burnt only after the perpetrators first emptied the buildings of any valuables.

This story is also confirmed by other documented cases from the Tuapukan refugee camp.

On his last day in Dili, Eurico Guterres, the Aitarak militia leader, came to visit Dr Monteiro and his family to warn them to leave immediately. This was on 19 September 1999. But the couple did not want to leave since the husband was too sick and too old to travel.

They thought their powerful brother-in-law, the Minister of Information in Indonesia, could protect them. They were wrong.

At around 6.00 pm, on 19 September 1999, the Red and White militia (*Merah-Putih*) from Liquiça came to their house and took away their cars. Everything that could not be taken away was destroyed in front of them. The couple was then forced to leave Dili by truck together with others. That was how they reached Atambua at midnight, the day before Interfet arrived in Dili. No one was spared in East Timor, not even the relatives of the powerful in Jakarta. Dr Monteiro has lost everything even though he was awarded the model-doctor prize by the Indonesian government in the 1980s. In just two weeks, much of East Timor was depopulated by the militia by ravaging, ransacking and destroying the land under the blind eye of the Indonesian military and police force.

Dispersal

Most of the refugees were located by the government of Indonesia in the districts of Belu and North Central Timor (*Timor Tengah Utara*: TTU) and on the surrounding islands in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). Some of them were dispersed as far as Irian Jaya and Sulawesi, depending on the availability of the ships that passed by Timor at the time.

According to the local NTT government official report at the end of September 1999, there were more than 259 268 people displaced in NTT. However, there were also many East Timorese refugees who voluntarily moved to West Timor. This includes the 1188 Indonesian farming families who were transmigrants from Java and Bali, as well as businessmen, civil servants, and about 6000 members of the military and police forces with their core and extended families.

Many families were separated during this mayhem. Thousands of husbands lost their wives and children. From early September until the end of December 1999, the International Red Cross (ICRC) in West Timor as well as in East Timor, has helped thousands of children to track their parents and families.

The camps

On 4 September 1999 the first shipment of 1000 refugees arrived in Kupang harbour and was received by the governor of the NTT

district. After disembarking from the ship, Fernando and his family, together with his fellow residents from Los Palos, were transported to Tuapukan refugee camp by military and police trucks. Here, 25 km outside of Kupang, these pro-independence supporters were housed together with the evacuated militia members, army personnel and their dependants. This is a typical profile in the refugee camps.

Initially, only a few tents were available, so most of the refugees were settled in the football stadium, government buildings and schools. More just slept in the open air with no shelter at all for a few weeks. The wealthy East Timorese families first stayed in hotels. Later, they rented houses in the city and villages around the camps. The cost of renting immediately skyrocketed 100 per cent. Some of the refugees also moved out from the camps and rented rooms or houses in the villages where they could. The peasant farmers stayed in churches, empty offices, or public camps. They could improve their housing problem by building their own traditional huts with materials readily available from nearby woods. Palm trees and leaves are locally used to build roofs, especially in camps outside the city.

Self-help projects

One project in Tuapukan was pioneered by a military sergeant, Januario, from Los Palos. He rented a room in a house from one of the local villagers for his own family. Later on, he built more huts near the main refugee camps at Tuapukan for his relatives, which totalled 80 people. Most of the local people prevented the refugees from using their toilet facilities in Tuapukan after the first week of their arrival in early September 1999. I supported Januario's various efforts to construct permanent toilets and water tanks for drinking water for these 80 people. In the beginning the women just asked for a bucket to carry water. I offered them a water tank if they were willing to build it themselves. Through donations by the Indonesian corporation *Lippo*, and by *Kompas* and *Suara Pembaruan* newspaper readers, I was able to provide the construction materials.

Once they had finished the toilet and water tank with a storage capacity of 5000 litres, I gave mattresses to the workers and was able to increase their electric power for their huts as a bonus, using the same source of funding. This water and sanitation project became a model for other refugees around Noelbaki and Tuapukan, two of the biggest

refugee camps in West Timor. Then, others began to request similar aid in constructing their own sanitation and water facilities. By providing these facilities, the refugees also rebuilt their own self-esteem through helping themselves and their neighbourhood. The Indonesian government worked closely with national and international NGOs to help build these toilet facilities in the refugee camps.

Indonesian government responses

In August 1999, the local government of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) province had anticipated the worst scenario of the referendum. The governor of NTT, Piet A. Tallo, believed that the pro-integration group could only win at most 30 per cent of the vote. It seems he had a better understanding of local East Timorese people's aspirations than his counterparts in the military and central government.

He had prepared the local government to accommodate the refugees. On 12 August 1999, the Minister of Social Welfare, Justika Baharsjah, visited Kupang to discuss the preparations to accommodate an estimated 22 000 families totalling about 100 000 refugees from East Timor. Despite the expectation of large numbers of pro-integration refugees, the provincial government had never prepared for the actual number of refugees at the peak time at the end of September. The actual number reached nearly 270 000 people because of the forced exodus of pro-independence supporters too.

After the news of the referendum was announced on Saturday, 4 September 1999, the governor of NTT, Piet A. Tallo, immediately called an urgent meeting between the civilian and military authorities at 11.00 am in his office to discuss and co-ordinate the plans to evacuate Indonesian and government officials and their families from East Timor. The first refugee camp in Kupang at Noelbaki was prepared to accommodate this first group of refugees.

In addition, the governor of NTT had ordered each government department to contribute five staff members every day to help the refugees disembark from the ships and airplanes. The Department of Social Welfare distributed 400 grams of rice and 1500 rupiah to each refugee. Fernando received 5 kg of rice the day after he arrived at Tuapukan camp.

The International Red Cross distributed kitchen and family kits, consisting of sleeping mats, sarongs, blankets, buckets, and cooking utensils. In total, the ICRC had distributed 150 000 family kits to the

refugees in West Timor (NTT). For those who did not receive rice assistance from the Department of Social Welfare, World Vision distributed 50 kg of rice for each family. Other NGOs, such as the Salvation Army, provided milk porridge. Yayasan Belu Sejahtera extended their existing program in West Timor to accommodate the East Timorese refugees with supplementary foods and with soybean powder. The Ministry of Public Works and World Vision, both built water tanks and toilets in the refugee camps.

In Kupang, the local municipal government immediately organised health services with health posts and mobile clinics to serve the influx of 23 621 refugees (see Table 1). In total, six health posts with 24-hour services were set up, three in the sports stadium and three in the sports authority building. Each health team consisted of one doctor, two nurses, one midwife, one nutritionist, and one sanitation expert. MSF (*Médecins sans Frontières*) Belgium had constructed 120 public toilets in these two places. The total refugees housed in the stadium and arts buildings were more than 1000 people each; the sports authority building had 1500 refugees, and the rest were living in hotels, with relatives, or among villagers in Kupang municipality. By the end of January 2000 there were only 100 families left behind in the stadium in Kupang (GOR); the rest had returned to East Timor.

Conditions

The most desperate refugee groups were those evacuated by Indonesian airforce planes. They could bring hardly any of their personal belongings due to limited space. They needed more assistance than those who were evacuated by boats or military trucks over land. Many of these refugees settled in the open without tents and roofs. Although many international agencies and the Indonesian government worked hard to support the refugees' basic needs, it was clear that there was no advanced plan to cope with the refugees on this scale.

NTT is one of the poorest regions in eastern Indonesia. Suddenly the population increased dramatically at the end of September 1999. The central government could only provide rescue funds and foreigners, especially Caucasians, were not welcome by the militia, especially in Belu district where most of the refugees resided, see Table 1.

For example, MSF doctors from overseas came to Atambua but were too scared to work in the refugee camps. ICRC staff too were

TABLE 1: *Distribution of refugees in NTT province by 3 October 1999*

<i>District / Municipality</i>	<i>3 October 1999</i>		<i>Changes Minus *</i>		<i>8 November 1999</i>	
	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons</i>
Belu	29 175	144 933	319	1 374	27 120	135 689
TTU	7 444	32 878	-	-	9 630	44 335
TTS	1 652	5 474	-	1	1 228	6 255
Kupang	4 209	23 621	-	25	7 956	36 338
Municipality of Kupang	7 733	44 983	-	-	516	2 173
Alor	692	2 851	-	-	701	2 886
East Flores	90	960	-	-	200	935
Sikka	394	1 646	-	-	349	1 326
Ende	146	771	-	-	524	2 395
Manggarai	130	612	-	-	270	1 620
Ngada	93	430	-	-	93	430
Total	51 158	259 168	319	1 400	48 587	234 391

Note: * The number of refugees who moved in and out of shelters.

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare, NTT, dated 16 November 1999.

forced to evacuate their Caucasian expatriate staff from Atambua to Kupang in September 1999 due to the increasing security risk. The main threat was the militia, who considered all Caucasians were white Australians. Australians were alleged to have helped the pro-independence group to win the referendum unfairly. Thus Australians were the enemy.

I arrived in Kupang on 22 October 1999, after securing funding in Jakarta for the medical team to work in West Timor. At that time, Kupang was relatively calm and militia were no longer roaming the city armed with guns. However, the residents of Kupang and West Timor were still cautious and shops generally closed earlier than usual. In this tense environment, I arrived to prepare my work for the refugees in Belu and TTU districts near the border with East Timor.

It seems the Indonesian local government in NTT was also concerned with security and the safety of the refugees and general public. So, in mid-September, the religious leaders in NTT as well as S.K. Leric, the Mayor of Kupang, complained directly to Major-General Adam Damiri, commander of the Udayana Military Command that the government must confiscate all arms from the militia. Despite this, security was still a major issue, as my own experiences show.

After meeting with the archbishop of Kupang to get his advice, I

decided to travel to Belu and TTU districts to observe the situation in the field and to meet with the health authorities assigned to the border area. One nun from Memisa, Holland, one staff from a Catholic volunteer organisation (*Perdhaki*) from Jakarta, myself and the driver were assigned the archbishop's car for the drive from Kupang to Atambua on 26 October 1999. To illustrate the security conditions in West Timor, I give my own experience in Kupang.

On the outskirts of Kupang, the provincial capital city of NTT, we stopped at the petrol station to fill up. While waiting in the queue, suddenly we were surrounded by twelve East Timorese militia. Their leader questioned our driver in Tetun, so we did not understand the conversation. However, I could see he was terrified by this uninvited guest at his car window.

Immediately I could sense the potential for danger unfolding in front of us by looking at the militia's faces. They all looked very cool, cruel and intimidating. I asked the leader what the problem was. He told us that my companion was an Australian who was not wearing her habit. The militia were everywhere in West Timor threatening to kill any Australians they could find because they believed that most of the UNAMET staff were Australians and they had organised the referendum unfairly. They believed this bias was what caused the pro-independence result of August 1999 in East Timor. Despite these open threats from the militia, by the end of January 2000, there were no reports that any Australians or Caucasians were killed in West Timor.

Violence against the refugees

Atrocities committed against the pro-independence followers started in East Timor long before the refugees arrived in West Timor. Only after the new government had been sworn in, in Jakarta, did the local situation in West Timor improve significantly. In September 1999, every person suspected of being a pro-independence activist, especially university students, former UNAMET staff, or UN agency staff were pulled out from trucks at the check points along the way to Atambua. In Atambua, one of the International Red Cross (ICRC) local staff from East Timor was kidnapped soon after he crossed the border and has not been heard of since.

The same applies to those who were preparing to board planes at the airport in Dili and Baucau and embark on ships in the seaports in

East and West Timor. They were taken away and remain missing. According to Amnesty International, many were killed at sea during the evacuation. Many more were kidnapped from the refugee camps each night and disappeared in the first month after arriving in West Timor. Some of their bodies were found in the bamboo forest in Belu district. The militia searched for their enemies in the refugee camps as well as the church compounds. However, the Catholic church in NTT played an important role in saving lives. They hid, protected, and later, evacuated the high risk refugees who came together with their families and were targeted by the militia soon after they arrived.

On 18 December 1999, the local people found a female corpse at Salore hamlet, Kabuna village, West Tasifeto subdistrict in the Belu district close to the border with East Timor (*Surya Timor*, 21 December 1999:9). This woman was a pro-independence activist who was killed because she tried to persuade fellow refugees to return to East Timor (pers. comm., 26 December 1999). Most of the women including the militia's wives wanted to return to East Timor, but most of the militia were too afraid to go home by the end of January 2000. They believed the pro-integration militia members would be killed and/or jailed for being a members of a militia. In mid-January 2000, I witnessed a group of young people waiting outside the refugee transit camps in Dili to attack the returning militia. The pro-integration activists demanded that they be provided the western part of East Timor for their resettlement in East Timor, so they could maintain their close social, political and cultural links with Indonesia.

For the local TNI and the police in West Timor, the killing of the East Timorese refugees was not their concern. It seems the Indonesian local security forces left the refugees to solve their own political differences without actively stopping any conflicts. They considered the issue an East Timorese internal family affair and turned a blind eye to any conflicts erupting around them. It is obvious and natural that most of the Indonesian security forces would be sympathetic to the pro-integration group and they were reluctant to confront the armed militia in West Timor.

Many of these crimes against the refugees were also witnessed by the health centre medical officials (Puskesmas staff) in Betun in the Belu district who performed many autopsies on the bodies found in the bamboo forest near Betun. A female medical officer also reported treating one rape case (pers. comm., 28 October 1999). However, in some cases, the Indonesian police tried to help and protect rape victims despite extreme difficulties.

In September 1999, for example, some women from the camp brought a gang rape victim to the police station in Betun for protection. She had been kidnapped and gang raped by three militia the night before. The police protected her from further harassment from the militia who came back to the camp looking for her the next day. Unfortunately, at the time the militia returned, only one police officer was on duty. So he did not have the courage to arrest the rapists and admitted that he was scared of the men. The police officer explained to the health centre doctor that he did not want to intervene. This was not their jurisdiction any longer since the victim was East Timorese. Even though they resided in West Timor and were subject to Indonesian law, the police stated that the refugees chose to solve their own problems when they voted for freedom from Indonesian rule. The same happened in places such as Tuapukan camp in Kupang when the UNHCR staff were attacked by the militia. In general the police attitude was to watch, but to do nothing to stop anyone wanting to prevent the UN staff doing their job in the refugee camps. Moreover, the militia was clearly not afraid of the Indonesian police.

Health

I came from Canberra with the purpose of establishing and leading a medical mission to West Timor. Soon after arriving in Indonesia, I recruited a medical team consisting of 11 young medical graduates from the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta. They worked in the Belu and TTU districts from mid-November 1999 to the end of January 2000.

Our medical reports reveal a preponderance of upper respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea, malaria and malnutrition in children under five. Health conditions were made worse by the poor distribution of staple foods, such as rice, to the refugees at the end of November 1999. The Ministry of Social Welfare, for example, stopped distributing food in the area. The Catholic Relief Service was suddenly responsible for all the refugees in Betun and has continued to be responsible for them.

Co-ordination was poor. My medical team and I witnessed thousands of refugees starving in Kletek refugee camp in Betun in early December 1999. These refugees had only mango and cassava porridge for several weeks to fill their stomachs before many of them returned home after the border was opened at the end of November 1999.

In general, health services for the refugees were adequate. There

were no serious incidents of epidemic outbreaks in the camps in West Timor, except in Tuapukan where the international health authorities worked hard to contain a cholera outbreak that struck in November 1999. Nearly 100 people were reported dead, most of them children under five. By the end of January 2000, the outbreak was under control. The nutritional status of the children under five was similar to that of the local population.

Initially, sanitation facilities were inadequate due to problems of security, but improved significantly. Many NGO field workers were afraid to work in Tuapukan camp. I was asked by Father Andre Soegijoprano, the Director of Jesuit Refugee Service in Kupang, to help them to penetrate the camp in early November 1999, so they could persuade the refugees to go home. This Jesuit organisation played a crucial role in helping the refugees to go home. I started with a water and sanitation program for the soldiers and their families, which eventually brought us into close and friendly contact with them and the militia. In addition, many local and international NGOs and particularly the government health system, responded well to the health needs of the refugees. Health posts were established near the refugee camps with 24-hour emergency services.

Among the NGOs who worked in Belu district were medical teams from the Philippines, the University of Atma Jaya in Jakarta, the Christian Children's Fund, the Red Cross and University of Gadjah Mada medical volunteers who worked directly with the refugees and supported the existing government health services. There were adequate medical supplies despite a twofold increase in refugee numbers at the health centres in the Belu district. All the medical services were free of charge to the refugees. In the initial stage of the refugee influx, for six weeks, there were only government health centre doctors in the field available to help the refugees. For example, at Betun, the number of outpatients increased from 100 to 500 in September 1999 with only one doctor and a dentist who acted as doctor due to the lack of additional medical officers. I have to salute these young government doctors who dedicated their profession to help the refugees. This is especially true for those doctors who were working in the border areas, where there were no incentives for overtime, overwork, or danger.

Mortality in some camps, such as Tuapukan, was high with crude estimates of 2.1 deaths/10 000 population/day (Bradt *et al.* 1999) and mortality rate of 9.2 deaths/10 000 population/day, for under-

fives. In Namfalus near the border town with Suai, East Timor, six per cent of children less than one year old were categorised as severely malnourished and 43 per cent mildly malnourished. 4.5 per cent of children in the under five group were categorised as severely malnourished and 50 per cent mildly malnourished. Poor nutrition, sanitation and personal hygiene, with crowded conditions without proper ventilation, were the underlying causes of acute respiratory infection and death, especially for the children under five.

Repatriation of the refugees

In general, the West Timor community and government received the refugees well from early September onward. Despite this, most of the refugees wanted to return home. The opportunity came when Mrs Sadako Ogata, the High Commissioner UNHCR and her staff from Geneva, paid a visit to the camps on 19 September 1999 accompanied by the Indonesian Co-ordinating Minister of Welfare. Soon after that, UNHCR was allowed to set up offices in Kupang and Atambua, with the Indonesian government providing the security for field staff working among the refugees. On 22 September, President Habibie agreed to allow the refugees to choose to settle in Indonesia or return home to East Timor. From that time, the refugees began leaving West Timor and other parts of Indonesia by air, sea and land. At the end of January 2000, a total of 140 000 refugees had returned home to East Timor.

The government provided a special army unit battalion 432 Kostrad from Makassar to protect the refugee convoys organised by UNHCR and MOI in the first week of November 1999. I was there when the first group of more than 1000 refugees went home by ship from Atapupu. The army appeared very disciplined and prevented the militia from harassing the refugees. This was the same unit that had previously been stationed in Baucau, East Timor, and had successfully prevented serious damage to that town, the only town still intact after the mayhem in September 1999. They were given a farewell send-off by the people of Baucau on 22 September 1999 (pers. comm., 15 January 2000, Dili).

Conclusions

Despite accusations and evidence of compliance in the destruction of East Timor, the Indonesian government, the West Timorese

people, the Catholic and Protestant churches all significantly helped the refugees in West Timor to survive the first months of their ordeal. Soon after that, local, national and international aid agencies took part in the rescue and aid operation. There were no serious epidemic outbreaks nor mass starvation, except in Tuapukan camp in Kupang district and the Kletek camp in Betun in the Belu district.

After the new democratically-elected Indonesian government was sworn in, in early November 1999, the security situation improved dramatically and repatriation programs for the refugees were accelerated by opening the border in three places in Belu and TTU districts. This political development in Jakarta had a positive impact on the East Timorese refugees. The military also changed their attitude by assisting the refugees to return to East Timor. Every day thousands of the refugees crossed the border, both spontaneously and with assistance by UNHCR.

More than 100 000 refugees had gone home by the end of January 2000. Many of the rest were militia and their families, former Indonesian government civil servants, and military personnel from East Timor (*Kompas*, 11 February 2000). These civilian, military personnel and militia members and their dependants are more likely to settle in Indonesia permanently. Some of these refugees have already settled in the various districts of West Timor.

For those who have decided to live in Indonesia permanently as Indonesian citizens, the government of Indonesia has planned to relocate them from the refugee camps in West Timor through the local transmigration resettlement projects. Here, they will mix with the local population in each district within NTT province. As for the East Timorese returnees, the process of rebuilding their shattered nation has begun.

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