Connect with ETAN

Subject: **U.N. Official Confirms Indonesia Mass Rapes**
Date: Sun, 20 Dec 1998 10:48:19 GMT
From: TAPOL

U.N. Official Confirms Indonesia Mass Rapes 02:30 a.m. Dec 18, 1998 Eastern

By Farah Mihlar

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (Reuters) - A United Nations investigator Friday accused the Indonesian military under former President Suharto of carrying out widespread rapes in various parts of the country.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, U.N. special rapporteur on violence against women, backed reports by non-government organizations in Indonesia that many women of Chinese ethnic origin had been raped in the Jakarta riots in May which preceded Suharto's fall.

Indonesian officials, including armed forces chief General Wiranto, repeatedly denied that any rapes had taken place in the Jakarta riots.

``During the May riots, with regard to women there was mass rape and they were all Chinese (women). We met many victims and it was clear it was conducted in a widespread manner,'' said Coomaraswamy.

``Secondly it seems to have been conducted in an organized manner,'' she told Reuters in an interview.

Coomaraswamy also accused Indonesian authorities of perpetrating violence before Suharto's fall in May against women in East Timor and the troubled provinces of Aceh in northern Sumatra and Irian Jaya, on New Guinea island.

``The problem was with military occupation. The troops were not sensitized to sexual violence and there was widespread rape,'' she said.

Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 after the former colonial power Portugal pulled out.

Coomaraswamy recently visited Indonesia to compile a report for the United Nations on violence against women during the May riots. Non-governmental organizations had recorded complaints of rape from some 168 women but she said she believed the figure was much higher.

``So many victims we spoke to had not made complaints to the police,'' said Coomaraswamy, who is expected to submit the report on Indonesia to the U.N. Human Rights Commission next March.

An Indonesian government appointed team in November blamed some members of the military for the violence and confirmed 52 rapes.

Human rights groups estimate that nearly 1,200 people died last May in Jakarta in rioting which forced President Suharto to step down after a 32-year rule. Most of those who died were looters trapped in burning buildings and ethnic Chinese bore the brunt of the violence.

The Indonesian government needed to pay more attention to reforming the country's legal system, Coomaraswamy said

``There seems to be a huge lack of confidence in the criminal justice system with regard to victims of violence."

``There is also a lack of implementation with regard to the human rights procedure. A lot of it is a lack of know-how because they were basically an authoritarian state," she added.

The Indonesian government had strived to change its attitudes and make a concerted effort toward democratic values but there were still hurdles for them to overcome, she said.

``Since May 1998 there has been a clear break from the past. Those in power now seem to very much want to put the country on to democracy and to some level of transparency."

``I think the state itself is polarized though, between those who want reform and those who want the old regime. There are elements within the government and the army that don't want change," she added.

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW, UK Phone: 0181 771-2904 Fax: 0181 653-0322 email: tapol@gn.apc.org Campaigning to expose human rights violations in Indonesia, East Timor, West Papua and Aceh

Back to December Menu
Main Postings Menu
Postings of Human Rights Violations in Timor