HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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Better Protection Of Rapes Investigators Needed

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(New York)-- Human Rights Watch today called for a full and independent investigation into the murder on Friday of Martadinata Haryono, known as Ita, a young Chinese-Indonesian woman in Jakarta. It also called for better protection of members of the Volunteer Team for Humanity who are investigating rapes of ethnic Chinese women. Ita's mother is a member of the team, and Ita herself had taken part in many of its activities. Her murder has raised concerns among Indonesian human rights groups that it represents an escalation of a campaign to terrorize those investigating the rapes; Jakarta police say it is a purely criminal case. The Volunteer Team for Humanity, better known by its Indonesian name of Tim Relawan, has been the lead organization documenting reports of systematic rape, primarily of ethnic Chinese women, in Jakarta and other cities during riots last May.

"Three of the most visible members of the Volunteer Team for Humanity -- Father Sandyawan, Karlina Leksono, and Ita Fathia Nadia -- have been threatened repeatedly since the issue of the rapes first arose," said Sidney Jones, Asia director of Human Rights Watch. "Now there is a murder of a person closely linked to their work. At the very least, the Indonesian government has an obligation to conduct fully transparent investigations, not only into this murder but into the numerous threats and other forms of intimidation that those investigating the rapes have endured over the last three months. It should take extra measures to protect members of Tim Relawan. And Indonesian officials, military and civilian, should cease any further comments on the rape investigations until the full report of the Joint Fact-Finding Team is formally presented." The Joint Fact-Finding Team, appointed by the government in August to look into the May violence, is due to make its findings public on October 23.

Members of the Tim Relawan have been called in the middle of the night and warned to stop investigating the rapes. Their children have also been the target of threats and obscene telephone calls. The threats have come as senior government officials have been making contradictory remarks about the rapes, with Defense Minister and Commander of the Armed Forces General Wiranto denying they took place, and Justice Minister Muladi saying they were widespread and systematic.

As of early Monday, there appeared to be many contradictory reports about the murder of Martadinata as well. Police said there were no indications of rape; some press reports suggested she had been sexually assaulted. Police said the man apprehended in the murder, a neighbor named Suryadi, confessed that he had intended only to rob the house to pay off his father's debt; rights activists have pointed out that nothing

of value was taken. In response, police said that in his "confession," Suryadi said he realized that Ita had recognized him and that was why he killed her. Police-induced "confessions" in Indonesia are so common, however, that a suspect's admission immediately after interrogation should not be taken at face value, even less the police report of such a statement.

"The explosiveness of the rape issue and of the Volunteer Team for Humanity's work make it imperative that this case be handled with extreme sensitivity," said Jones. "It's also critical that any lead or strand of evidence suggesting a link to the victim's work with Tim Relawan be fully and impartially explored, with the results reported back to the Indonesian public."

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