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Indonesia: Murder of a Human Rights Defender

An Indonesian human rights volunteer worker has been murdered after the authorities failed to take action on repeated threats against human rights defenders and witnesses of violence during the May 1998 riots, Amnesty International said today.

Eighteen year-old Martadinata had been working with the Volunteer Team for Humanity (*Tim Relawan*), a non-governmental organization, documenting allegations of rape against ethnic-Chinese Indonesian women during disturbances in May 1998.

She was found dead by her father in her family home on the evening of 9 October. Her throat had been cut and she had stab wounds in her stomach, right arm and chest.

"There is no doubt that failure to act on the threats has left the witnesses and human rights defenders investigating the May 1998 rapes vulnerable to attack,"Amnesty International said.

"Martadinata's death could have been avoided if the authorities had offered effective protection, investigated reports of threats or intimidation, and condemned attacks against ethnic-Chinese."

A suspect has already been arrested by the police who claim that the motive for the murder was robbery. However, in view of the threats against the volunteer team and their families, a motive other than robbery for Martadinata's murder cannot be ruled out.

Amnesty International is urging the Indonesian Government to take immediate steps to protect Martadinata's family, other witnesses and human rights defenders working on the May 1998 rapes, and to ensure a full and impartial investigation into Martadinata's murder.

Other members of the Volunteer Team for Humanity have received regular threats over the telephone. A grenade was sent to the team's office through the mail, a shelter for homeless youths managed by one of the team's leaders, Father Sandyawan, was attacked and several of the residents beaten up by a group protesting against the rape allegations.

The threats and attacks were not only ignored by the government but were fuelled by the authorities' continued denial that the rapes took place.

In a meeting with Armed Forces Commander General Wiranto in September 1998, Amnesty International urged the Indonesian authorities to stop making prejudicial statements concerning the rapes and the riots. However, the statements continued and on 4 October General Wiranto stated again that the Armed Forces had not found any evidence of rapes during the May riots.

"Every time the authorities deny the rapes took place, not only do they pre-judge the findings of the government-established investigation team, but they also send a signal that those making the allegations are fair targets for attacks," said Amnesty International.

"The immediate priority for the Habibie Government now must be the protection of Martadinata's family, members of the *Tim Relawan* and all the witnesses to the events."

The Indonesian authorities must ensure that Martadinata's murder is fully and impartially investigated and that all threats against witnesses and human rights defenders are immediately investigated by an independent body.

Background

In June 1998, the Volunteer Team for Humanity released a report claiming that 168 women – the majority of whom were ethnic-Chinese – were raped or sexually abused during violent disturbances in May 1998. The team claimed that the rapes were organized by groups believed to be linked to the military.

The authorities have repeatedly denied that any rapes took place during May. However, under considerable international and domestic pressure, President Habibie established an independent fact finding team to investigate the rapes and other violence during the riots. The team, which comprises members of the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) and non-governmental organizations, has been gathering further information and hearing testimony, but its work has been hampered by prejudicial statements from military figures.

The police have already arrested a 22 year-old man for Martadinata's murder who they claim was found with blood-stained clothes and fake jewellery allegedly belonging to the victim and that the motive was robbery. Previous media reports however had said that nothing was missing from the family home.

Human rights workers are publicly sceptical of the robbery motive and allege that her murder is linked to the work of the *Tim Relawan*. Both Martadinata and her mother had been involved in the process of documenting the allegations of rape.

Indonesia's Human Rights Commission, Komnas HAM, has announced that it will investigate the murder.

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