

## FIELD WORK REPORT

### **EAST TIMOR: UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

This report aims to introduce social characteristics of East Timor and outlines research findings carried out in East Timor from July to December 2000.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this fieldwork was to explore humanitarian operations in East Timor.<sup>2</sup> The author engaged in several surveys to understand reconciliation attempts in the District Liquiça<sup>3</sup> as a part of project assessments in a non-governmental organisation based in Dili. Thus, this report presents certain aspects of the author's findings - about militia, circumstances of reconciliation between the East Timorese militia and the populous, and future settings of reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> The information presented here is based primarily on interviews carried out in East Timor, particularly in the District Liquiça. To achieve the research aims, the author extensively interviewed workers in International Organisations and NGOs in Dili and the District Liquiça, as well as the local people. The report also made use of the available secondary and tertiary resources on the subject, such as printed documents, books, articles, journals, newspapers and Internet sources. Recent information is based largely on the printed documents and interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> The author worked with a non-governmental organisation based in Dili during this period.

<sup>2</sup> East Timor exists 300 miles North of Darwin, Australia. Portugal and Holland fought each other for control of the island. In 1945, West Timor joined Indonesia, while East Timor remained a Portuguese colony. The Portuguese colonial empire broke apart in the 1970s, and after the 1974 revolution, Indonesia staged a full-scale land and sea invasion in 1975. Brief history of East Timor, see, Cray, P. and C. Bentley (eds.), (1995) *East Timor at the Crossroad: The Forgoing of a Nation*, New York: Social Science Research Council. Also, see, Pinto, C. and M. Jardine, (1997) *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance*, Boston: South End Press.

<sup>3</sup> The district is located next to the capital district hence provides an important basis for a unique case study of seeing the degree, extent and the nature of international humanitarian assistance provided to East Timor, which are crucial for the development of the country and yet are not located in the capital.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'militia' is used to mean those who do not have formal training as military but engage in military activities with arms to fulfil a certain purpose.



East Timor Map, The Source: United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) <sup>5</sup>

### Reconciliation in Process – Out of “Brutal” History

East Timor gained independence on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2002, which marked the official end of foreign rule over the territory. Almost 475 years of foreign rule has reflected on the East Timorese society in a way that it gravitates around its historical existence and experiences, which could be termed as “brutal.”<sup>6</sup> Most of the atrocities were committed between 1975, when Portuguese colonial rule collapsed, and 1999, when East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence. Allegedly a quarter of the 1975 population, numbered approximately 200,000 people, is thought to have died during Indonesia’s twenty-five year occupation.<sup>7</sup>

Given this historical background, the complexity of re-building East Timorese society becomes self-evident. The twenty-five year Indonesian rule has created a situation that has divided families, villages and communities during the resistance. There were many families that had a father in FALINTIL (Armed Force for the National Liberation Resistance) and another family member in the opposing militia group.<sup>8</sup> For example, there were many Timorese who co-operated with the Indonesian activity of maintaining control over the territory, while at the same time they provided support and assistance to the resistance group secretly. This has created, as an aftermath, a feeling of multiple identities and associated problem of nationhood and statehood for both Indonesian and East Timorese. Therefore, what is needed is to build relationships, which would help them in understanding the situation in which they were, their own community, their former antagonists and

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/timoreg.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> More than 450 years rule by Portugal, followed by the Indonesian invasion in 1975.

<sup>7</sup> See, Scott, C. (2000) *East Timor: Transition to Statehood*, CIIR Comment, p.5. The population at the time of Indonesian invasion in 1975 was estimated 800,000. At the time of 1999 election, the population was estimated 891,000 according to the Indonesian National Electoral Board dated 1999-04-21.

<sup>8</sup> FALINTIL is East Timorese military set up in 1975, supporting pro-independence movements.

themselves. This would mean re-living through the pain of generations, including the event of recent history. This would, by all measures, require a long introspective approach towards the 25 years of Indonesian rule. The process will be, in fact, painstaking and would entail emotional threads for all parties concerned.

Many reconciliation attempts in the process at the time of this field research were set in a long-term process that aimed to cover basic changes in the framework of the societies together. One of the interviewees' comments depicts some optimistic conditions for the reconciliation in East Timor: Unlike other world's complex conflict areas such as the Balkans, most basic factors such as ethnicity, religion, language and customs between East Timorese antagonists are almost identical.

The problem that newly independent East Timor must face to carry the process further relates to how to deal with the rest of refugees still remaining in West Timor that include a number of former militia leaders, and if they do come back, how can they reconcile the relationship between those returnees and the people, particularly those who lost their close family or relatives.<sup>9</sup> In the field survey, it became clear that people know who used to be a member of militia and which type of militia they used to be in most areas in the District Liquiça.<sup>10</sup> Convincing measures to establish relationships are required from people's own initiatives in such close communities or villages.

Major attention now seems to be given to the number of returnees rather than the situation they would face after they return. In the transitional period, there were diverse attempts by different organisations and local people for the reconciliation between former militias and the people. It is, seemingly, achieving its primary purpose, i.e. by accepting returnees with a mind of forgiveness. Yet future refugee return may not be possible in such an agreeable condition that would require a reconsideration of current approaches with the data and experience gathered from the current process.

### **Division of the Society**

Before the turmoil in 1999, there were three major divisions among people on account of their political positions regarding to the status of East Timor. The first group supported East Timor's full-independence and this group belonged to the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) created in 1998,<sup>11</sup> and comprising the majority of the society.<sup>12</sup> The second group held a pro-autonomy or pro-referendum position<sup>13</sup>: those who belonged to the Popular Democratic

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<sup>9</sup> The remaining refugees are those who were former members of pro-Indonesian militias or their families and those who formerly worked with the Indonesian administration in East Timor and fear losing their pensions.

<sup>10</sup> For different types of militia, see later section: 'Militia: The Reality?'

<sup>11</sup> The history of the CNRT, see, Niner, S. (2000) "A Long Journey of Resistance: The Origin and Struggle of the CNRT," In *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol.32, Nos.1 and 2, pp.11-18.

<sup>12</sup> The CNRT consists of different political groups such as the UDT (Timorese Democratic Union), the PST (Timorese Socialist Party), the FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) and others.

<sup>13</sup> The pro-referendum group consists of those who had had an intention to comply the result of the national

Association of Timor (APODETE). The third group supported East Timor's independence, as is the first group - originally supported Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN)<sup>14</sup> - but did not support the CNRT.<sup>15</sup> This group belonged to the Democratic Republic of East Timor (RDTL).

### **The District Liquiça**

There are thirteen districts in the administrative divisions in East Timor.<sup>16</sup> The District Liquiça is just west of Dili with the population of about 55,000 at the time of April 1999, among which Indonesian nationals were estimated around 4,000.<sup>17</sup> The size of the district is relatively small - geographically the second smallest district in East Timor. It exists between the District Dili and the District Bobonaro, which faces the border with West Timor. Thus Liquiça District is situated between the capital Dili and the border town Batugade, which connects with West Timor, town Atanbua, a number of refugees resided and are still remaining in this town. Therefore the District Liquiça was one of the key areas that came under the total control of militias.<sup>18</sup>

The first militia violence that was reported by the media occurred in Liquiça on 6th April 1999, dozens of people were killed in an attack by pro-integration militia.<sup>19</sup> Though Liquiça incident was starting point, data collected from several interviews in Dili indicated that the level of overall atrocities in the District Liquiça were lesser than other districts.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, more than half of the residences in the District were destroyed and major public buildings including CNRT (pro-independence group) offices were almost ruined or damaged badly.

There was a militia base within the District, named Besi Merah Putih. It is one of three militia bases established in 1999.<sup>21</sup> According to one of the CNRT leaders in sub-District Maubara, these three were recognised as bases that caused worst violence throughout the country. The base is in the

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ballot. Those who have held pro-referendum position supported the CNRT after the ballot.

<sup>14</sup> FLETILIN is the original body of the CNRT. In 1981 the FRETILIN changed its name to the CRRN (National Council of Revolutionary Resistance). Then the CRRN became the CNRT in 1998 after having had several changes among political factions that consisted of the CRRN. See, Niner, S. (2000) op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> This group believes that East Timor has proclaimed its independence in 1975, so that the CNRT's claim for independence in the 1990s cannot be recognised.

<sup>16</sup> Generally each district has administrative divisions, sub-district, and each sub-district consists of villages that include all communities in the area. For example, the District Liquiça entails three sub-districts, Bazartete, Liquiça and Maubara.

<sup>17</sup> The number comes from the CNRT census.

<sup>18</sup> Dili and districts connect to the border with West Timor were key areas for Indonesia army. It is said that the Indonesian army and militias planed to partition East Timor and tried to wreck the outcome of the referendum. Therefore they wanted to take those areas under total control of the militias. In the field interview in the District Liquiça, the atrocities on the road between Dili and Batugade by militias during the turmoil have been an ordinary scene.

<sup>19</sup> See, *World News*, Inter Press Service on 11th April 1999.

<sup>20</sup> From the interviews with East Timorese in Dili.

<sup>21</sup> Other two are Aitarak (Dili) and Mahidi (Suai).

sub-District Maubara, where militia activities were particularly vigorous in the District.<sup>22</sup> A United Nations report and also the CNRT census show about 3,600 militia members were from the District.<sup>23</sup> At the time of August 2000, around 10 percent of them, numbered 460, returned to the District.<sup>24</sup> Rest of militia members still remained in West Timor.

Throughout the field survey, it was relatively easy to obtain all information, which related to the District. This was largely because of the well-organised networks of CNRT. In East Timor, in general, information can be traced easily. This is because there is a strong clear information track in the CNRT from the centre (Dili) to communities, which facilitate to pass any information swiftly from the centre to communities and vice versa.<sup>25</sup>

The networks and the information monitors were particularly firm in the sub-District Maubara compared with other two sub-districts in spite of its geographical inconvenience.<sup>26</sup> This seemed to be partly because the sub-District Maubara was the area that has had intense militia activities as well as a militia base. High militia activities seemed to result in strengthen the information network and solidarity of the people.<sup>27</sup> Most information such as the number of population, militia details, incidences in the area and others, could be obtained from the CNRT leaders at each administrative level. Therefore, even the UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor) was working closely with the CNRT for the project planning and fact-finding about militia related information.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to the sub-District leader, the base has not been used since militias have left and the District has no plan to use the building in the future.

<sup>23</sup> The UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor) data seemed to come from the CNRT census. Therefore both of them are coherent. An unofficial report obtained from the UNTAET Office in Liquiça. CNRT data was obtained from the CNRT office in Maubara.

<sup>24</sup> The number stems from author's field research by visiting each villages and CNRT leaders. Total population of the District at the time of August 2000 was around 47,000.

<sup>25</sup> Information goes, Dili - Districts - sub-districts - villages - communities, and vice versa. The CNRT has offices in each sub-District, which assemble most information from District leader and village leaders.

<sup>26</sup> Geographically, the sub-district Maubara has more difficulties than others to travel through in that most communities are on higher and farther mountains from sub-district town.

<sup>27</sup> Areas such as the sub-District Liquiça and Bazartete had lesser available information, due to the unclear communication lines, limited networks and mis-management.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was established on 25 October 1999 following the United Nations Security Council, by resolution 1272 (1999), as an integrated multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation fully responsible for the administration of East Timor during its transition to independence. Resolution 1272 mandated UNTAET to provide security and maintain law and order throughout the territory of East Timor; to establish an effective administration; to assist in the development of civil and social services; to ensure the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development assistance; to support capacity-building for self-government; and to assist in the establishment of conditions for sustainable development. UNTAET consisted of a governance and public administration component, a civilian police component of up to 1,640 civilian police and an armed United Nations peacekeeping force, of equivalent size to INTERFET. In addition, humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation components were incorporated within the structures of the Transitional Administration. See, *East Timor UNTAET Background*, <http://www.un.org/peace/etimor/UntaetB.htm>

In East Timor, problems are dealt with by discussions or public talk in each level of administrative divisions, i.e. community, village, sub-District and District. Customarily, people take a consensus style for the decision-making and follow a top-down approach.<sup>29</sup> Considering rural village characteristics, high illiteracy and lack of information in community and village levels, the consensus system dominates the decision making process, partly because of high respect to leaders who are mostly elderly persons.

### **Militia: The Reality?**

Incidences between militia groups and peacekeepers were often reported during the field research, particularly in border areas. These militias caused atrocities such as murder, rape, setting fire, plunder, and torture to the pro-independent civilians during the turmoil.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst the militia aggression called media attention as a consequence of the violence after the national ballot resulted in majority support for independence, some East Timorese militias, openly supported by the Indonesian army (TNI), were formed as early as in the 1970s. In addition, not all militias were East Timorese.<sup>31</sup> According to CNRT leaders, in some areas in East Timor, half of the militia were West Timorese. There were a number of Indonesian populations including police officers, army officers, and others, who were supporting the militia. An existing theory explains that the flow of goods and people from West Timor and other part of Indonesia that has been sustaining East Timor economy facilitated the support of militia activities by the Indonesian population.

During the turmoil after the ballot, a number of refugees fled mostly to West Timor.<sup>32</sup> The refugees numbered more than 250,000, which also included the Indonesia army-backed militias. Most of the militias left East Timor for West Timor when a multilateral force led by Australia started arriving on 20th September.<sup>33</sup>

### *Three Types of Militia*

Field interviews made it clear that there were three types of militia. These three types are:

- (1) Vocational militia: Those who have been members of armed group organised such as the

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<sup>29</sup> For several times in the field survey, the author witnessed public talks held in communities and villages.

<sup>30</sup> Throughout East Timor, 70 percent of infrastructure has been destroyed including homes, clinics, and water and electrical systems. In addition, almost all public buildings in the main cities were destroyed. *East Timor Development Report*, UNTAET (2001)

<sup>31</sup> There were those who were born or having spouse born in East Timor yet not Timorese.

<sup>32</sup> The number of refugees is figured in the later section. Most of them were fled to Atambua, close to the border between East and West Timor, and Kupang, far west of West Timor.

<sup>33</sup> Some small groups of militias were active in the border area between East and West Timor, particularly in Districts of Bobonaro and Covalima, even at the time of August 2000.

militia from the time of the Indonesian rule.

- (2) Accumulated militia: Those who became a member of militia at the time of turmoil, just before and after the national ballot. This includes those who were forced to be a member.
- (3) Militia relatives: Those who are perceived as a member of militia by reason that one of the family members is a member of militia. Therefore, in a strict term, they are not members of militia but cannot return as they are taken as members of militia.

From people's explanation in Liquiça, the majority of the second and third categories of the militia did not commit serious crimes by their own motivation and in fact most of them classified in these two categories returned to the places where they are from at early phase of refugee repatriation process.

In some reports by media, all those who fled to West Timor are considered as 'militia,' which implied that they all committed atrocities during the turmoil in September. Yet majority of refugees were not assailants but victims who were forced to leave East Timor. Therefore soon after the security in East Timor was retained, they have returned to their communities.<sup>34</sup> Hence there exists a certain level of differentiation amongst the population about the different factions/ status of the militia.

#### *Return to Villages*

In the course of survey, it became apparent that leaders of the CNRT, who have been working for the acceptance of returnees and reconciliation in each district with the co-operation of the UNTAET, recognise the difference in militia. In addition, from field interviews at villages in Liquiça, most people in villages also recognize this difference. This is partly because of the strong information networks of the CNRT between leaders of the District and sub-District, and village leaders, which made it possible to share all details about militia from the lower levels to the top.<sup>35</sup>

During the interviews in communities, most people confirmed that they would like to accept returnees as their brothers and sisters. Yet there were a number of village people who confessed that there are certain returnees that they cannot accept: those who committed serious crimes such as murder, rape and torture. They acknowledged that those returnees who committed serious crimes are mostly vocational militias. Therefore the most difficult stage of acceptance of returnees will be

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<sup>34</sup> The number of returnees marked about 170,000 at the time of August 2000.<sup>34</sup> However, those who remained in West Timor comprise a majority of former militias as well as their families and other refugees.

<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the details of militia, name, family and the type of militia, were identified by community leaders in each village for several occasions at the field interview. There was an occasion that a former militia spoke his experience. He was forced to be a member of militia before the turmoil. Therefore, he and his family left for West Timor soon after the ballot. He came back to his village in March 2000 after two-day stay in a detention centre in Dili. Since then he has engaged in voluntary works such as cleaning streets in his village.

when those vocational militias, if they do, come back from West Timor to East Timor, as they have to deal with the domestic backlash.

### *Investigation of Returnees*

Under the UN Transitional Administration, the investigation of returnees, the UNTAET, specifically the Civil Police, was in charge. All refugees had the right to return yet they are required to have an examination by the Civil Police when they return. If the returnee carries arms or some accusation exists against the person, the Civil Police would investigate all details. After investigation, they are either sent to jail or set free. However this procedure was not commonly implemented, at least, in the District Liquiça.<sup>36</sup>

The fact is that all returnees were sent to the CNRT, first of all, where members of investigation committee checked whether or not the person was militia or not and whether he/she committed criminal acts, particularly murder and torture. Generally small crimes such as plunder and setting fire were not addressed. The UNTAET officers from the Human Rights Section carried out investigation at this stage. This investigation results were compared with those of the CNRT. The Civil Police had carried out investigation only when some serious crimes were proved, as a need was felt to investigate. Nevertheless, despite the fact that some were found not guilty, they were sent back to the hands of CNRT. This is partly because those returnees often become a target of revenge by the people, who lost their family members in the community or village, and considered anyone even remotely associated of having committed a crime. The CNRT, therefore, provides a place for them until their security in the village is confirmed.

### **Reconciliation**

The role played by the CNRT, NGOs and other national organisations such as the church has been extremely positive, especially when seen in reference to the work done by them in aiding the reconciliation process.<sup>37</sup> In the District Liquiça, reconciliation efforts were witnessed at community and village levels. According to CNRT leaders, before returnees came back to the village, the village, community and leaders held several meetings.<sup>38</sup> One of the CNRT leaders explained that whenever returnees arrived at their own communities, there were meetings held at both community and village levels, where leaders welcomed those returnees and stressed the importance of cooperative work for the reconstruction of their community and village. Those meetings are held

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<sup>36</sup> This research was carried out only in Liquiça. Therefore it is limited in scope and cannot be applied generally to all districts. However since other social indicators such as the social condition in other districts were similar, this might have been a general tendency throughout East Timor.

<sup>37</sup> Comments by an NGO officer. Considering people's religious tradition, i.e. 90 percent Roman Catholic, and the social influence of church, the role played by church has been one of the aiding factors for the reconciliation process. This information had been collected by the author through a series of interviews and church records.

<sup>38</sup> Usually refugee return was informed beforehand. Information from interviews to the CNRT leaders in Maubara (one of the sub-Districts in the District Liquiça).



constantly in the village level. Leaders of the CNRT have been playing the central role in this process. One of the leaders described that returnees usually attend community and village meetings after they return, where CNRT leaders speak to the people. The first factors highlighted in the meeting were to eliminate distorted information that those returnees obtained from militia leaders in West Timor.<sup>39</sup> Subsequent to this attempt, leaders in the CNRT calls all people to work for the reconstruction of their village together regardless of their past. These meetings provide an opportunity for all the actors to come together and prove as a forum for carrying the reconciliation process. Substantively, these meetings seem to just reintroduce the returnees to the community. During the interviews to some of those who were attending the meeting, it was the common comment that they accept the returnees and would work together with them as their leaders have advocated.

The CNRT reconciliation scheme has a certain positive connotation, i.e. their acceptance bears generous moral fibre and careful approach to both returnees and to those who incurred pain by losing family or relatives. However, the methods in this process have relied heavily on leaders of village and authority of the CNRT, so that the achievement could be rarely enduring or expected to broaden the scope.

There were other reconciliation efforts such as workshops and symposiums by churches and NGOs. During the field research, there were several reconciliation symposiums at the church in the sub-District Maubara.<sup>40</sup> The number of attendance in such occasions shows people's eagerness for finding a way to heal their relationships.<sup>41</sup> Although the symposiums were centred principally on religious teachings and preaching, this created a positive occasion that people can gather to address and reconsider relationships between former antagonists

In addition to the Timorese efforts, some other international organisations have also held peace-building projects involving various reconciliation schemes.<sup>42</sup> This has been one of the positive tendencies in that the reconciliation process and must be carried out by former antagonists and effectees to promote peace.

### **Recent Refugee Return**

During the of field research in the middle of 2000, the total number of returnee was 170,000. The number of returnee was critically decreasing in the end of the year in spite of all international efforts.

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<sup>39</sup> Militia leaders in West Timor informed refugees that the CNRT attempts to slay them when they return. From interviews to a representative working in one of the national non-governmental organisations based in Dili.

<sup>40</sup> The militia violence was highest in the District.

<sup>41</sup> According to the CNRT leader, usually approximately 100 people attend such symposiums.

<sup>42</sup> Most of the cases in Liquiça for those projects are jointly implemented with national NGOs. International NGOs and some donor governments provided schemes and funding to the local NGOs and assisted the implementation.

It was already a difficult situation for the refugee repatriation as some of them preferred to stay in West Timor while others hoped to be back to East Timor. The distinction was not clear-cut and political efforts by the Indonesian government as well as the UN agencies and the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), did not result in expected rate of refugees coming back to East Timor.<sup>43</sup>

This year marked a high number of repatriation partly because of optimism as for East Timor's official independence.<sup>44</sup> The recent return indicates that more than 213,000 of refugees fled or forced out of the territory in 1999 have returned to the country. Fewer than 50,000 refugees remain in West Timor. Although Indonesian government starts halting assistances to those refugees and conditions for refugees is becoming severe, there are still serious obstacles to return for East Timorese refugees.<sup>45</sup> These obstacles have ranged between the followings.

- 1) Death threats against families seeking to leave,
- 2) Attacks on convoys heading back for East Timor,
- 3) Distorted information by militia regarding East Timor, and
- 4) Militia leader presence in the camps.

Sending back refugees to East Timor seemingly has given optimism, at least, to the remaining number of refugees. However, few may realise that the recent return involves some key issues for East Timor's new start as a state. For less than three-year transitional period before the full-independence, international organisations, churches, and NGOs have made efforts for reconciliation between former militia and the people. The early returnees were, as most CNRT and village leaders indicated, those who were either victims of the turmoil or accumulated militias and their families. Therefore, the attempt to adapt them to the society bore minor problems. However, recent returnees include former militia leaders, vocational militias and their family, which elucidates that more crucial problems lie ahead.

### **After the Field Research: Some Concluding Comments**

Throughout the field research, there were several points need to be addressed both in general and the reconciliation process in specific:

The general were,

- 1) The legitimacy of the CNRT: The CNRT was not officially elected body by popular vote at

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<sup>43</sup> Still by the end of 2001, total 192,000 refugees were sent back, remaining 60,000 – 75,000 in West Timor, according to the UN report. Report of the Secretary General on the UNTAET for the period from 16th October to 18th January 2002. Security Council, S/2002/80, 17th January, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> In the beginning of this year, some 10,000 refugees returned to East Timor. Since the beginning of June, nearly 5,000 refugees have returned from West Timor to East Timor, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The most recent return, according to IOM, is some 1,100 East Timorese refugees from the towns of Soe and Atambua in West Timor on 23rd July.

<sup>45</sup> This information is based on the interviews with more than 100 East Timorese returnees in transition centre in Dili. Cf. Human Rights Watch, *East Timor: Forced Expulsion to West Timor and Refugee Crisis*.

the time of field research, although majority people were supporting their manoeuvres. Almost all operations were carried out by way of the CNRT.<sup>46</sup>

- 2) There is high possibility that relying on the information line by the CNRT excludes those who were out of the circle.<sup>47</sup>
- 3) Principally the CNRT did not have such a right to take overall authority over returnees and the people.<sup>48</sup>

[In the reconciliation process]

- 1) Reconciliation methods portray top-down processes in which changes in social goals and beliefs are initiated by elite groups, i.e. the CNRT.
- 2) External organisations have just helped to filter down the CNRT initiatives to the public.
- 3) The approach has high risk to affect the society as a whole in a sense that it installs absolute hierarchical system, particularly in the rural area and also creates a condition for social exclusion for those who do not fit in the system.

The field research revealed that reconciliation initiatives in the past were accompanied by symbolic acts intending to integrate the public into the process. The success of the approach in the past may be smaller than actual steps and future refugee return may put the light on the fragmental effect of the previous attempts. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission must avoid being just a figurative organisation and a discharge duty.<sup>49</sup> Some of the opinion gathered through the field interviews has implied such a situation that the public was passive rather than proactive. This is true particularly for the public in rural villages and further more in communities in remote areas. Taking public opinion, people's perception and expectation, in this process, above all such remote areas, may become a breakthrough, which tells us a valid view of reality.<sup>50</sup> Future reconciliation in East Timor, therefore, requires firm efforts for creating the social space for the people to address and also assess their own society from both public and elite groups. Recent refugee return and remaining refugees in West Timor call attentions to review the reconciliation methods in the past and to set up an empirical baseline for reconciliation sentiments.

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<sup>46</sup> In most post-conflict area, where there is no legitimate national body, external organisations must be careful not to be conformed to the circumstance.

<sup>47</sup> This point was discussed with one of the sub-District leaders for several occasions, in which the leader made it clear that leaders in each community and village have constant talk and discussions with those who do not stand by the CNRT and try to take in their opinion as well.

<sup>48</sup> Some UNTAET officers raised this point in the discussion. However, realities of the field condition in villages, limited human resources and information resources, resulted in the reliance on the CNRT. This was a particularly difficult issue during the transitional period.

<sup>49</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inaugurated in the beginning of 2002, which is expected to operate at least two years and work in conjunction with East Timor's judicial system to deal with atrocities committed during the twenty-five years of occupation by Indonesian forces.

<sup>50</sup> The importance of public opinion in the reconciliation process, see, Shamir, J. and Shikaki, K. (2002) op. cit.