

Analysis of The Sectarian Conflict In Maluku and Its Role In The Islamicisation of Indonesia

A Report By JUBILEE CAMPAIGN UK

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Jubilee Campaign is an interdenominational Christians human rights organisation which has worked with over 150 British Parliamentarians for persecuted Christians all over the world, in countries such as China, Vietnam, Laos, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sudan, Egypt, Burma, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia.

Synopsis:

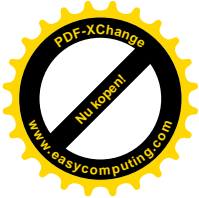
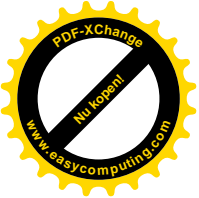
This resume includes a short summary of the background and the salient points of the conflict. It submits that the sectarian conflict in Maluku is master-minded by Islamist Indonesian Army (TNI) officers and Islamist organisations in Indonesia in an effort to change the constitution of Indonesia from a pluralist basis to one that is based or flavoured by Islamic laws and to Islamicise the country as a whole. This report, however, does not demonise Islam or even blame the Muslim community in Maluku. It is blaming the leaders of the Muslim community in Maluku, certain Islamist military officers and organisations for using religion for their own political motives. To a certain extent this conflict also can be seen as between certain Muslims who are trying to protect their privileged positions in Indonesia (pro-status quo) and Nationalists who are trying to reform the Indonesian society to a democratic one.

Introduction:

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, however its constitution is not based on Islam, but on Pancasila (5 principles; the first of which is Belief in God Almighty). It therefore represents a major prize to capture for the Islamists. In fact since the formation of Indonesia's first constitution in 1945 some Muslims have tried to change the multi-religious basis of Indonesia to one which is based solely on Islam (see for instance Ricklefs, 1993 - refer to Bibliography at the back of this report). This effort continued into the 1950s when Indonesia briefly enjoyed a democratic, constitutional Government (Nasution, 1992).

In the first 20 years or so of his rule, President Soeharto gave patronage and privilege to many Christians whilst at the same time often repressing many Islamic movement. However, from 1990 he usually gave his patronage and privileged treatment to Muslims. The change of policy may have been related to the growing unpopularity of Soeharto, particularly from within the armed forces, such that he needed to enlist Muslim political support (Vatikiotis, 1994; Schwarz, 1994). This tactic of dividing and ruling caused the Muslim majority in Indonesia to fear losing their privileged position. Such sentiment was then exploited by Muslim extremists.

Increased patronage to Muslims was signified by the formation of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) spear-headed by the then Minister of Research and Technology B.J. Habibie. Because Habibie spent so many years studying and working in Germany, he did not have a broad political support base in Indonesia. Subsequently Habibie used ICMI as his power-base.



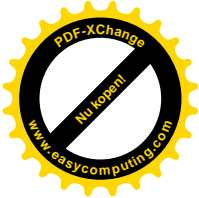
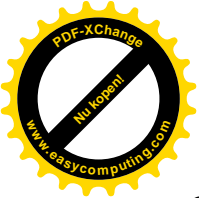
The rise of Islam in Indonesian politics was also marked by the rise of the pro-Muslim faction in the military and police (note that until recently the police force is part of the armed forces, often known by its initial ABRI). This created major division within ABRI, between the Islamist Officers and Nationalist ones. The nationalists are in favour of secularism while the Islamists support the Islamicising, or at the very least a much greater role for Islam in the political, social and military life in Indonesia. The nationalist camp is often known as ABRI-Red and White (after the national flag of Indonesia) and is led by the current Head of Armed Forces General Wiranto. The Islamist camp is often known as ABRI-Green and was led by among others, Lt. Gen. Prabowo (son in law of ex-President Soeharto), Gen. Hartono and Gen. Feisal Tanjung. The current leader of this camp is unclear, but there appears to be much indication that Major General Zacky Anwar Makarim is at the very least an influential person in this camp. Note that Gen. Makarim has also been implicated in master-minding the destruction and atrocities in East Timor after the referendum on the future of that territory.

There are only 6 provinces in Indonesia which contain a non-Muslim majority or only a slight Muslim majority, they are: Bali, East Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, Irian Jaya, North Sulawesi and Maluku. With the exception of Bali, which is mainly Hindu, all the provinces have substantial Christian populations. In Ambon, Christians have a slight majority over Muslims, but for the province of Maluku as a whole, it is reported to be about 55% Muslim and 45% Christian. These percentages are taken from Patrick Johnstone's, "Operation World", published by OM Publishing in 1993. One popular theory within the Christian community in Indonesia is that Maluku is being used as a testing ground to subjugate the Christians and therefore change the demography of the Christian areas in Maluku to a Muslim majority or at the very least have Muslims controlling all the political and public life in Maluku. There is even a plan to divide Maluku into two provinces (despite the fact that it is one of the smallest provinces in Indonesia) into: North Maluku which is Muslim majority and South Maluku with a Christian majority. The current sectarian conflict occurs mostly in Central and SE Maluku. The reasoning of the Islamists appears to be that if Maluku can be subjugated then the other 5 provinces (excluding East Timor which is headed towards independence) can also be brought under Islamic domination. Once this has happened, there is little to stop the changing of the Indonesian constitution from its pluralist base to an Islamic one.

Persecution and Discrimination Against Christians in Indonesia:

Persecutions against Christians, which were done in a very subtle way during the Soeharto era, have turned into more blatant and vicious ways during the Habibie era. Starting from the last few years of Soeharto's rule there was an increase in attacks on Christians and ethnic Chinese (majority of whom are Christians). The Indonesian Christian Communication Forum has catalogued the names of 596 Churches burnt/destroyed/vandalised up to 25 August 1999. Of these 2 were destroyed in the time of President Soekarno, the first President of an independent Indonesia, 456 in President Soeharto's time and 138 so far, during his successor, President Habibie's rule. Of the 594 Churches destroyed in Soeharto's and Habibie's times, 355 were destroyed between 1995-1999 (see Figure 1).

Religiously motivated attacks against Christians in Indonesia were growing long before the Asian financial crisis of 1997, which precipitated the downfall of President Soeharto and widespread social unrest in the country. For instance, on October 10th 1996, in Situbondo in Java, 24 churches were destroyed by Muslim rioters and 5 Christians were killed. The victims were: Rev. Ishak Kristian, Mrs. Ribka Lena, Elizabeth Kristian, Nova Samuel and Sri Karyawati. A number of Catholic schools and an orphanage were also destroyed. In "The



Church and Human Rights In Indonesia", published by the Surabaya-Indonesia Christian Communications Forum in 1997 - edited by Dr. Med. Paul Tahalele, M.D and Dr. Thomas Santoso, M. Si - they report in Indonesia: "There were many incidents where churches were destroyed, closed or burnt, such as: ten churches in Surabaya on June 9, 1996; twenty-four churches in Situbondo on October 1996; some churches in Siantan, Borneo were closed or destroyed on March 30, 1996; in Wates, Kediri, on June 14, 1996; in Pare, Kediri, on June 25, 1996, in Bekasi, West Java, on July 17, 1996 and in Kendari, South East Sulawesi (during 1996). Another sad event known as Black Thursday happened in Tasikmalaya, West Java on December 26, 1997, when Christians all over the world were celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world, 2000 years ago. Fifteen churches were destroyed or burnt and four people died."

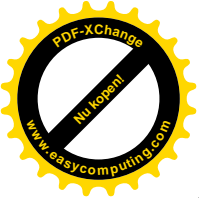
This report cites Jesuit priest, Father Frans Magnis Suseno S.J as writing in *Hidup (Life)* magazine that the Republic of Indonesia was the "first world champion" in church destruction and arson.

One senior Indonesian Protestant pastor interviewed in 1996 stated that yearly about 10 to 20 churches were destroyed or forcibly closed (this was in 1996 - the number has probably increased). He commented that "the government is not doing anything for us." Both local and higher authorities were not lifting their fingers on behalf of the Christian minority and added, "The Muslims have the majority; which politician would like to affront them...In case of an incident the authorities always look for a source in the church. You did not have permission, or you made too much noise, etc." Or they give reasons like - we only have a few policemen against a crowd of 1,000, so we cannot handle it, but next time we will be able to help.

The pastor commented that the Muslims had taken over all high posts in the military by that time, and by far the most posts in the government. In future it would be highly unlikely that any Christians would be appointed to a top position. The Muslims would claim that since Indonesia is an Islamic country there is no reason to appoint Christians to such influential positions. The pastor believed that often Malaysia is used as an example to justify such action. The perception is that Malaysia has more money, less problems and calls itself an Islamic nation with Islam being the official religion so Indonesia should follow this example.

The Pastor also observed that the Indonesian government was largely sponsoring the construction of mosques, Islamic schools, and other types of Islamic properties. He claimed that the government had invested one billion dollars in such projects from 1991 to 1996, through two or three different foundations, belonging to the family of President Soeharto. He stated that it was not possible to open Christian book shops, apart from in some locations in the big cities. Even when a book shop was opened, it was likely that the Muslims would come in and demand a display of Islamic books, larger in quantity than the Christian books. If this was not done, it was possible for the shop to be stoned.

These are just a few examples to illustrate that there has been a gradual increase in anti-Christian activity in Indonesia, with the growth of attempts to Islamicise the country. A western expatriate who formerly lived in Indonesia, frequently visits the country and has extensive contacts there, has given an analysis of the situation which includes the following excerpts: "As the popularity of the Soeharto regime declined, so the President had to shore up his backing by engaging in new alliances. Army generals were "bought" with exploitation rights to huge tracts of tropical jungle. Concessions were made to the more extreme Islamic factions, tipping the balance of power in their direction. Whilst Habibie was still heading up



the national aeronautical industry in Bandung he was invited to set up the Indonesian Islamic Intellectuals Association in order to win support for the government in that direction. Enormous sums of money were poured into Islamic welfare and social organisations. Little by little leading Christians were side-lined from positions of influence in the civil service, the military, the government and higher education. Strategic government departments (such as that responsible for food distribution) were taken over by the Islamic extremists.

.....There are two major obstacles to the establishment of an Islamic Nation, 1. the Chinese ethnic group who dominate the economic life of the country, and 2. the National Constitution "Pancasila" which enshrines the freedom of religion. During the past two years there has been a systematic attempt to remove these two obstacles. The vicious attacks on the Chinese - the destruction of their homes, the looting of their shops and brutal rape of Chinese women are all aimed at driving the Chinese from their influential niche. The Habibie government has put high priority on setting up Islamic co-operatives to replace the Chinese traders and business men in the economy.

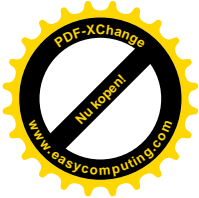
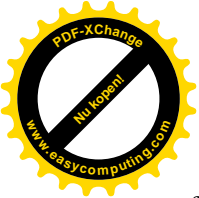
The systematic burning of churches, making Christians, especially those of Chinese ethnic descent, scapegoats for the country's economic problems is the second prong of attack. The campaign to foment religious violence still continues. Trouble makers are hired to trigger incidents and then bus loads of hired ruffians are shipped in to start riots, burning and looting..."

The organised attacks against Christians in Maluku is just one outcome of this growing tide of religious intolerance. The pattern of intimidation and attacks against Christians in Maluku is very similar to those employed in East Timor and suggest a pre-planned effort backed by sections of the military. For example Lt. Gen. Prabowo was reported to have invited many kyais (Islamic religious teachers) and gave them copies of the book *Lords of the Rim*, which describes the economic power of the overseas Chinese (Seagrave, 1995) thus fuelling anti-Chinese feeling (Far Eastern Economic Review, 12 February 1999, page 17). Many of the Church attacks and attacks on ethnic Chinese were not stopped, and in some cases even supported, by military people (e.g. the May 1998 riots in Jakarta in which a large number of Chinese women were raped and even murdered and Chinese properties destroyed; Mann, 1999).

There is also an encouragement of Muslim radicalisation and incitement of hatred against non-Muslims by the pro-Muslim media. For instance the Muslim media and Islamist ministers (e.g. Adi Sasono, Minister for Co-operatives and Small Enterprises; claimed to be Indonesia's most dangerous man in the Far Eastern Economic Review 3/12/1998 and the Economist 20/3/1999) blamed ethnic Chinese conglomerates for the economic crisis whilst mentioning nothing of the role of Soeharto and his Muslim cronies. There was also widespread blame of Christian finance ministers from the Soeharto era for the economic crisis. Just before the election, the politician Megawati Sukarnoputri was accused by another Islamist minister (Dr A.M. Saefuddin) of being a Hindu simply because she went and prayed in a Hindu temple.

History and Location of Maluku:

Maluku - known in English as the Moluccas - is one of the 26 provinces in Indonesia (excluding East Timor). It is also known as the original Spice Islands. Historically it is the place which started the European exploration to the East and to America and subsequently changed the history of the world (Roditi, 1972). In the 1667 Treaty of Breda, for example, the



formerly British-held island of Run in the Banda Islands was ceded to the Dutch in exchange for Manhattan Island in America (Hanna, 1978).

As a consequence of the past importance of Maluku, traders from China, Arab, India, Java and latterly Europe came and subsequently influenced the local culture and introduced religions to the population whose dominant religion was animism. Islam arrived in the 13th Century in North Maluku and later spread to the northern part of Ambon Island (Leihitu Peninsula; see Figure 2). Christianity came with the Portuguese in 1511 and it received a favourable response among the animists in the southern part of Ambon Island. Catholicism was then largely replaced by Calvinist Protestantism with the consolidation of Dutch power in early 17th Century. Catholicism remains strong in south-east Maluku (Leirissa, 1975).

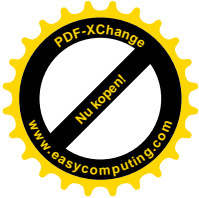
Similarities in culture and previous animist beliefs between Christian and Muslim Moluccans, meant that the relationship between the two religious groups were harmonious. Particularly in the area surrounding Ambon Island, the two communities are often tied in a traditional alliance called Pela and Gandong. Pela, which is a vow of brotherhood, can be held among Muslims or Christians villages, or between the two. Gandong existed when two or more villages descended from one patriarch. In most cases, Gandong exists between Muslim and Christian villages. When villages are tied by these vows, they are traditionally required to help each other, and this includes the building of Houses of Worship (Cooley, 1987). Although there was close cooperation, both the Christian and Muslim communities remained deeply loyal to their respective religious faiths.

Administratively, Maluku is divided into 6 sub-districts: North Maluku, Central Halmahera, Ternate City (all majority Muslims in North Maluku), Central Maluku (Protestant majority), Ambon City (slight Christian majority) and South East Maluku (mostly Catholics). Ambon City is the capital of Maluku and it is located on Ambon Island (Figure 2).

Pre-Conflict Setting in Maluku:

In Ambon there were increasing numbers of migrants which shifted the religious balance from a clear majority of Christians to approximately 50-50 Christian-Muslim population (one statistic show a population of 312,000 that is 42.4% Muslim and 57.5% Christian with at least 50,000 new arrivals of Muslim from South Sulawesi). During the rule of President Soeharto, he implemented a transmigration policy, forcing many to migrate from one part of Indonesia to another. The Church in Maluku stated that the transmigration policy favoured Muslim rather than Christian migration to Maluku.

With the shift in demography came the gradual marginalisation of Christians. The rise of ICMI's political influence meant that ICMI membership was an essential passport to success in the bureaucracy and politics. As a result, Ambonese Christians began to be squeezed out of local government, police and the military. Many key positions in Maluku, in the government, police and military were taken away from Christians and handed to Muslims. The current governor Dr M. Saleh Latuconsina fired many Christian government officials and replaced them with Muslims (e.g. in South East Maluku the regent and most of his staff are Muslims, when the majority of the population in the area are Catholics). One report from Ambon stated that it was clearly observed that the local Christian policemen slowly disappeared from the streets of Ambon, and were replaced by Muslim police from South Sulawesi. There have also been several reported cases of increased insults and intimidation against the Christians in Ambon.



Politically, the two communities are also divided, with most Christians supporting PDI-P (The Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri) whereas Muslims are largely supporters of PPP (The United Development Party, a Soeharto formed Muslim-based party, now supporting Habibie. This party was created by Soeharto in the early 1970s to amalgamate all the Muslim-based political parties. In the beginning this was an attempt to subjugate the various Muslim parties. However, in the 1980s Nahdatul Ulama (under the leadership of Muslim moderate, Abdurrahman Wahid, left the coalition and since then the PPP has become more extreme).

Events Leading to the Conflict:

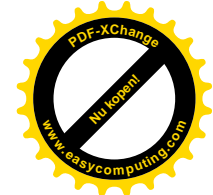
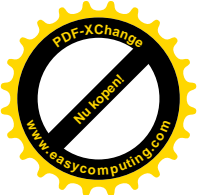
The good relationship between young Christian and Muslim Moluccans (mostly Ambonese-people from the Island of Ambon and the surrounding area) in Jakarta was weakened when the Moluccan Muslim Youth leader in Jakarta - Deddy Hamdan - disappeared with other pro-democracy activists between February and April 1998. The Indonesian army's elite force, Kopassus, was implicated in the kidnapping. The leadership of the Moluccan Muslim Youth was then taken over by Ongen Sangaji who is a member of Pemuda Pancasila, an organisation reportedly made up of ex-criminals and thugs who supported Golkar (the ruling party during Soehartos time). This organisation has been accused of attacking the headquarters of Megawati Sukarnoputri, mass rioting in Jakarta, killing of religious teachers associated with Nahdatul Ulamas (a moderate Muslim social movement) in East Java, the Cawang and Ketapang massacres, the Maluku conflict and eye witness reports by MataBean organisation (Human Rights group working in East Timor) indicate that Ongen Sangaji and his men were part of the East Timor militia. Sangaji is also known to be close to Tutut and Bambang Soeharto (the children of ex-president Soeharto).

In early November 1999, Ongen Sangaji with the funding of Tutut Soeharto, recruited radical Muslim youths including many Ambonese Muslims to form the PAM-Swakarsa militia. This militia aimed to protect the Extra Ordinary Parliamentary Meeting who approved the appointment of B.J Habibie as president and decided the timing of the General Election (Mann, 1999). During this time the militia clashed with pro-democracy student protesters and 4 Ambonese Muslims were killed near the Indonesian Christian University in the Cawang District of Jakarta. There were apparently photos of atrocities from East Timor which were distributed to Muslim villages in Ambon, before the Ambon conflict, alleged to be those of the 4 Ambonese Muslims. The distributor of the photos, thought to be Major General Kivlan Zen, claimed that 4 youth were killed and crucified by Christians.

On 22 November, 1998 there was a gang fight between Ambonese Christian and Muslims in Jakarta's Ketapang district. This triggered an orgy of killing and church-burning by youths trucked in from elsewhere, after false rumours spread that Ambonese Christians had burnt a local mosque.

Following these two incidents, Ambonese Muslim and Christian thugs were shipped to Ambon. One theory as to who was responsible for this is that Jakarta-based Ambonese gangsters loyal to the Soeharto family did this. They, aided and abetted by rogue military elements, provoked or took advantage of a street fight between a Christian bus driver and a Bugis migrant in Ambon on the first day of the Muslim Idulfitri holiday, to trigger the sectarian conflict.

In Ambon itself there were:



Warnings to Javanese Muslims in Ambon before January 1999 to leave Ambon
Warning within Butonese communities not to attend Ied prayers in Al Fatah Mosque (central Mosque in Ambon) because there was going to be a massacre
There is an Ambonese Muslim who inadvertently told a Christian before the start of the unrest that in a few hours Ambon would be controlled by Muslims
Furthermore, the Response Centre for the Bloody Idulfitri Conflict - Legal Division was formed on 6/1/1999, 9 days BEFORE the sectarian conflict even started!! In 1994 there was a meeting on Maluku's Muslim Culture sponsored by Qalfir HMI (Muslim Student Association) Ambon branch. In this meeting, M. Nour Tawainela (an Ambonese Muslim) delivered a paper on The Development of Islamic Culture in Ambon City, Within the Context of Cultural Transformation Now and in the Future. In the meeting Tawainela clearly stated that due to the lack of distinctions between the teachings of Islam and culture, the effort to Islamicise Ambon will be a holy ideal for every Muslim intellect today (data from the Team of Church Lawyers).

Abdurrahman Wahid, the head of Nahdatul Ulama (the biggest Muslim organisation in Indonesia) has even criticised the Muslim leaders in Maluku, particularly those in MUI (Majelis Ulamas Indonesia - an organisation loyal to Soeharto) Maluku branch for being responsible for this sectarian conflict.

There was also reported sighting of Major General Zacky Anwar Makarim, the ex-chief of Army intelligence who is known to support extreme Muslim groups, in Ambon days before the conflict.

The Conflict:

The sectarian conflict started on 15-17 January 1999 in Dobo (the furthest city in Maluku away from Ambon), thus prompting the sending of police and troops to Dobo. This had the effect of draining military resources in Ambon.

On 19 January 1999 there were 4 incidents of Muslim-Christian fights. The last one resulted in a Christian bus driver chasing a Muslim migrant into a Muslim area (Batu Merah) after the Muslim migrant tried to extract money from the bus driver. This was followed by attacks by Muslim mobs into the Christian area of Mardika and the burning of several houses there. Almost simultaneously sectarian conflict developed several kilometres away in Silale and Waihaong. These events were well documented by the court in Indonesia during the trial of the bus driver.

The initial issue of local fight quickly changed to a religious issue. Note that at this time many Christians were visiting Muslims during Idulfitri - the day which celebrates the Islamic Holy month of Ramadhan. For example, people from Ouw village were visiting Muslim village of Seith and many Christian were in the Muslim village of Batu Merah. The Muslim masses seemed to be well prepared and they appeared with white head bands which is unusual in Ambon. The Christians use red headbands, which is the traditional warring headbands for both indigenous Muslim and Christian villages.

Human rights workers in Indonesia conducted investigations shortly after the outbreak of sectarian violence in Ambon in January 1999. They reported that on January 20th, in the Christian village of Benteng Karang, in northern Ambon, 15 Christians were massacred by Muslims and their bodies cut up. During this massacre, four security personnel are said to have arrived, embraced the rioters, then departed. They noted that eyewitnesses reported that



the riots which began on January 19th, expanded with a precision that smacked of pre-planning and organisation. Eyewitnesses claimed that the Muslim rioters came in three distinct waves. An initial group came to disperse residents and place distinguishing marks on Christian and Muslim homes. A second group then arrived to kill, torture and torch the Christian homes. Finally, a third group is supposed to have followed and looted whatever had not been burned. Indonesian police and army personnel are also said to have allowed Muslim rioters to pass through checkpoints unchallenged during the January riots (see also the joint letters from church leaders in Maluku, at the back of this report, which give several examples of anti-Christian bias by the Indonesian security forces.)

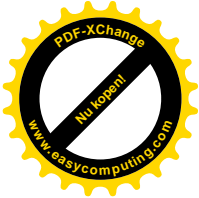
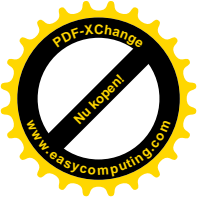
Whilst acknowledging that some Christians have used violence, other than in self defence, the fact remains that there have been no indigenous Muslim villages attacked throughout the sectarian violence. In contrast, several indigenous Christian villages have been attacked, such as Hila-Kaitetu (which housed the oldest Church in Maluku), Benteng Karang, Hunuth, Durian Patah, Nania, Negeri Lama, Waai, Suli, Tial Serani, Rumah Tiga, Tawiri and Galala all in the island of Ambon; Kairatu, Manipa (Tomahelu), Popora, Piru in the island of Seram; Kariu, Hulaliu and Sameth in Haruku Island; several villages in the Kei Islands; all of the Christian villages in the Banda Islands; Ulath, Siri-Sori Serani, Noloth and Porto in Saparua Island and Malifut in Halmahera. The conflicts are always moving which means the security forces have to guess where the next flash point will be and are subsequently spread out over many islands.

One characteristic of this conflict was the simultaneous attack by Muslim mobs which indicated a high degree of co-ordination and planning. For example on Thursday 12 August 1999 there were Muslim attacks around Ambon City at Poka, Rumah Tiga, Galala, Kompleks Aster, Kampung Ahuru, Air Besar, OSM and Kelurahan Batu Meja.

The pre-planned attacks appear to have a pattern with the aim of controlling strategic installations and destroying property belonging to Christians (e.g. burning and looting of Christian shops, attack on Christian and State campuses, holding of inter-island ports and airport). Empirical field observations also indicate the mass mobilisation of Muslims from Leihitu Peninsula in northern Ambon. The capture of trucks full of weapons with people from Leihitu has been documented at least twice and a video was made of Leihitu people attacking Poka. In early September a boat with 80 fully armed Muslims from Ternate (North Maluku) trying to land in Ambon was captured.

Since the massacre of Christians at Yabok Protestant Church by Indonesian soldiers in the Galala area in August this year, there are currently Muslim attacks on Police houses and bases and Marines bases. Possible motivation for these attacks is to split and provoke the Police and Military forces and blame them to be siding with the Christians. This was clearly demonstrated in the attack on the Police housing area in **Talake area on 25-26 August 1999**, the attack on the Marines post in Ambon on 10 September 1999 and the attack on Tantui area (a predominantly Christian area, but with a sizeable Muslim community) on 14 September 1999 near a Police housing complex. On 16th October 1999 the Muslim mobs directly attacked the Air Force special unit who are guarding Ambon's airport. During this attack the Muslim side are seen to use automatic firearms.

The timing of the conflict also coincided with increased calls for investigation into the Soeharto families' riches and other major political events in Indonesia. The first conflict (15 January 1999) started when political parties for the general election were being formed and



registered, whereas the second conflict (27 July 1999) started the day after the announcement of the general election results (i.e. the start of political bargaining). In between the conflicts there were smaller conflicts which kept the hatred and distrust alive.

Recent developments in Maluku (since 23 August 1999) indicate that there is now a concerted effort by Islamists to isolate Ambon. A Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) press-release on 2 September 1999 stated that there were several murders on inter-island ships leaving Ambon. Groups of attackers waited until the ships sailed when they went on a killing rampage, targeting Christians, particularly those of Moluccan descent. There were also clashes near Ambon airport which resulted in the cancellation of all civilian flights. When the Governor of Maluku and the Chief of Police in Maluku requested that the airport be returned to its civilian status, renewed attacks by the Muslim mobs ensued. The head of military in Maluku has even requested the Navy to step up its patrol in the waters surrounding Ambon due to frequent attacks using boats. At the same time, conflicts have moved out of Ambon, thus draining the resources of the security forces there.

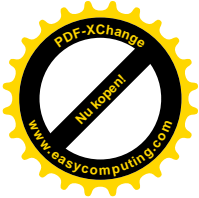
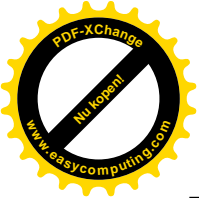
A recent report in one of the papers in Jakarta (Detik interactive) states that by 14/9/1999 there have been 1,349 deaths in the Maluku conflict. This according to local people is a conservative estimate. The Church has catalogued at least 459 Christians and 209 Muslims died in the first conflict alone.

Field evidence showing that the attacks were well planned and well co-ordinated include mass mobilisations, which were well targeted, systematic and strongly suggest that there were people working behind the scenes. This has also been acknowledged by the Governor of Maluku (a Muslim Ambonese) who stated in the Jakarta Post on 2/9/1999, that he blamed various political, economic and social interests in creating or sustaining the conflict in Maluku.

The Role of Media:

The pro-Muslim media in Indonesia have been very biased and only reported fatalities suffered by Muslims, some of which were not even true. In several instances they even fabricated outright lies (e.g. the horrific killing of a Christian pregnant woman in the village of Benteng Karang by Muslims was reported as a murder of a Muslim pregnant woman by Christians). The major elements in the Islamic media are controlled by ICMI and some generals in ABRI-Green. E.g. Republika newspaper is owned by General Hartono and ICMI. Note that the same tactic of media manipulation has been employed against the Australians for their involvement in East Timor.

The nationalist media portray the sectarian violence simply as a Muslim-Christian conflict, implying that both sides are equally aggressive and to blame for the troubles. When nationalist media filed a pro-Christian report they were intimidated by demonstrations and acts of violence. For example none of the statements by Ambon's Church leaders have been published in full in the media, and such statements have only been quoted in parts by the nationalist media. The Yabok Church massacre in which 25 or more Christians were killed was covered only in passing, whereas when 5 Muslims were killed outside of a Mosque by Indonesian soldiers these made the headlines and resulted in the call for Jihad (Holy) War by some Islamic leaders against the Christians.



There is now at least one book available in Indonesia which portrays the conflict in Maluku from the Muslim view, reporting alleged atrocities by Christians and mentioning none committed by Muslims. This is likely to whip up even more hysteria against the Christians.

Media manipulation has created the impression in Indonesia that Muslims are the victims in this conflict and has resulted in the call for Jihad. One instance of such a call was sponsored by KISDI (World Islamic Solidarity Indonesia) and the government did nothing to try and stop them, although such statements go against Indonesia's pluralist constitution. The call for Jihad has resulted in the mobilisation of Muslims from South Sulawesi, North Maluku and Ambonese Muslims from Jakarta to fight in Maluku against the Christians.

Ironically Maluku has previously always been the show case for religious harmony and tolerance. The efforts of the pro-Muslim media to manipulate and distort the news from Maluku has had the effect of demonising Ambonese Christians. This may also be a part of a plan to radicalise the general population in Indonesia to be anti-Chinese (for economic reasons) and anti-Christian (there is an overlap between these two groups, with many Chinese being Christians). By creating the problem in Ambon / Maluku, Islamic extremists appear to be trying to show the rest of Indonesia's Muslims that Christians can't be trusted and should be placed under firm Muslim domination.

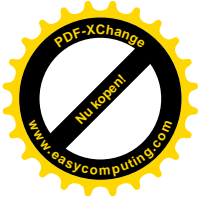
In recent days the local Christian Ambonese have started to distinguish peace-loving Ambonese Muslims from those calling for Jihad (often distinguished by their white robes and white head bands).

Extreme Muslim groups both in Maluku and in Jakarta (e.g. KISDI) and sections of the military blamed RMS (Republic of South Moluccas, a separatist movement) despite of lack of evidence for this claim. The Christians have strongly refuted this allegation and RMS in Holland (both Christians and Muslims in the movement) have strongly denied any involvement in the sectarian violence. On 18-19 October 1999, Abdurrahman Wahid even invited leaders of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands, including 3 pro-RMS leaders, to Jakarta to voice their concern about the sectarian conflict in Maluku with himself, the then President Habibie and General Wiranto.

Role of Military:

During the first sectarian conflict, the Indonesian military sent in Kostrad troops from Ujung Pandang (also known as Makassar). This was extremely unusual since one of the parties involved in the conflict was ethnic Buginese/Makassarese (people from Ujung Pandang). Furthermore, the Kostrad troops were known to be under the influence of Islamist officers. This unit was accused of complacency during the May 1998 riot in Jakarta and subsequently it was implicated in the shooting the Yabok Protestant Church Massacre and in Bethabara Church massacre where on 22nd February, 1999 six people were shot to death by the security officers. Three of victims were shot while they were inside the gate of the Nehemiah Church in the Bethabara congregation of Batu Merah Dalam village.

The Indonesian Military and Police are trying to create the impression that they are impartial and doing their best to control the situation when in fact there are major divisions within their ranks (cf. East Timor). Friction within the military can be seen in the different approach which different troops took (e.g. repressive Kostrad vs. Persuasive Marines). There were also open armed conflicts between Kostrad and the local Brimob (elite police force). The Marines and Paskhas-AURI (Air Force elite troops) units were shot at by Kostrad. Note that the



Marines and Paskhas-AURI are both under the control of nationalist officers. There are many eyewitness reports and a statement by a group of NGOs reporting on the presence of snipers including one who attempted to murder the head of the military in Maluku (a Christian Ambonese).

There are also eye-witness reports of the capture of people masquerading as soldiers, dressed in military outfits, inciting riots and in several instances shooting at Christians using automatic weapons. The speculation is that these people are part of the Tidar Group - disgruntled ex-special forces personnel loyal to Lt. General Prabowo. There were at least two instances of captured automatic weapons, bombs and ammunition which were sent to Ambonese Muslims. There are eyewitnesses and documented evidence of the use of machine guns and bombs by military people in the Muslim camp (e.g. attack of Yabok and Bethabara Churches and the attack on the Air Force elite unit in Ambon Airport on 16 October 1999). The critical question here is how Ambonese Muslims obtained access to bombs, automatic weapons and ammunition? This suggests an extensive level of organisation on the part of the Islamists.

Lack of Government Attention:

So far the only governmental attempts to solve this conflict has been to send several fact-finding missions (none of which published their conclusions) and to use the military approach to solve the conflict. There is very little political will on the part of the Indonesian government to investigate the causes of the conflict or even to facilitate peaceful settlement (see for instance the second joint statement of Church leaders in Maluku). People who have called for Jihad have not been called to answer for their actions, despite the fact that this call clearly runs against Indonesia's pluralistic basis and incited hatred against Indonesia's Christians.

With massive problems in East Timor, Aceh and with the Presidential election looming, little attention has been given to the conflict in Maluku, even though this conflict is crucial in defining the inter-religious relationship between Christians and Muslims throughout Indonesia. As an indication, in the Presidential speech on Independence day on 17th August this year, nothing was mentioned about Ambon /Maluku. Ex-president Habibie also failed to mention the sectarian conflict in Maluku during his State of the Nation address to the Parliament on 14th October 1999.

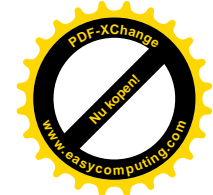
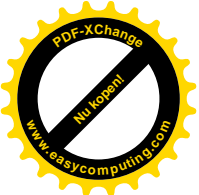
Possible Aims:

In attempting to answer this, the crucial questions are what would the Christians gain from this conflict and what would Muslim extremists gain? Some possible aims of this conflict are:

Shift attention from the persecution of Soeharto.

Tarnish the image of nationalist military officers (who are responsible for security in Jakarta and in Maluku). Note that before the second conflict (The first phase of intense sectarian conflict in Maluku was January to May 1999. Then there was 2 months of relative peace during which only minor incidents occurred. The second conflict is from July 27th this year and has been continuing at an intense pace since) ex-president Habibie installed a new deputy of TNI which is filled by a close friend of Habibies brother who is a Naval Officer. This is a highly unusual appointment in view that most of the influential TNI officers are from the Army.

Derail the general election (first conflict) and now derail the presidential election in November 1999.



Radicalising Muslim sentiment against Christians. Creating a false image of the Christians as untrustworthy.

Use Maluku as the testing ground for repression of Christians and Islamicisation by force. Note that East Nusa Tenggara and North Sulawesi are similar to Maluku; Irian Jaya's Christian majority can be altered by transmigration of Muslims.

If the extreme Islamic extremists manage to bring about a Muslim majority in all of Indonesia's provinces, ultimately they will be in a much stronger position to change the constitution from a pluralist basis to one based on Islam or at least to have a Muslim-dominated society where the non-Muslims have very little political or economic influence.

Implications:

Like East Timor in the recent past, Maluku is quickly developing into a killing field where Islamic extremists, Indonesian politicians and opposing military officers use the local population as their testing ground and proxies for conflict. The most obvious implication of this conflict is the gross violation of basic human rights (including religious freedom and the right to life). There are also very serious implications for inter-religious relationships in Indonesia. Should the effort of radical Muslims to change the Indonesian constitution be successful, there will be serious implications for the substantial non-Muslim minority in Indonesia. The Islamicisation of Indonesia would have a grave negative impact not just on the country, but on the entire region because of Indonesia's massive size and major role in the area. There is thus a very urgent need for the international community to monitor very closely the religiously motivated violence in Maluku and other parts of Indonesia and take swift and effective action to stop the perpetrators of this destructive policy, for the sake of stability in Indonesia and the region as a whole.

Suggested Steps:

Request the Foreign Office (and the European Union) to pressurise the Indonesian Government to:

Pull the Indonesian military's Kostrad unit and the Army's ZIPUR unit out of Maluku. Ensure that all military units in Maluku are neutral and withdraw any other biased units.

Conduct an independent investigation of the involvement of army units in the sectarian conflict and prosecute the responsible soldiers and their commanding officers, including those Kostrad soldiers responsible for the massacre of about 25 or more Christians in the Yabok Protestant Church.

Investigate the cause of the conflict and prosecute those responsible for the cause and the continuation of the violence.

Prosecute all parties who are inciting and carrying out unjustified violence, including those who are calling for Jihad (Islamic "Holy" War).

Enforce strict entry requirements into the ports and airports of Maluku, including thorough checks for weapons coming in and out of Maluku.

Ensure the security and safety of civilians leaving Maluku.

Invite UN Human Rights observers to catalogue and investigate human rights abuses. (e.g. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-judicial Executions)

Ensure accurate reporting by the media and that they do not incite religious hatred. Penalise those in the media who act irresponsibly in this matter.

Facilitate and encourage reconciliation talks between Muslim and Christian religious and community leaders.

Provide humanitarian aid for the refugees and victims of this conflict and allow humanitarian workers to access these people.



The British Embassy and other Western governments should also be in close communications with Moluccan Christian human rights workers, their community and religious leaders about the conflict, to get their perceptions of what is happening. This is especially important in view of the misinformation spread by the Islamic media.

Addenda:

On 20th October 1999, the Indonesian Parliament elected Abdurrahman Wahid (the head of Nahdatul Ulama) as the fourth president of Indonesia and on 21st October Ms. Megawati Soekarnoputri was elected as the vice president. Abdurrahman Wahid has a reputation as a moderate, tolerant religious leader and in his inaugural speech he stressed the importance of democracy and pledged to uphold the supremacy of law, equality and freedom of speech without racial or religious discrimination. Whilst this is a welcome development, one should note that Abdurrahman Wahid is a compromise candidate between the Islamist and Nationalist camps. Islamic parties supported Habibie in the presidential election and strongly rejected Ms. Megawati because of her gender. In fact in the days before the presidential election, supporters of Habibie and supporters of Megawati were congregating in Jakarta, prompting the head of TNI General Wiranto to appear on national TV and appeal for calm. Many people fear that there will be conflict between Islamic and Nationalist mobs, replicating the situation in Maluku. At the time of writing this report, such clashes have been prevented. Abdurrahman Wahid was put forward to break the deadlock between Habibie and Megawati. When Habibie's State of the Nation address was rejected by the Parliament, he withdrew from the presidential contest which means that the Islamic parties lost their presidential candidate. Mr Wahid was then elected with the support of Islamic and Muslim-based parties.

The importance of this presidential election is that Muslim-based parties have shown that they have the power and the influence to challenge the election result. The second implication is that Mr. Wahid is now indebted to Islamic Parties and this may affect his policies. One should therefore continue to watch developments in Indonesian politics, particularly the sectarian conflict in Maluku, to closely monitor the Islamist movement and their growing influence in Indonesia.

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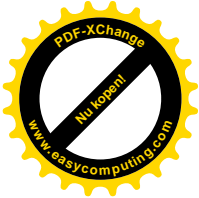
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info@jubileecampaign.demon.co.uk

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