

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR

The Refugee Council of Australia express their horror at the violence to which those East Timorese who voted for independence in last Monday's consultation are now being exposed. It is manifest that this campaign of terror is being conducted with the complicity of the Indonesian military and police.

Already this has led to massive population displacement and refugee movements, and it is imperative that security be restored so that the United Nations and the ICRC can access these people to provide assistance.

The Council, however, fears an even worse scenario: the genocidal slaughter of a large proportion of the East Timorese population under a 'media blackout' produced by the evacuation of foreign journalists, and the cantonment not of the Indonesian military but of the courageous staff of UNAMET and aid agencies serving the people of the territory.

To avert this, it is necessary to expose Jakarta to international pressure of a kind which it has never felt before. Specifically, Australia should immediately withdraw de jure recognition of the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia, stand ready to denounce the 1995 Australia-Indonesia Security Treaty which leaves us stained by the crimes of the Indonesian Armed Forces, and use all our influence with the IMF in order to force Indonesian acceptance of a neutral security force in East Timor.

This is a moment of truth not only for Australian foreign policy, but for our identity as a nation. We have a choice between honour on the one hand, and utter shame and humiliation on the other as a consequence of inaction. Australia actively promoted the agreement under which the people of East Timor were encouraged to vote without a security force on hand to protect them from the predations of the losers.

We cannot now wash our hands of the situation.

How we react in the coming days will tell us little about the East Timorese, but everything about ourselves.