

INDONESIA

THE VIOLENCE IN AMBON

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I. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On January 19, 1999, as Muslims around the world were celebrating the end of the fasting month, a fight broke out on the island of Ambon, in Maluku (Molucca) province, Indonesia, between a Christian public transport driver and a Muslim youth. Such fights were commonplace, but this one escalated into a virtual war between Christians and Muslims that is continuing as this report goes to press. Much of the central part of the city of Ambon, the capital of Maluku province, and many neighborhoods (*kampung*) in other parts of Ambon island and the neighboring islands of Ceram, Saparua, Manipa, Haruku, and Sanana have been burned to the ground. Some 30,000 people have been displaced by the conflict, although the figure is constantly shifting.

The death toll by early March was well over 160 and rising rapidly as army reinforcements, brought in to restore order, began firing on rioters armed with sharp weapons and homemade bombs. The head of the Christian documentation center in Ambon told Human Rights Watch by telephone on March 10 that eighty-three Christians had been killed between January 19 and March 9, 1999, twenty-three of them at the hands of the military. Nur Wenno, head of Muslim relief efforts at Ambon's largest mosque, said there were no precise figures on the Muslim death toll, but it was over one hundred.

Questions as to who was accountable for the violence in Ambon and surrounding islands focused on three issues: Who started it? Why did it escalate so fast? What, if anything, could the government have done to halt it? And what should the government be doing now?

The Indonesian press, senior Indonesian officials and opposition leaders, and many Jakarta-based diplomats believe the violence was provoked as part of a nationwide strategy of rogue military officers linked to the Soeharto family to disrupt the forthcoming parliamentary elections in June and create the conditions for a return to military rule. The June elections, which promise to be the freest Indonesia has had since 1955, would, if fairly conducted, almost certainly lead to a further diminution of the military's power, which has been on the wane since President Soeharto resigned in May 1998. Local leaders in Ambon tended to see the violence as locally instigated for narrow communal goals. In either case, the government of Soeharto's successor, Habibie, seems to have been half-hearted about investigating allegations of provocation at either the national or local level.

Why did the violence spread so quickly? Ambon was portrayed in the Indonesian media as a land where relations between Christians and Muslims had always been harmonious, the tranquility of interfaith relations protected by an alliance system called *pela*, where for centuries, a village of one faith had been twinned with a village of the other, where Christians helped build mosques, and Muslims helped build churches. The reality was very different. Tension between the two communities, Ambonese Christians on the one hand, and Ambonese Muslims and Muslims from various migrant groups on the other, was so high that it would have taken very little provocation to ignite an explosion. Once the violence began, it quickly fed on itself, dragging out historical grievances, creating new injuries, and generating new, deeply felt communal suspicions.

What might the government have done differently? A key question revolves around the use of lethal force. The conflict in Ambon separates into two distinct phases, demarcated by a decision to fire on demonstrators. From January 19 to about February 14, most of the deaths on both sides were caused by traditional or homemade weapons — machetes, long knives, spears, arrows shot from slingshots, molotov cocktails, and

fishing bombs (illegal devices exploded under water to capture large quantities of fish). Many people also burned to death when houses or vehicles were set on fire. From February 14 onwards, most of the deaths took place when security forces, whose numbers by March had risen to 5,000 on an island with a population of about 350,000, began implementing shoot-on-sight orders. There is no question that an extremely grave security threat existed, and the security forces were initially accused by both sides of standing by and doing nothing as the different sides were attacking each other. When they finally did intervene, they shot lead bullets rather than attempting to use any methods of non-lethal crowd control.

A second question relates to the composition of the security forces used. Both sides have made allegations of bias, with the Muslims tending to accuse the police of favoring the Christians, and the Christians tending to accuse the army of siding with the Muslims. The accusations of bias were based in part on non-military attributes of the soldiers and police involved (geographic origin, religion, ethnicity) but also on their behavior in the field. Muslims accused Christian police in one case of opening fire near a mosque; Christians accused Muslim soldiers in another of helping Muslims attack a Christian village. Those accusations need to be thoroughly examined by an impartial body. Moreover, the government should deploy security forces with a view toward minimizing perceptions of bias, a point we elaborate on below.

The first two questions are directly related to the protection of human rights in a situation of civil strife. There is a third question of the government's response, however, which has arisen in other outbreaks of communal violence, such as a serious ethnic conflict that erupted in West Kalimantan in late 1996 and early 1997. This is the Indonesian government's belief in top-down conflict resolution: that if the local government brings religious or customary leaders together and has them sign a peace pact or participate in a traditional ceremony, the conflict can be solved. This approach can have unfortunate consequences, because when the pact inevitably breaks down, the participants often believe that the bad faith of one of the parties must have been responsible — and mutual distrust and suspicion grow deeper.

The conflict in Ambon has also displaced tens of thousands of people from their homes. Human Rights Watch is concerned that the provincial government, which has done the best it could to provide emergency shelter for the displaced, may be moving too fast to decide on transmigration — that is, resettlement of the displaced on other islands — as the optimal long-term solution to the problem. We are also concerned about the provincial government's unwillingness as of early March to allow international humanitarian agencies in to help with the distribution of assistance to the displaced and other victims of the unrest.

We examine all of these issues in the report, based on a fact-finding trip to Ambon in February 1999, documentary material collected and interviews conducted during that visit, and subsequent communications with Christian and Muslim leaders in Ambon.¹ Based on that material, we make the following recommendations to the Indonesian government:

1. Ensure that its security forces respect the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officers and that troops assigned to Ambon are fully equipped with non-lethal methods of crowd control. Of particular importance to Ambon is the principle that "Law enforcement officials, in carrying out their duty, shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force

¹ We would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided by Binny Buchori of the Indonesian nongovernmental coalition, INFID, based in Jakarta, who facilitated our visit and conducted some of the research. Any errors or misinterpretations in this report, however, are solely the responsibility of Human Rights Watch.

and firearms. They may use force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result.”

2. *Investigate accusations of bias in the behavior of security forces.* In many outbreaks of violence thus far, notably the shooting on March 1 of four people outside a mosque and the conflict on the island of Haruku on February 14, Muslims have accused Christian Ambonese police personnel of taking part in attacks against them. Likewise, the Christians have accused troop reinforcements sent from the Wirabuana command of the Indonesian army, based in Ujung Pandang, Sulawesi, of siding with Muslim villagers in several clashes. The fact that the Wirabuana command is led by a Muslim Ambonese, and that some of the Muslims involved in the conflict in Ambon are ethnic Bugis and native to the area around Ujung Pandang, does little to allay suspicions of bias. An impartial independent investigation, not necessarily of every outbreak of violence that has taken place, but at least of three or four major clashes where bias has been alleged, would be useful.

At the same time, independent investigators should work with local village heads (*raja*) and community leaders to examine reports that have been produced by both sides to identify points of convergence and divergence and use these findings to understand how perceptions have fed the conflict.

At this stage, to investigate the whole conflict may be too enormous an effort, but different incidents might lend themselves to this approach, including the initial outbreak on January 19; the burning of city markets on January 19-20; the attack on Benteng Karang on January 20; the conflict on Haruku on February 14; and the shootings in Ambon on March 1. The point would be to get local communities to understand that there *are* two sides to each incidents, and often, both share responsibility for the violence and become victim to it.

3. *Avoid at all costs the imposition of a state of "civil emergency" in Ambon and surrounding islands.* This option is currently being weighed by Cabinet ministers in Jakarta and has been recommended by some local leaders in Ambon. With the very clear exacerbation of the situation caused by the presence of security forces with shoot-on-site orders, additional measures that allow the military to bypass normal civil rights safeguards are likely to make things even worse.

4. *Make absolutely clear in all public pronouncements and interviews that both Christians and Muslims have suffered terrible losses.* There has been a distressing tendency in both the Indonesian and international media to quote sources from only one side of the conflict. That reporting feeds back into the communal tensions in Ambon, helping fuel one side's anger against the other.

5. *Find and prosecute any provocateurs.* If General Wiranto and other senior government leaders have enough information to acknowledge, as they have, that provocateurs played a role in the initial outbreak of violence, they have an obligation to make public the nature of their evidence and make every effort to ensure that those individuals are found and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

6. *Undertake a thorough study on the underlying political, economic, and demographic causes of tension and prepare recommendations on how to address them that can be discussed and debated in Ambon.*

7. *Ensure that international, non-religious-based humanitarian organizations are allowed full access to Ambon and surrounding islands to assist the wounded and displaced.* The need is not so much for supplies of food and medicine but to find a way to distribute existing supplies safely and impartially.

8. Ensure that the rights of internally displaced people in Ambon are fully protected in accordance with "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement" prepared by the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations.

II. BACKGROUND

Ambon is the name of a city and an island, and the term "Ambonese" describes a cultural area that embraces many of the islands in the district of Central Maluku, Maluku province, Indonesia. Those islands include Ambon, Saparua, Haruku, Buru, Manipa, Nusalaut, and Ceram. The population of indigenous Ambonese since the sixteenth century has been relatively evenly divided between Christians and Muslims.² For the most part, the two live in separate *negeri* or villages, and even within mixed villages, they tend to live in separate *kampungs* or neighborhoods. In addition, many ethnic Butonese migrants from southeast Sulawesi, a large island to the west of Ambon, and ethnic Bugis and Makassarese, from south Sulawesi, have settled in their own *kampungs*. These migrants are overwhelmingly Muslim, and they dominate small-scale retail trading and transportation networks.

Tension between Muslims and Christians in Maluku province had been growing for decades, the result of the declining influence of traditional authority mechanisms; the influx of migrants; and the "greening" or perceived Islamicization of the central government in Jakarta. The outbreaks of communal violence elsewhere in Indonesia in the aftermath of President Soeharto's resignation in May 1998 served to heighten distrust between the two communities.

Both the *pela* alliance system and the authority of traditional local leaders, called *raja*, had been undermined long before the current conflict erupted. The *pela* system had received a fatal blow at the time of Indonesian independence in 1949, when a largely Christian political elite, many with military or administrative ties to the Dutch colonial administration, opted to establish the Republic of the South Moluccas (RMS), rather than join the new Indonesian state. A brief war ensued which the RMS lost in December 1950. In the course of the conflict, many Muslim villages were razed by RMS forces, and the destruction was not forgotten. In addition to the war, a steady influx of migrants from other parts of Indonesia resulted in the establishment of new settlements that were completely outside the *pela* system, which applied only to Ambonese Christians and Muslims.

In 1974, with the passage of a new law on local government, local leadership was gradually transformed from a clan-based system, represented by the Ambonese *raja*, to a territorially based system of village heads, the lowest rung on the Indonesian administrative ladder. In one sense, the new system was more egalitarian, because it opened up the possibility that migrant communities of ethnic Bugis, Butonese, and Makassarese could be represented, and some candidates for village head appealed to these communities for votes. On the other hand, it meant that many of the village heads lacked the authority the old *raja* had enjoyed, and when conflict broke out, there were fewer people at a local level with the ability to stop it.

² The commonly held misperception that Ambon is predominantly Christian, and predominantly Protestant at that, may be rooted in the fact that Christians traditionally dominated the civil service, including the teaching profession, and the police, and the Moluccans who fled to the Netherlands following the failure of the RMS movement were more than 90 percent Christian.

The migrant influx also tipped the demographic balance in favor of Muslims. Migrants from Sulawesi had been coming to trade in Ambon since the sixteenth century, but migration picked up sharply in the 1970s, and with it, increasing tension with the Ambonese population.³ Ethnic Bugis, who had traditionally settled along the coast in self-contained communities, began to settle in the city of Ambon, displacing other traders, taking over the transportation sector, and in the view of some Ambonese, creating slum areas and contributing to urban crime.⁴ Bugis also began to make themselves felt politically in the 1980s and 90s, with tightly organized Bugis associations that local politicians ignored at their peril. Their political rise coincided with what Ambonese Christians saw as an affirmative action policy undertaken by the national government in the early 1990s to redress the marginalization of Muslim entrepreneurs in comparison to their ethnic Chinese competitors. Whatever the rationale for this policy in Muslim majority areas, in Ambon it created anger and frustration among Christians, as they saw not just economic opportunities but also civil service jobs going more and more to Muslims, many of them migrants. As Christians were eased out of the positions they had traditionally held in the local government, teaching profession, and police, they turned to the private sector, only to find that migrant groups from Sulawesi, among others, had sewn up the market. Christians began to feel that their political, economic, and cultural existence in Ambon was threatened.⁵

Communal relations, then, were not good, even before the violence erupted, and everyone we talked to in Ambon spoke of regularly recurring fights between Muslim and Christian kampungs. The neighborhoods seemed to live in a state of barely repressed hostility, but the frequent fights were quickly settled.

The atmosphere, however, changed perceptibly for the worse after a series of possibly provoked communal incidents broke out elsewhere in Indonesia in late 1998. On November 22, 1998, a dispute between local gangs over a gambling establishment, at which Christian Ambonese acted as security guards, turned into a communal riot as rumors spread that the Ambonese had destroyed a local mosque, and Muslims youths trucked into the area then burned some two dozen churches. On November 30, a Christian youth congress in Kupang, West Timor, held a congress, followed by a march, to protest the church-burnings. In the middle of the march, a truckload of youths appeared whom no one seemed to know, and in no time an ethnic Bugis neighborhood, including the mosque, was burned to the ground.

Both incidents were widely believed to have been provoked by the military, because the army in particular was perceived to be the beneficiary of civil unrest: a traumatized population might see the army, rather than a democratically elected government as Indonesia might have next June, as the only guarantor of security.

³ On the history of migration into Ambon, see Gareth J. Knoop, "A City of Migrants: Kola Ambon at the End of the Seventeenth Century," *Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY), No.51, April 1991, pp. 105-128.

⁴ M.J. Papilaja, "Apa, Mengapa, & Bagaimana Kerusuhan Ambon: Sebuah Kajian Empirik," February 1999 (e-mail communication from Ambon, received March 1999).

⁵ Ibid.

The local government warned religious leaders around the country, as Christmas and the Muslim fasting month approached in December 1998, to be on alert for provocation and to resist being influenced by rumors.

One meeting of religious leaders was held in Ambon in mid-December. The atmosphere was so tense, according to one participant, that the Muslims left convinced that the Christians had decided that the only way to address the problem was to rid the province of Muslim migrants. Leaders of both communities set up "*posko*," an acronym defined either as "communication post" or "command post" depending on the militancy of the definer. These posts, with networks of mosques and churches connected by cell phone or regular telephone, were intended to alert the respective communities to any danger of provocation. In fact, once a fight broke out, they served as much to spread rumors and mobilize communities.

In such an atmosphere, it did not take much to cause a conflagration, although precisely how it started is still a matter of speculation.

III. WAS THE CONFLICT PROVOKED?

Outside Ambon, as reflected in the country's major news weeklies and statements of political opposition leaders, the near-universal belief is that the violence in Ambon is one of a number of outbreaks of unrest around the country deliberately instigated by people loyal to former President Soeharto, his family, a group of disgruntled army officers, or all of the above. The outbreaks in question include the shooting of four students and subsequent rioting in Jakarta in May 1998 that preceded Soeharto's resignation; killings in Banyuwangi, East Java in the latter half of 1998; clashes in Semanggi, Jakarta on November 13 between students and members of a pro-government civilian militia set up by the army; communal violence in Ketapang, Jakarta on November 22; communal violence in Kupang, West Timor on November 30; and communal clashes in Sambas, West Kalimantan in January and February 1999. Unsuccessful efforts to spark unrest around the end of the Muslim fasting month were also reported in the cities of Manado, North Sulawesi, and Malang, East Java.

The aim of the alleged provocateurs is said to be to disrupt efforts to hold national elections now scheduled for June 7 and to force the government to declare a state of emergency so that the Indonesian military could return to power.⁶ In Ambon, proponents of this theory maintain, the instigating agents were a group of Jakarta-based Ambonese gangsters with ties to both the Soeharto family and army officers sidelined after Soeharto stepped down.

A second theory, widely held by Muslim leaders in Ambon, is that the violence was provoked locally by Christians resentful of their declining influence who turned to supporters of the Republic of the South

⁶ In early March 1999, opposition leader Abdurrachman Wahid named a Prabowo associate, Maj. Gen. Kivlan Zein, a staff member of army staff headquarters in Jakarta, as being behind the violence in Ambon. According to Wahid, Zein, former chief of staff of the army's elite strategic reserve, KOSTRAD, and sidelined with other officers close to Prabowo since early January 1999, was head of an association called the Tidar Group (Kelompok Tidar). The group was composed of army officers, street thugs, and members of a martial arts organization headed by Prabowo called Satria Muda Indonesia or SMI. See "Awat, Aksi Kelompok 'Eks Tidar,'" *Xpos* (Jakarta), No.08/II/4-10 March 1999.

Moluccas (RMS) movement for assistance. Their aim, according to this theory, was to restore Christians to their old position of dominance and lessen the population of Muslims by attacking Muslim migrants.⁷

A third, which is a combination of the first two, is that disgruntled army officers mobilized RMS activists to provoke violence, knowing that local Muslims would react as they did and believe that Christians were working with RMS to displace them.

Thus far, no “smoking gun” has been produced that would conclusively prove or disprove any of the above, but the allegations of provocation are so serious, and have been made by such senior Indonesian officials, including the commander of the armed forces, that they must be investigated far more seriously than they have been to date. As a *Jakarta Post* editorial noted:

They have no identity and are nameless. They are almost invisible, and, above all, untouchable. Yet, they are so powerful as to have left a trail of untold deaths and massive destruction across the country in the space of only a few months. If this was a year ago, they would probably have been called “communists.” Instead, the military and police, supposedly working within a new reform paradigm, have come with a new shorthand for them: provocateurs.

The police and military claim that they have drawn a blank in all these major cases. Sure, they have made a few arrests and some of those arrested were later convicted in court, but these were the small fry.

If the police had the political will, the least they could do was pursue some of the more plausible theories, even if only to disprove them. The way things are at the moment, one is left to wonder whether our law enforcement agencies are run by a bunch of incompetents that cannot solve even a single case, or they simply do not have the political will because they are dealing with truly powerful and untouchable bogeymen, as some of the conspiracy theories suggest.⁸

The Gangster Theory

⁷ This theory was expressed to us by two leaders of the Muslim community in Ambon in February 1999.

⁸ “The untouchable bogeymen,” *Jakarta Post*, February 8, 1999.

From the moment the violence in Ambon erupted, there were rumors that the provocateurs had been some of the Ambonese underworld figures or *preman* involved in a major communal outbreak in Ketapang, Jakarta on November 22.⁹ The Ketapang clash resulted in a wave of church burnings by a mob allegedly acting on rumors that hundreds of Christian Ambonese security guards for a major gambling casino in the area had destroyed a local mosque. (Indonesian human rights investigators found evidence that truckloads of youths, some of them paid, had been trucked in to take part in the violence, but it remains unclear who organized them or why.) Of the thirteen killed, several were Ambonese, as were most of the 180 arrested in the immediate aftermath of the violence.

To Human Rights Watch's knowledge, no one has produced hard evidence that the Ambonese from Jakarta were directly involved in the conflict, although top army officers have implied that the evidence exists. The commander of an army unit from South Sulawesi, Maj. Gen. Suaidi Marasabessy, himself an Ambonese Muslim, said that Jakarta *preman* were responsible for the outbreak in Ambon. The claim was echoed by Maj. Gen. Amir Sembiring, commander of the region that includes Maluku, who said that he had a report from the Maluku commander that provocateurs operating in small groups had stirred up the people.¹⁰

It is true that hundreds of Ambonese who had worked in the Ketapang area returned to Ambon in December; we spoke with one man who was on the same boat as several hundred who left Jakarta on December 16. But there are plausible explanations for their return, including the fact that the casino was destroyed and local people warned that if any Ambonese returned to the neighborhood, they would be killed.¹¹ Dozens had just been released from detention and may not have wanted to stay in Jakarta. The fact that hundreds returned to Ambon in the weeks before the outbreak does not in itself indicate provocation.

The *preman* may have carried their own feuds back home, however. Most of those who returned were loyal to one of two gang leaders, Ongen Sangaji, Jakarta coordinator of the Moluccan Muslim Student Movement, and Milton Tua Kota, a Christian. Ongen Sangaji's gang was mostly Muslim although it also contained some Christians. Milton's followers were overwhelmingly Christian. The two were bitter rivals, and Milton was married to Ongen's ex-wife. The two competed for influence with the Soeharto family. Ongen's ties were to Bambang Soeharto, the elder son of former President Soeharto, while Milton was said to be closer to the eldest daughter, Siti Hardianti Rukmana, better known as Tutut. Ongen was clearly the more successful of the two by the time the Ketapang violence erupted, but sources in Ambon said the rivalry between followers of the two men could well have helped fuel the Muslim-Christian violence.¹²

But the allegations of *preman* involvement went deeper than that. Abdurrachman Wahid, the opposition leader and leader of the moderate Muslim organization, the Nahdatul Ulama, caused a stir in early February when he suggested that the man personally responsible for the unrest was Yorrys Raweyai, leader of a group

⁹ The word "preman" is a corruption of the Dutch word meaning freeman, i.e. a civilian, and soldiers out of uniform are still referred to as wearing "preman" clothes. But the word in recent years has come to refer to members of urban street gangs, often involved in crime.

¹⁰ "Preman Jakarta Dituding, Korban Tewas di Ambon Menjadi 39 Orang," *Media Indonesia* (Jakarta), January 23, 1999.

¹¹ "Bak Raju Telanjang Berbaju Emas," *Gatra*, Vol. V, No.3, December 5, 1998 (electronic version, no pagination).

¹² Milton himself did not return to Ambon, according to our information, and was not detained there in January as some reports out of Jakarta alleged at the time.

of thugs-for-hire known as Pancasila Youth or Pemuda Pancasila.¹³ Yorrys was known to be close to the Soeharto family, and Pemuda Pancasila had often been used as a tool for ensuring victory in Golkar campaigns. He was summoned for investigation by police but denied any involvement and said Pemuda Pancasila was extremely weak in Ambon.

¹³ See "Dituduh Menghasut: Yorrys Buka Kartu," *Gatra*, (cover story), Vol.V, No.12, February 6, 1999, and "Yorries Raweyai: Saya Preman, Bukan Politisi," *D & R*, (a Jakarta newsweekly) January 30, 1999.

Then Ongen Sangaji himself stepped forward. A member of Pemuda Pancasila, he was widely quoted as saying that 604 Ambonese preman had returned to Maluku and that their paymaster was Yoseano Waas, an Ambonese member of the national parliament.¹⁴ Waas's boys, according to Ongen, were working with Christians in Ambon to attack Muslims, and one of their leaders was Sadrakh Mastamu, head of C & C Amusement Center in Ketapang. Ongen told the tabloid newspaper, *Tekad*, that fifteen of Mastamu's men had died in Ketapang and that his brother had seen Mastamu attacking Muslims in Ambon. Waas denied the allegations and filed defamation charges against *Tekad*.

Christian sources, meanwhile, told Human Rights Watch that Ongen Sangaji was seen in Ambon in February and was responsible for putting up posters around the city calling for a holy way (*jihad*) against Christians there as well as in helping organize Muslim volunteers from other parts of Indonesia to join the war. These sources alleged that Ongen was working with a retired army officer in Ambon, Brig. Gen. Rustam Kastor, who was the Ambon link to a group of disgruntled officers under Maj. Gen. Kivlan Zein. The preman theory thus comes full circle back to the notion of a rogue army group linked to the former first family.

It is worth noting that of the more than one hundred people detained in connection with the conflict, none is a preman from Jakarta. As of March 10, one Christian and one Muslim had been accused of incitement, but there is no reason to believe that either operated at more than a very local level.

The Separatist Explanation

From the beginning, Muslim leaders have accused the RMS movement of being behind the violence and backing the Christians. On January 28, for example, Yusuf Rahimi, a leader of the Ambonese Muslim community in Jakarta, gave a press conference together with the head of a conservative Jakarta-based Muslim political organization, the Indonesian Committee for International Islamic Solidarity (Komite Indonesia Untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam or KISDI). At the press conference, Rahimi said the two factors responsible for the violence were RMS and "a political group frustrated with the development of Islam in Ambon." He cited a number of sightings of the RMS flag in the first days of the unrest, statements made by the movement's leader in Holland, and shouts of support for RMS heard during the fighting.¹⁵

Christians leaders dismissed the possibility that RMS had played any significant role. A statement released on January 27, 1999 by Catholic and Protestant leaders noted:

The reaction of the Christian community to this incident [the outbreak of violence on January 19] was in no way motivated by certain political interests, that is, [it is not true] that the RMS was behind the violence in Ambon and surrounding areas as put forward by the head of KISDI in a 6:00 a.m. broadcast on SCTV on January 21, 1999. The way the RMS rumor was set off by the head of KISDI implies that RMS is identical to Christianity in Maluku, whereas in fact, RMS is not identical with Christianity, and the Christian community never has and never will give space to RMS to grow and develop. The RMS rumor is intended to create conflict between the military and the Christians in Maluku and to divert attention from the true causes of the violence that erupted in Baturah and Silale (Waihaong) and has so rapidly spread to other places.¹⁶

¹⁴ Forum Keadilan Th.VII, No.22, February 8, 1999.

¹⁵ "Ambon Menangise," *Gatra*, Vol. V, No.2, January 1999.

¹⁶ "Pernyataan Sikap Umat Kristiani di Maluku Sehubungan dengan Peristiwa 19-24 January 1999," January 27, 1999,

One pastor told Human Rights Watch that the flag seen in one area of the city that Muslims were claiming was an RMS flag was in fact the banner of the Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or PDI) of popular opposition leader Megawati Soekarnoputri. On the other hand, several individuals linked to RMS in Holland were in Ambon when the trouble broke out, although what they were doing is not clear.

signed by Rev. M.M. Siahaya, Jurjen Soenpiet, Mgr. P.C. Mandagi, and Rev. S.P. Titaley.

Since the Indonesian army crushed the RMS movement in 1950, it has been largely an exile political movement with no significant mass base in Ambon.¹⁷ Every April 25, on the anniversary of the declaration of the South Moluccan Republic in 1950, a few RMS flags are raised, particularly on the island of Saparua. The Soeharto government—which executed the leader of the short-lived republic in 1966—routinely arrested the flag-raisers, but RMS sympathizers were never seen as a serious threat, and since the late 1950s, the movement has lacked a guerrilla force comparable to that in East Timor, Irian Jaya, or even Aceh. Ironically, the ongoing violence has been a major boost for the movement, both in terms of international attention and possibly increased support in Ambon from some Christians who see both the civilian and military arms of the Indonesian government as hostile.

The Muslim accusation that the Christians in Ambon had RMS backing, however, was significant. It served to reinforce and heighten bitterness in Muslim villages in Ambon that had been destroyed by RMS forces in 1950. It gave a rationale to a call to arms for the Muslim side because it suggested the Christian side was organized, trained, and equipped by an outside force that in the past, at least, had had some military capacity; many RMS members in 1950 were Ambonese who had served in KNIL, the Dutch colonial army. And it conveyed a sense of Christians as being both Western-backed, given the Dutch base of the RMS, and disloyal, since the RMS had fought against Indonesian independence and sought to retain ties to the Dutch crown.

Anyone who had wanted to fan the flames of conflict in Ambon could easily have done so by using the RMS card.

IV. THE CONFLICT

However the conflict started, the violence took on a life of its own. Each outbreak or clash increased the polarization between the two communities and the feeling of fear among the general populace. Even while we were still there, whenever anyone saw smoke there was an instant reaction of panic that a new attack was on the way until the smoke could be traced to a trash fire or some other innocuous source. Any sudden noise had the same effect.

The division in Ambon and surrounding islands into Christian and Muslim villages made the conflict more difficult to contain. For example, after fighting broke out between the Muslim village of Pelauw and the Christian village of Kariu on the island of Haruku on February 14, Muslims from Pelauw who had been living in Ambon city for years became targets of Christian attacks.

There is a widely held perception that the conflict in Ambon is one between Muslim migrants and indigenous Christians, but as the following narrative will show, it is not that simple. The presence of migrants, especially from Sulawesi, unquestionably heightened communal tensions, but there was friction between Ambonese Christians and Muslims going back to the colonial period, and much of the current fighting has involved (and been directed at) Ambonese Muslims as well as Bugis and Butonese.

¹⁷ There are over 40,000 Moluccan expatriates in the Netherlands, many of them related to a core of some 12,000 Ambonese who fled after the defeat of RMS forces in 1950. They are organized into several competing political groups, most of which support an independent South Moluccan republic but not necessarily under the leadership of the current RMS president, Dr. Frans Tutuhaturunewa. RMS itself is a member of the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization, UNPO.

The conflict falls into two distinct phases: before the army started routinely opening fire and afterwards, with the dividing line about February 14. The chronology that follows is not complete; there were many more actual clashes, threats, and actions by both sides that contributed to the overall deterioration of the situation. Most of the key incidents are included, however, with, where possible, information from both sides.

Phase I: The Army Stands By

From January 19 to mid-February, the conflict erupted in a number of different areas of Ambon and surrounding islands. For the most part, the army and police did little, but their failure to act may have been as much due to lack of preparedness and fear as much as anything else. (An army spokesman told a Jakarta newspaper that the army was slow to react because since the advent of the “reform era” that began with Soeharto’s resignation, the army had to obey the rule of law; before, they could have just started arresting people.)¹⁸ In this section, we track the fighting as it spread from one area to another to give a sense of the nature and intensity of the conflict. The value of these accounts is that they show that neither side has a monopoly on violence or victims: both sides have endured appalling losses. They also show how impossible it may be to sort out the truth of who was responsible for any incident. It may not matter in the sense that stopping the conflict now is more important than sorting out accountability for each link in the chain. But it matters terribly to those involved, and belief that one party set off an attack contributes to the determination on the part of the other to preempt another or avenge the first. The problem is that for virtually every incident, there are two diametrically opposed versions of what happened.

January 19: The Beginning

Even for the most thoroughly covered and analyzed incident in Ambon, the fight on January 19 that ignited it all, there are two very different accounts. One, circulated by the legal team representing Christian detainees, portrays a Christian Ambonese public transport driver, Jacob Leuhery, otherwise known as Yopy, as the victim of harassment by two Bugis Muslims, Usman and Salim. A second version, circulated by the fact-finding team of the Moluccan branch of a Muslim political party, the Justice Party, portrays the Bugis as the victims of intimidation by Yopy. When interviewed by Human Rights Watch, Yopy reiterated the first version. On February 15, however, he was arrested and detained on charges of assaulting the Bugis.

The first version states that around 2:30 p.m. on January 19, Yopy, a Christian from Aboru village near Batu Merah, was just starting his shift as a driver of a public transport van at the Batu Merah Terminal. Two youths approached him, and one of them demanded Rp.500. That youth, named Salim, was arrested in Bone on February 3 and was returned to Ambon for questioning several days later. Yopy refused to hand over any cash, saying he didn’t have any because he was just starting his shift. He then went on to the Mardika terminal. After about half an hour, he returned to Batu Merah, without passengers. The youths were still there, and the one came up to him again and demanded money. He replied he didn’t have any because he didn’t have any passengers. He told the youths to stop their demands. One of them took out a traditional knife (*pisau badik*) and held the point to Yopy’s neck, but Yopy was able to push him away with the door of the van and drove off to Mardika, in the hopes that the two would leave. But when he came back, still without passengers, the youths were still there. Salim reached in his pocket to pull out his knife. Yopy ran to his home, near the terminal, got his own knife, and ran back, chasing his would-be attacker into the market of Batu Merah village. The youth got away, and Yopy eventually went home.

¹⁸ “Apa Kalau Pangab Mundur Persoalan Selesai?,” *Abadi*, 28 January - 3 February 1999, p.4

The Muslim version, which apparently has been accepted by police, says that Yopy was the driver of a van that was owned by a Bugis resident of Batu Merah Bawah. His conductor was also a Muslim from Batu Merah Bawah. Yopy had used the van for a charter or private rental, and the conductor, acting on behalf of the owner, asked Yopy for the money he had received. Yopy refused and threatened the conductor. Several Christian passengers then joined Yopy in assaulting the conductor, who ran to Batu Merah Bawah to get reinforcements from his friends. The two groups clashed, and religious and racial tensions erupted into violence.¹⁹

The Christian account states that less than fifteen minutes after Yopy got home, he saw hundreds of Muslim youths from Batu Merah coming to attack the largely Christian residents of Batu Merah Dalam, the area near Yopy's house. They went back and mounted a second attack, this time with an even larger group: 600 to 700 people, according to a church report. They then went back and returned a third time.

Human Rights Watch interviewed "Amir" (not his real name), one of the few Muslim residents of Batu Merah Dalam. He said that at about 3:30 p.m., when stone-throwing started on January 19, he did not pay much attention, because fights between the Muslim and Christian neighborhoods were so common.

But then, around 4:00 p.m., a Muslim crowd came back and attacked. They came across the bridge into the village in large numbers, Amir couldn't see how many. He came out of the house to look carrying a Quran, so people would know he was a Muslim. Amir said that he has lived in Batu Merah all his life, but he did not recognize the men leading the mob — all he knows is that they weren't from Batu Merah. Some five or so people at the front were wearing a white cloth on their arms. Amir called the military police, but they said they had already told the regular police. They themselves couldn't do anything, they said, because it was Lebaran, the holiday marking the end of the fasting month, and they didn't have many men. There were about ten intelligence people in civilian clothes around at the time. One of them fired his pistol in the air, but it did not do any good; the crowd kept advancing.

¹⁹ "Laporan Tim Pencari Fakta DPW Partai Keadilan Maluku Tentang Kerusuhan Idul Fitri 1419 H Berdarah di Ambon," Chapter III, updated as of February 6, 1999.

The attackers stopped at the auto repair garage below his house and apparently found oily rags there that they set on fire. Then they used their long knives to toss the burning rags into houses, the windows of which had already been broken. Amir's house was burned to the ground, like every other house in the neighborhood. People were also shouting that the mosque in Bawah Merah had been burned, although it had not been touched. Eventually the riot police (known as Brimob, for mobile police brigade) came, but only after everything was already destroyed.²⁰

From Batu Merah, the crowd went on to Mardika, a market area in the center of town. There the first homes to be burned were those of Silas Noya, Empi Tuhumena, Boy Huliselan, while a fourth building used as a auto repair shop was also torched. Another house was burned, and six others were slightly damaged.²¹

January 19, Silale, Waihaong, and Kudamati

Trouble in Silale, a mostly Muslim kampung with about forty Christians, began between 5:00 and 5:45 p.m. on January 19. The home of a Christian family, Nikijuluw, was burned first, then the rectory of Sumber Kasih church.²² A Muslim crowd proceeded to burn and loot twelve homes belonging to Christians in Silale, Waihaong, and Jalan Baru. They also threw rocks at the Bethelehem church. The people who started the trouble were not from Silale, where relations between the two communities had always been good.²³ Indeed, some of the local Muslims gave the Christian women headscarves to wear if they needed protection. But a handful of outsiders started mobilizing people using the *takbir* (shouting Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar). Initially the local Muslims just came down to look, but the troublemakers managed to arouse them with the *takbir* until they ran to get arms.

At this point, according to Christian reports, the Christians in nearby Kudamati heard that Christian residents of Mardika had been attacked by Muslim residents of Batu Merah and that homes and religious buildings had been burned. They therefore gathered themselves together to mount a counteroffensive and defend their coreligionists. They were blocked by a Muslim crowd at Waringin, and the two parties attacked each other.

At about 8:00 p.m., a Muslim group of about thirty people tried to attack the Silo church, but they were held off by Christians defending it. According to the Muslim accounts (and largely confirmed by Christian sources), the Christians gathered at the GPM church on Anthony Rebok Avenue about 10:00 p.m. and burned a few kiosks at the edge of the street before going after the pedicabs (*becak*) owned largely by

²⁰Human Rights Watch interview, Ambon, February 7, 1999.

²¹ Tim Pengacara Gereja, "Gambaran Peristiwa Kerusuhan di Kotamadya Ambon Mulai Tanggal 19 Januari 1999," January 30, 1999.

²² Tim Pengacara Gereja, p.3

²³ Human Rights Watch interview, Ambon, February 4, 1999

Butonese and Bugis. They piled the becaks into a huge stack, then set the stack alight. Muslims who lived around the al-Fatah mosque then joined forces with the Muslims already on the street. Christian and Muslim forces faced off around Avenue A.M. Sangaji, one of Ambon's main streets.

Along those streets, Muslims were handing out white armbands and headbands to other Muslims so that they would be able to identify each other. Nur Wenno, head of the information post (posko) at the al-Fatah mosque, told Human Rights Watch that from about 7:00 p.m. on the evening of January 19, he ordered people at the mosque to wear a white cloth on their right wrist during the day and on their left at night. Christians were wearing red headcloths and the two sides were referred to as the "whites" (*kelompok putih*) and the "reds" (*kelompok merah* or *pihak merah*).

January 19, Kampung Paradeys

According to an Ambonese Muslim we interviewed named Ikhwan, the Christian attack on his neighborhood, Kampung Paradeys, began around 11:00 p.m. The attackers came in groups, about twenty people to a group. They claimed their church, the Bethel church, had been burned, but it wasn't true. Then they went about trying to destroy houses with iron pipes and rocks, smashing everything. He was in his house when they came. About fifteen minutes later, the second attack came, then they went back. The third wave came about 11:30 p.m. They threw rocks but didn't try to enter the houses. They went away again but came back around 1:30 a.m. Some of the mob wanted to break into the houses, but he heard someone shout, "Don't go in yet!" Then he heard the banging on the electric pole. Three times meant "Come together" and banging many times very rapidly sent a different message, he wasn't sure what. There was clearly a leader giving the signals.

At that stage, Ikhwan and his family ran out the back, leaving everything in the house. They heard cries of "Burn!" and "Kill them!" He said the Christians carried large pipes, knives, and machetes. They had red cloths on their heads and on their arms.

The mob came back around 3:30 a.m, then again two hours later. Ikhwan said the Christians went in each house, looting and stealing. He heard one of them say, "Don't take it out on the streets or we'll be accused of theft. Put it in the Bethlehem Church." Ikhwan's house was only five meters from the church, and they took his television set there. They couldn't burn his house because it was so close to the church.

The police came once or twice in the midst of all this but not to guard the neighborhood, only to take a look and pass by on patrol. At that point, Ikhwan went out by a back way that went via the Hotel Elinor and sought refuge with a woman priest. She sheltered him, his family, and three other families, but because they were afraid that she would become a target, they found a soldier to escort them to the al-Fatah mosque.

He said the targets of the attackers were Buton, Bugis, Minang Sumatra, and Javanese, i.e., the migrants. He said his Chinese neighbors weren't bothered, but on his house, obscenities against Islam and pro-RMS slogans were scrawled. He kept repeating to us that he was from Ambon, an Ambonese, but they went after him anyway.

January 19-20, Batu Gantung, Waringin²⁴

²⁴ "Kronologis 'Tragedi Syawal 1419 H' di Batu Gantung, Waringin," statement signed by ten residents of Baru Waringin,

At about 3:30 p.m., the grandson of Haji Agil Azuz came running home and said there was trouble at the terminal, with people running and others chasing them. An hour later, another resident ran in and reported that Christians from Kudamati were joining forces with Christians from Mardika. At about 5:00 p.m., witnesses saw a truck with about fifty youths on board pull up in front of Haji Kembang's house; all were carrying long knives. Their first action was to wreck five cars parked on the main road, smashing the windows and causing other damage. They then went on to wreck four houses in the southern part of the neighborhood with rocks and iron pipes.²⁵ Then three houses in front of the Rehoboth Church received the same treatment, as did the building housing a computer training center owned by Haji Naya. Three vehicles nearby were torched.

At this stage, there were no casualties. People in Batu Gantung began to panic, but then they were attacked from all sides. Residents managed to fend off the attackers until the police arrived. The police ordered everyone to go back home, assuring them that they would be safe.

The Batu Gantung people returned home accordingly, but shortly thereafter, a second attack came; again, the police, about twenty-five in total, were able to push them back. But most of the police disappeared between about 10:00 and 11:00 p.m. and were not in place when the third attack came. About 2:00 a.m., hundreds of people armed with knives, sticks, and rocks came back to Batu Gantung. This time, there was a lone policeman in place, and the attack had proceeded for more than an hour before two more policeman arrived, one of whom fired a warning shot in the air. One of the Batu Gantung men ran up to the police and cried, "Why are you letting them attack when you ordered us to go back?" The policemen just told him to calm down. Two residents were hit by rocks in this round, and a truck belonging to Haji Muhammad Ali was burned.

About 4:00 a.m., witnesses saw two kiosks belonging to Bugis set on fire. An oil drum was turned upside down and set on fire. Police, among them the police chief of Latuhalat, witnessed this but did nothing to stop it.

On the northern side of the neighborhood, some of the Christians were singing a song over and over as they moved from the secretariat of the Indonesian Christian Student Movement office toward the Rehoboth church where many of the attackers were gathering. The words, as noted by a Muslim, were "We will not retreat, we will not, we will not, we will not, We have won with the blood of Lord Jesus, We have won with His blood."

At 10:00 a.m. on January 20, the Christians attacked again, this time using flaming arrows and molotov cocktails. The attackers appeared to come from several Christian villages in Nuaniwe subdistrict. In the course of this attack, the house of a Muslim named A. Gani was set on fire with a molotov cocktail, but he managed to put out the flames. The house of Ani Sangadji was attacked by three of her own Christian neighbors, Prima Kastanya, Yance Noya, and Hans Siahaya, while two other neighbors, also Christian, stood

undated but probably January 25, 1999.

²⁵ The houses wrecked belonged to Haji Kambang, Haji Nawawi, Haji Samad, and Ca Nipa.

by and watched. Noke Latupeirissa, a resident of Batu Waringin, stood on the second floor of the Kastanya house and shot flaming arrows into the Muslim houses. The Muslims pleaded for help from the police who were standing in front of Jln. Dr. Sitanala, but they said they were assigned to that spot and could not move.

From the north, the attackers tried to set the houses of Sahadin, Huri, Mulyono, Jambulang, and La Gawaru on fire, but the owners managed to extinguish the flames. The Christians, according to this account, then emptied the houses of two Christian residents, Mama Nyora Maelissa and No Rehatta, and set those on fire. From there, the flames quickly spread to the rest of Batu Gantung, destroying about 120 homes. Fire trucks only arrived at 6:00 p.m., after the fires were almost out.

Some 240 families fled to nearby Muslim kampungs, including Talake Atas, the Taman Hiburan Rakyat in Waihaong, and the police barracks at Perigi Lima. No one was killed, but four people were injured in the attack, one seriously.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a Butonese man who lived near the bridge at Batu Gantung. Now one of displaced people living at the al-Fatah mosque, he had owned twenty-five kiosks in the Mardika market, selling everything from kitchen implements to vegetables. His house was used for religious meetings (*pengajian*) and was the first target of the rioters around 7:00 a.m. on Wednesday. (From the time the attacks started, he said, the Christians mobilized or dispersed their forces by banging on metal electric poles. One signal met "Gather together," another clearly meant "Retreat.")

The kiosk owner recognized most of the attackers, indeed, he presented us with a list of their names written out. Most were from Batu Gantung. All together, he said, there were about fifty people, each carrying weapons. When he returned not long before we interviewed him to look at his house, there was graffiti scrawled on it: "Jesus Victorious" and "Israel." He got out with just the clothes on his back.

January 20, early morning

January 20 saw all the major markets in the city burned down by Christian forces, the destruction by Muslims of an entire Christian village in Benteng Karang, and widespread burning and killings. Many of the deaths reported from Ambon occurred on the second day of the troubles.

Around 3:00 a.m. a clash between Muslim and Christian forces took place near the Merdeka sports field, not far from the Maranatha church, in the center of the city.

By 6:30 a.m. Christian mobs had burned the Pelita shopping area, the Gambus market, the Mardika market, the Mardika fruit market, and the Cakar Bongkar food market. A large settlement of Butonese around the Gambus market was burned to the ground. The stalls in the burned markets were overwhelmingly Bugis-owned. One man told us that the only two stores in the Gambus market not burned were automobile spare parts stores and belonged to ethnic Chinese. The man said, "It was as though the Christians tried to protect the Chinese even as they destroyed everything else."²⁶ The al-Hilal Muslim elementary school and kindergarten were also burned, and there was selective burning of Muslim-owned property, such as a Padang restaurant and the Natrabu travel agency, along Ambon's main streets.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, al-Fatah mosque, Ambon, February 5, 1999

Later in the morning, Christian mobs set fire to Pohon Pule, the housing complex on the coast where the Bugis traders who worked in the Mardika market lived.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a boy, Hamid (not his real name), who said he was eighteen but looked much younger. A Butonese from the neighborhood of Gunung Nona, he had been in his house on January 20 with his mother and his younger sister. His sister, who was in the third grade of elementary school, went outside to urinate. Suddenly a mob of people arrived wearing red scarves that covered their mouths and noses so that only their eyes were visible. They were all armed with knives, bombs, and arrows. They shot his sister with an arrow that hit her in the chest. She screamed for her mother, but before anyone could come, the mob hacked her with a machete and put her body in a sack, then tied the sack and carried it away. Hamid was about thirty meters away. He then saw three people pour gasoline and burn down his house. He ran as fast as he could toward the al-Fatah mosque but had to pass a crowd of Christians. They asked him where he was from, and he said, "Tenggara" (the Indonesian word for southeast) since most of the Christian families in the area were from southeastern Moluccas. He also said his name was Albertus, an obviously Christian name. They let him pass. When he got to the mosque, he bought one litre of gasoline. He said he wanted to burn down a nearby church since his own home was burned.

January 20, Benteng Karang

Benteng Karang is a village on a main road linking the Muslim village of Hitu with the market town of Passo. Most of the villagers are originally from the southeastern Moluccas, from Batumeo, Tutuke, Tanimbar, and Leti. Most of the villagers rent land out from residents of Hitu.

According to the Muslim version of events, the people of Hitu and Mamala, another Muslim village, received word early on January 20 that the al-Fatah mosque in Ambon had been surrounded and burned, and many Muslims massacred. (According to Christian sources, a man known as Abang, a candidate for village head in Hitu, who has a house in Poko, was responsible for the misinformation. He was later arrested on charges of incitement, and his car was turned over and burned in front of the Universitas Pattimura campus, where the charred hulk remained two weeks later.) After hearing the mosque had been burned, the Muslims decided to march to Ambon in protest. They had to pass by Benteng Karang on the way. According to a Muslim report, the Christian residents who had been alerted to the Muslim march, came out and attacked them with knives.²⁷ The Muslim version acknowledges that all those who died, however, were Christian.

The Christian reports, supported by information Human Rights Watch gathered from its interviews, suggest an unprovoked attack by the marchers. At about 9:00 a.m, a policeman used a cellular phone to call a Benteng Karang resident that a large crowd of people from Mamala, Morela, Hulana, Hitu-Missin, and Wakal was going to attack.²⁸ A police patrol vehicle then came by with the same message and said the mob was already in Telagakodok. The policeman in charge, a Christian, warned that the village was going to be attacked by the people of Hitu, but the crowd that was coming was too large to mount any resistance, so the people of Benteng Karang should stay in their homes. He gave the impression that the police were going to get reinforcements, but then no help arrived.

²⁷ "Laporan Tim Pencari Fakta Pos Keadilan DPW Partai Keadilan," p.11

²⁸ Much of the information in this section comes from an interview with L.R Sarupy, village head of Benteng Karang; Julianus Dady, head of RT II, and D.Manina, treasurer (bendahara) of Benteng Karang. Interview in Suli, AURI base, February 5, 1999.

The people of Benteng Karang gathered together in front of the church but it was less than twenty minutes later that the mob entered Benteng Karang. The attackers had white cloths on their arms and were yelling, "Kill them! Kill them!" First they used a fishing bomb to bomb the Roman Catholic church, then they poured gasoline over three other churches and burned them.

Rina Maakewe, twenty-nine, from subdivision (*rukun tetangga* or RT) IV in Benteng Karang was hacked to death. She was six months pregnant. Her husband was in his house when he heard people shouting "Kill them!" He and about forty others came out with long knives and sticks, but the mob was too strong. He was on the road and his wife was in the house with their eighteen-month-old child. He saw them go up to the house and he went to help her, but they got there first, and he saw them chop her with machetes. She screamed "Mercy!" but he couldn't do anything.²⁹ Her uncle, Andi Maakewe, seventy-four, and his younger sister, Ny. Selestina Maakewe, fifty-five, were also killed. A man named Heri Kanara, twenty, was hit by an arrow and was chopped in the neck with a machete. (A mass grave, said to contain twelve bodies, is visible from the road as one enters Benteng Karang.) In subdivision II, a man named Petrus Kamsmesak, a retired army man, was hacked to death as he was praying, and a seventy-year-old woman was chopped in the neck and burned. Village officials say sixteen were killed in all.³⁰

The men we talked to said they have no desire to rebuild Benteng Karang and they preferred transmigration, especially if it meant resettlement on the island of Ceram as promised by the governor.

January 20-21, Passo and Nania

Marcus (not his real name), a resident of Passo, said that around noon, they got word that Benteng Karang had been burned and the villagers killed.³¹ At 12:30, a neighbor who ran a public transport van said there was a crowd of people in the thousands coming their way. They saw black smoke that seemed to be coming from the nearby villages of Nania and Negeri Lama. About this time, an officer from the subdistrict military command in Passo came by with the Passo village head. The two told people to stay in their houses, everything would be safe; the Muslims were coming in peace.

Marcus and other men went to an area called Air Besar, near the entrance to a post of the mobile police brigade (Brimob). It was at a bridge in Air Besar that the men from Passo and the crowd from Hitu confronted each other. Everyone from Hitu was dressed in white with white headcloths, and they were, shouting "Allahu Akabar." The crowd stretched for more than a kilometer long and was led by a traditional war leader. Every Muslim house in Negeri Lama and Nania hung a white cloth on their front doors as a safety measure.

Teenagers were the first in line, armed with fish bombs, spears, arrows, and machetes. The men from Passo had knives, and two of them had arrows. Marcus told us:

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mesak Serpiela, husband of Rina Maakewe, Feb 5, Suli

³⁰ The village head of Benteng Karang, in an interview on February 6, told Human Rights Watch that sixteen had been killed, and he showed us a list of names. A report from a Christian source, Yayasan Sala Waku Maluku, dated 1 February, gives a figure of fifteen. Both are considerably lower than the reports that appeared in the international press of forty and more.

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Ambon, February 7, 1999

There were seven soldiers at the point of contact, four trying to prevent the Hitu people from advancing, three trying to restrain us. The Hitu people dared us to come forward. They tried to show us they were fearless; one of them opened his shirt and showed knife marks all over as though to prove he was invulnerable.

One of Marcus's friends took up the dare and advanced. He was hit by three arrows shot from a slingshot. Each of the arrows was about twenty centimeters long, metal-tipped, with three little spikes on the shaft, so that it ripped the flesh as it was pulled out.

One of the soldiers shot into the air. Someone in the crowd threw a rock at him that hit him the head. The soldiers said they had to get logistical support and left. Other soldiers drove a truck between the two groups to separate them.

The Hitu people tried three times to advance to Ambon, three times they were forced back. There were initially only about thirty people from Passo but as the confrontation went on, about one hundred more joined in.

At one point a minister came to try and negotiate an end to the standoff. He spoke with the leader of the Hitu crowd and with the army. The outcome was that the Hitu people agreed to be taken back to Hitu on army trucks, and the Passo people would return home. But many of the Hitu people wouldn't get on the trucks and started going back on foot. Soldiers from Infantry Battalion 733 watched them and didn't do anything to stop them. It was on their way back, maybe out of frustration, Marcus said, that the Muslims torched Christian homes in Negeri Lama and Nania. It was around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. In Nania, they also killed a Protestant minister and burned the body.

Marcus said no one slept in Passo that night. At about 5:00 a.m. a crowd of Passo men went back to Nania and Negeri Lama, intending to chase the Hitu people back. But when they found the Hitu people were already too far along the way, they turned their anger on local Muslims, and burned the houses that had hung the white cloths on their doors. They also wrecked the mosque.

Marcus believes the army could have stopped the Hitu people at any time but chose not to. He said that as a result of the police and soldiers telling everyone that things would be safe just before the Muslims arrived, no one in Passo trusts anything the military says any more.

January 20, Hila and the attack on the Bible camp

On January 20, six Christians were killed in Hila, apparently by people from the nearby Muslim village of Wakal. They were among 120 people taking part in a Bible camp run by the New Covenant Church of Christ (Gereja Kristus Perjanjian Baru or GKPB) on the grounds of Pattimura University's fisheries field station. According to Christian accounts—we have no Muslim accounts for this incident and were not able to interview survivors—the participants in the camp had arrived there on January 17 for a three-day retreat and were preparing to return to Ambon on the morning of January 20.³² There was not enough room in the van

³² "Tragedi Penyerangan dan Pembantaian Warga Masyarakat Pada Beberapa Desa/Dusun di Pulau Ambon," undated but sent by the Christian legal team to the governor of Maluku on January 30, 1999.

for all those who wished to return, so three men, a policeman named Hendrik Hursepuny, Rev. Mecky Sainyakit and a driver, Mataheru, decided to go into Wakal to look for another car. When they reached Wakal, no sooner had Mecky and Mataheru stepped out of their van than they were killed by residents and the van set on fire. The policeman, who was known to the Wakal people because he had once been assigned there, was not harmed.

Meanwhile, the people waiting for transport in the main hall of the field station heard the sounds of a truck approaching with those on board shouting "Allahu Akbar." The Bible camp director ordered people to go to their rooms for safety, but when the attackers arrived, they shouted for everyone to come out, otherwise they would be killed. As they emerged, four people were hacked to death. The others were ordered back into the main hall where they were surrounded by the attackers who took the money and valuables they had in their bags.

The attackers left around 3:00 p.m. saying they were going to Benteng Karang, the village that had been destroyed earlier in the day. The Bible camp participants then broke into small groups and managed to return to Ambon with the help of several Muslims from the area, including a number of Butonese.

January 20-21, Wailete and Kamiri, Hative Besar

The violence that erupted in Hative Besar on January 20 was in some ways a continuation of a Christian-Muslim fight a month earlier, although residents said such fights were commonplace, especially around religious holidays. On December 12, there had been a volleyball match between the gandong villages of Wakal and Hative Besar, and a party followed that evening. Many of the Muslims are Butonese, and most of the Christians are originally from the southeastern Moluccas (*orang Tenggara*). At about 2:00 a.m. unrest broke out after a drunken Christian youth stabbed an army man providing security for the party. People started hurling rocks at each other, and the party broke up. At about 4:00 a.m., the sound system used for the party was burned by a Butonese, so Christian youth went and burned the kiosk and house belonging to a Bugis man. They also burned three other houses belonging to Bugis and Butonese. (Muslim sources told us more than forty other Muslim houses were damaged.) The police did not arrive until about 5:00 a.m. They arrested seven youths, held them for more than a week, then released them shortly before Christmas.³³

This incident colored subsequent events in Hative Besar, because it served to raise tensions between Muslim and Christian inhabitants. A Butonese Muslim from Kamiri gave us an account of subsequent developments.³⁴

On January 17, he said, the governor and religious leaders of both faiths came to Hative Besar to give "guidance" to the people of Wailete and Kamiri, but none of the villagers showed up, only the village officials. The content of the "guidance" was the usual: don't believe rumors, don't let yourselves be provoked, everyone will be safe.

On January 20, the day after the rioting broke out in Ambon, the local police station initiated an effort to get religious leaders and neighborhood officials from Kamiri and Hative Besar to negotiate peace, but the Christians would not take part and by 4:00 p.m., it was clear the negotiations had broken down. At 6:00

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with owner of the sound system, Wailete, Ambon, February 6, 1999.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Jafar Tiyan Kapita, now a refugee at Kompi C, Ambon, February 6, 1999.

p.m., a group of about one hundred Christians gathered at a local high school with long knives. After the Christians set fire to a kiosk, the Kamiri residents feared for their mosque and gathered to defend it, thinking it would be the next target. By 6:30 p.m., after three incidents of rock throwing, the Kamiri Muslims, armed with knives, were confronting the Wailete Christians, armed with spears and arrows.³⁵

A Christian account of the origins of the clash in Hative Besar is very different. It says that between 4:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., several speedboats docked off the Kamiri coast, carrying Muslims displaced by the violence the day before. The village head of Hative Besar, accompanied by the subdistrict police chief, tried to persuade them to leave Kamiri. They ignored the appeal, however, and around 12:00, held a meeting with people from Kamiri. The Christians in Hative Besar saw the meeting as a threat and asked for help from the hamlets of Souhuru and Waalia to help guard against any attack from Kamiri. This account holds that around 5:30 p.m. both sides began throwing rocks at each other and then rushed each other with sharp weapons. In the latter attack, a Christian resident of Hative Besar did burn down a kiosk owned by a Butonese. The Muslims, all of them Butonese, Bugis, and Makassarese, responded by burning the houses of four Christian teachers who taught at a local school, as well as one warehouse and two other Christian homes.³⁶

Both Christian and Muslim accounts agree that for a few hours, from midnight until about 3:00 a.m., the situation was tense but quiet. Then, according to the Christian version, residents of Hative Besar got information that the Butonese, Bugis, and Makassarese were going to attack at around 4:00 a.m. The “war” erupted again: members of the above ethnic groups burned down more than a dozen more houses, so the Christians retaliated by burning every building in Kamiri, including the mosque. Muslims say there was one policeman there during the confrontation, but he didn’t do anything, and the entire population of Kamiri was forced to flee to the local base of the army’s Infantry Battalion 733, Company C.

Three residents of Kamiri died of stab or hack wounds; four were injured in the clash and required hospitalization. A man we interviewed named Jafar said that there was no effective security force present at the time of the attack. When Jafar asked the head of Company C why he did not intervene, he said he had no orders to do so. Of the seven subdivisions of Kamiri, only one was left intact. Some 180 houses were burned to the ground. According to Jafar, there were 1,063 refugees in Company C as of February 5. No one wants to go back to live in Kamiri, even the Buton and Bugis who have lived there for sixty years and more. The only way Jafar himself could be persuaded to go back is with security guarantees from the army.

January 22, 1999 Killing of Five Muslims in Mangga Dua

Around midday on January 22, five Muslims hiding in a pickup truck driven by security forces were dragged out the truck in Mangga Dua, Ambon, doused in gasoline and set on fire by Christian residents.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Tragedi Penyerangan dan Pembantaian Warga Masyarakat Pada Beberapa Desa/Dusun di Pulau Ambon,” undated, but attached to a letter from the Church Fact-Finding Team to the Governor of Maluku province, January 20, 1999.

In the first version we heard of this incident, from a Christian source, the five Bugis were discovered in a pick-up truck, hidden under sacks of rice, trying to smuggle about thirty grenades and eight bombs into their village, as well as Rp.3 million in new notes. It was not clear where the truck was headed. According to this account, the truck also contained eighteen cartons of Jamu Madura, a potion that allegedly enhances virility. The truck was guarded by three security officers, two regular policemen and a Brimob policeman, evidence, the source said, of security force complicity in arming the Muslims. Someone from the village of Mangga Dua was in a house looking down on the road. He saw some feet sticking out and yelled. The driver panicked and turned around but as he was trying to go back, a Toyota vehicle was coming in the opposite direction. The driver was forced to stop, and the Christians dragged out the passengers inside.

A very different account, from Muslim sources, appeared in the newsweekly *Tempo*. It said that police were trying to evacuate the five Bugis from a largely Christian kampung infuriated over news of the death of the Protestant minister in Nania.³⁷ The truck was stopped by a Christian mob, who did not believe police protestations that they were only carrying rice. They discovered the five in the back of the truck under the rice sacks, dragged them out, and set them on fire. A Muslim we talked to confirmed the details of the *Tempo* account, but said the five were in fact Butonese, not Bugis, from the family of Haji Lasano in Waihaong.³⁸ And while some cash was found in the truck, there were no grenades or bombs.

January 23, 1999 Killing of a KOSTRAD soldier in Benteng, Ambon

A Balinese soldier from the elite army strategic reserve, KOSTRAD, was killed in the largely Christian village of Benteng on January 23, and one Christian youth died after being shot. Eleven youths, all Christian, were later charged with murder of the soldier, I Gusti Ngurah Hartawan. This was one of the few incidents during the first phase of the conflict when the army opened fire, but there is no reason to assume in this case that the shooting was indiscriminate.

According to one Christian account, the incident started when a group of Bugis tried to attack residents of the part of Benteng that faces the coast. KOSTRAD troops there made no effort to prevent the attack and allowed the Bugis to enter the village. (Our source assumed erroneously that the troops were from Ujung Pandang, home to the Bugis ethnic group, and were therefore partial to the attackers. In fact, the Balinese and his fellow soldiers were from a KOSTRAD unit based in Jember, East Java.)

³⁷ "Getir Ambon di Idul Fitri," *Tempo*, January 31, 1999.

³⁸ M.N. Wenno, "Kondisi Kerawanan Kotamadya Ambon Pasca Pertemuan Kespakatan Damai Tokoh-Tokoh Agama Propinsi Maluku di Depan Menhankam/Pangab 21 January 1999," Ambon, February 4, 1999.

Seeing they were about to be attacked, the people of Benteng massed to confront the Bugis. The KOSTRAD troops intervened to stop the Christians, according to the Christian account, instead of trying to stop the Bugis. The Christians therefore “were forced” to attack the troops, stabbing Hartawan in the process.³⁹ (A *Jakarta Post* article of January 25, 1999, notes that he was slashed in the face and stabbed in the stomach; Human Rights Watch learned that his arms also were hacked off below the elbow.) The troops opened fire on the Christians, wounding five and killing one. The KOSTRAD troops were pulled out after the incident and replaced with soldiers from Infantry Battalion 733.

A church fact-finding team looking into the incident afterwards concluded that the army had helped the Muslims attack the Christians by firing on them to drive them from their homes. When the Christians did not leave, they fired again, this time causing casualties. One Christian youth accused of trying to take the gun from the Balinese soldier was in fact trying to grab the barrel of the rifle to prevent it from being aimed at him, the account says. The soldier shot the youth in the left lung and was then stabbed and hacked to death by other Benteng youths.⁴⁰

Christian sources report that those arrested in connection with the Kostrad killing were severely tortured after being taken to military police headquarters in Ambon. They were beaten with rifle butts, and their ears were slashed.

January 24, 1999, Manipa

Violence erupted on the island of Manipa, and forty-eight Muslims were detained by the police as a result.

February 2, Karangtepe, Ambon

About 1,000 Bugis men had sought refuge in the village of Karangtepe, but after several days of providing them shelter, the local people, both Ambonese and Butonese, were getting uneasy at having so many men. They complained to the communications post at the Maranatha church and said unless the people were transferred elsewhere by 3:00 p.m. on February 2, they would take action to expel them. The church spoke with the provincial government, and officials arranged for the men to be transferred to the al-Fatah mosque. The Bugis started descending the hill down from Karangtepe, and rumors spread quickly that they had been attacked by Christians. Another clash was narrowly averted.

February 3-5, Ceram and Saparua

According to a Muslim account, trouble broke out on February 3. A peace initiative had been launched by the Christians of Rumberu, Rambatu, and Kairatu on the southwest coast of the island of Ceram, and they invited the Kairatu Muslims to take part. But when the Muslims came, they were met by the Christians armed with sharp weapons, including arrows and spears. Four Muslims from Kailolo were the first casualties, three hit by arrows, and an imam, Jalil Useinahu, injured by a spear.⁴¹ Three other Muslims, Ali, Yusuf, and Hamid Marasabessy were also wounded. Twelve houses near the mosque were burned to the ground, then the market, dominated by Muslim traders, went up in flames. The Muslim villages of Kailolo,

³⁹ Report from Baileo Maluku, January 26, 1999

⁴⁰ “Gambaran Hasil Pemeriksaan Tersangka Pelaku Pembunuhan Anggota KOSTRAD,” Koordinator Tim Pangacara Kristen, January 27, 1999.

⁴¹ M.N. Wenno, “Konidisi Kerawanan Kotamadya Ambon, February 4, 1999.

Pelauw and Ori all sent help to the Muslims in Kairatu; a Christian source said about ninety people from Kailolo took part.

Christian sources said that the trouble began on February 3 when a Christian from Kailolo set fire to the market and (unintentionally) four Christian houses in Kairatu, a town on the southwest coast of Ceram. The Christians believed the Muslims had set the fire and began burning Muslim homes.⁴² Clashes between the two communities then erupted.

Fighting continued on February 4. One of the areas attacked was the Christian hamlet of Waitasi, Kairatu. Christian sources allege that a group of about thirty Muslims, both Ambonese and Butonese burned twenty-eight houses in the hamlet of Waitasi, near Kairatu, and that they were led by Muslim police officers from the Kairatu police station. On the other hand, they also say that a Christian police sergeant helped defend the local church against Muslim attacks, so the allegations of bias were directed more at individual officers than at the police as an institution.

The depth of hostility and suspicion that the violence had produced by this stage is illustrated by the fact that a chronology of events prepared by Christian sources notes that on February 3, just before fighting broke out in Kairatu, Butonese residents dug pits in the ground to hide their valuables. Then on February 5, after the fighting had ceased, the village head and a policeman stood by while the villagers dug up the pits to take their belongings home. The Christian report saw this as clear evidence that the attack on Waitasi was premeditated and involved local officials. But after the series of outbreaks that had already taken place in the region, the effort to protect their valuables could well have been a simple precautionary measure taken by frightened villagers, with no sinister implications.

⁴²Human Rights Watch interview, Ambon, February 6, 1999.

By February 5, the Pelauw villagers were helping to evacuate Muslims from Kairatu. Around 10:00 a.m., the head of the Muslim hamlet of Waimitai reported that the hamlet was under attack by people from the Christian village of Kamariang.⁴³ A Christian source confirmed the involvement of Kamariang residents, saying security officials tried to stop them but they overpowered the local police, shouting that Kamariang was being burned.⁴⁴ Police opened fire, killing a Christian youth named Petrus Sahetapy. Several others were wounded. Police arrested a number of Christians accused of involvement in the attack and took them to the subdistrict police command Masohi, Ceram. Lawyers for the group said the detainees were beaten with rifle butts during interrogation. (As of March 9, nineteen Christians were detained there.)

The island of Saparua also began to show signs of unrest. On the same day as the Kairatu violence, Christians burned a Muslim dormitory occupied by people from Kulur. Saparua has sixteen villages, of which three are Muslim: Sirisori, Iha, and Kulur. Kulur is the most militant and has a reputation for being the best at making fishing bombs.

Haria is the biggest Christian village with some 7,000 inhabitants. On February 3, Haria villagers gathered at the church and were getting ready to attack Bugis and Makassarrese in the town of Saparua. The village head (*raja*) called a minister to come in. The minister tried to convince the villagers not to attack by having a joint prayer, and one of the villagers said in exasperation, "We've just had a joint prayer to get ready to fight and take the oath to battle, and now you're telling us to have a joint prayer to stop it?"⁴⁵

Christians from Ouw and Ulat were also ready to do battle, as eight of their people had disappeared and were presumed killed in the Muslim attack on Hila. The eight had land in Hila and had returned to claim it. After they disappeared, the villages of Ouw and Ulat, traditional enemies, joined forces in the interest of attacking Saparua.

The threat of violence was averted, however, after the intervention of local leaders.

Phase II: Security Forces Open Fire

Small-scale incidents took place daily in Ambon and surrounding islands over the next week, with a house-burning here, a minor clash there, but no major battles took place. It was the response of security forces that seemed to change after the next serious outbreak took place on the island of Haruku. From that point on, security forces seemed to lose their reluctance to shoot, and the death toll rose sharply as a result. In each case where the security forces opened fire, as far as we are able to tell from written and oral accounts, there was a rationale for intervention of some kind, usually to stop an attack or to halt a battle underway. But the security forces appear to have been equipped only with live ammunition, not with rubber bullets or non-lethal riot control equipment, and it is not clear that they took all necessary steps to avoid loss of life.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview in Ambon, February 6, 1999.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview in Ambon, February 6, 1999.

February 13-14, Haruku Island

More than two dozen people were killed in violence that broke out on Haruku on February 14; this was the first incident since the violence started on January 19 in which most of the deaths were the result of the armed forces' opening fire. Both sides have accused the security forces of bias, but whereas in Ceram, both sides accused individual police officers from the local station of favoring their co-religionists, in Haruku, the Muslim accusations were directed against the police, and the Christian charges mostly against the military, although against a few individual police officers as well. Thirteen Christians were detained, accused of arson and murder. Both Christian and Muslim sources have provided detailed and, on many details, divergent accounts of the shootings.

Both accounts agree that the trouble started on Saturday afternoon when a Christian from Kariu, a village located between the Muslim kampungs of Pelauw and Ori, set fire to a house just on the border with Pelauw. According to the Muslim account, the house was owned by a Christian from Aboru named Yunus Sinai, a civil servant in the Haruku office of the Education and Culture Ministry. The idea, both sides agree, was to make people think that a Muslim had burned the house, and indeed, residents of Aboru and Kariu accused Muslims of setting the fire. At about 5:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, another Christian house was burned. Realizing how tense the situation had become, the *raja* (village head) of Kariu and the local minister tried to calm things down, but both Kariu and Pelauw were on high alert. In Pelauw, according to a Muslim source, the people were ready for a holy war (*berniat jihad*), many of them wearing long white robes and carrying knives and spears.

Suddenly, according to Christian sources, Kariu was surrounded by people from five mostly Muslim villages: Pelauw, Ori, Kailolo, Kulor and Tulehu (the latter two are on Saparua; the people came in by boat), joined by Butonese displaced from the trouble in Kairatu, Ceram, who were temporarily living in Pelauw.

In the Muslim account, as the two sides confronted each other, police wearing civilian clothes opened fire without warning in the direction of the people from Pelauw, and several people were hit. Seeing them fall, the Muslim side attacked the Christians, who were being protected by Christian security forces and who had airguns and firearms. The Christian side fired on the Muslims, and the Muslims then burned down Kariu. The Muslims also got the military to take into temporary custody four Christian policemen they maintained had fired on them: Sgts. Loupatty, Titir Loloby, Hendrik Nandatu, and Officer Latumahina.⁴⁶ In the meantime, Muslims from Kailolo and Rohomoni were on standby alert, ready to come to the aid of Pelauw as needed. Fifteen Muslims died of gunshot wounds, nine from Pelauw, three from Kailolo and four from Ori.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Tim Pencari Fakta, Pos Keadilan, "Kondisi Kotamadya Ambon dan Sekitarnya Serta Beberapa Tempat di Maluku Tengah," 3rd week of February 1999.

⁴⁷ From Pelauw: Rohnur Talaohu, Hamzah Tuahena, Abubakar Latupono, Silikatai Tuakia, Jalil Salampessy, Alim Tualeka, Ruswan Latupono, and Ja Petty Sahubawa. From Kailolo: Mo Marasabessy, Dahlan Marasabessy, and Abidin Marasabessy.

According to the Christian source, people from Hulaliu tried to help the people of Kariu but they were stopped by the army near Ori. The army put a corpse on a bridge, and when youths from Hualeiu tried to retrieve the body, the army opened fire. On February 16, a Christian source reported twelve dead on the Christian side; the Muslims say fifteen Christians died. The Christian source says eight were shooting victims, of whom six were from Hulaliu and three from Kariu.⁴⁸ The same source says that after the army shot them, the Muslim mob rushed on the bodies and mutilated them with machetes, in some cases gouging out their eyes.

In addition, four elderly people Kariu died in the effort to escape through the forest to reach safety. By 3:00 p.m. all Kariu residents had fled either to the forest or to the village of Aboru. They left behind their church, to be guarded by the army, who promised it would be safe. But the church was burned to the ground before noon, and all that was left was the steeple, with a white flag flying on top.

Christian sources say they believe the attack on Kariu was planned well before it took place, because a week before it exploded there had been a meeting of Pelau elders, and the men began to shave their heads as if in preparation for war. In addition, a military post between Pelau and Kariu was dismantled before the attack and moved to a new spot between Ori and Hulaliu. It meant that when the Saparua Muslims came in by boat, there was no one to stop them, and indeed, they came in accompanied by the police and army. Christian sources named one Muslim sergeant from the Haruku police station as personally responsible for some of the shooting deaths, according to the Christian version.

February 20, 1999, Haruku Island

At around 10:00 a.m. in Rohmoni village, a Muslim villager going to his fields with about twenty others was reportedly confronted by twenty people from a Christian village in Haruku. The Rohmoni people ran back to their village to alert others. The confrontation ended in a stand-off, and no one was hurt.

February 22, 1999, Ambon

About 9:00 a.m. Muslims in Waihaong, Ambon, reportedly beat up a man named Arkalang Matulesy whom they suspected of being a former member of RMS, and turned him over to security forces.⁴⁹

February 23, 1999, Saparua

⁴⁸ From Hualeilu: Christianoya, shot in the neck; Martin Tahepary, shot below the left eye; Agusnoya, shot in the right breast; Franky Tahati, shot in the neck; Johannes Leiwakabessy; Martinus Taihitu, shot in the rahang. From Kariu: Anthon Pattiradjawane and Ais Radjawane. Dominggus "Doko" Tupalessy was in critical condition.

⁴⁹ Tim Pencari Fakta Pos Keadilan, "Kondisi Kotamadya Ambon dan Sekitarnya Serta Beberapa Tempat di Kabupaten Maluku Tengah, Pekan Keempat Bulan Pebruari 1999," e-mail account, no date.

Muslim sources say that in the early hours of February 23 Christians from the Christian half of the village of Sirisori wearing red headbands and armed with molotov cocktails mounted two attacks on the Muslims of Sirisori, trying to goad them into retaliation. Eventually they succeeded, and a violent clash took place between 7:00 and 11:00 a.m.. The Muslims say one Muslim, a teenager named Amir, and eight Christians died. Christian sources say one of the Christians died when security forces intervened and fired on the crowd. The victim was a student named Franz Pattipelahy.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Telephone conversation with Christian sources in Ambon, February 24, 1999

Later that night, fighting broke out between the Christian village of Nolot and the Muslim village of Ihahatawano. Christian sources report that three Christians were shot and killed by security forces who opened fire. Muslim sources say the Christian villages of Mahu, Ihamahu, Nolot, Itawaka, and Haria banded together and attacked the Muslim village. One Muslim and one Christian were killed, according to this account, and four were wounded by knives and arrows. The same account says that security forces confiscated one machine gun and three rifles from the Christian attackers.⁵¹ *Republika* newspaper, a daily from Jakarta with an Islamic orientation, reported that a mosque and seventeen houses were burned in Ihahatawano.

February 23, 1999, Ambon city

Muslim and Christian accounts also differ on the fighting that erupted with renewed virulence in the city of Ambon on February 23. According to Christian sources, a Muslim mob from the neighborhood of Galunggung attacked a group of Christians in the street, then continued on to Waihaong where they attacked a car belonging to a Christian, breaking the glass. The Muslims set upon a Christian high school student in front of the al-Fatah mosque, then attacked the village of Batu Merah, burning ten Christian homes there. The Christians said they defended themselves as best they could.

According to the Muslim side, the renewed violence broke out when Muslims became enraged after Christians forced a pregnant woman to remove her Muslim headscarf and then stomped on it. Shortly thereafter, some bombs went off, and soon some twenty houses were on fire. One person was killed after being shot by security forces.

Around noon, according to the Muslim account, a public transport van was stopped by a Christian mob near the state Islamic institute, and its eleven Muslim passengers forced out and attacked with machetes. Five were reported killed: La Kaida, La Ito, La Masi, Ustadz Dar and La Eni (their names indicate that they were all Butonese).

Around 4:00 p.m., Muslims reported that Christians burned a mosque in the area of Karang Panjang, together with four houses nearby. Four Muslims died. Then, in a clash shortly afterwards in Kramat Jaya, three Christians and a Muslim were reported killed.

By February 24, Muslims sources reported twenty-three dead, fourteen of them at the hands of security forces; twelve of the dead, they said, were Christians. Christian sources reported seven dead.⁵² Muslim sources routinely reported higher numbers of Christians shot by the army than did Christian side, the implication being that anyone shot by the army must have been on the offensive.

February 23, Waai, Tulehu, and Liang

In the eastern part of Ambon island, security forces opened fire in a clash between residents of the Christian village of Waai and the Muslim villages of Liang and Tulehu. The only detailed account we were able to obtain comes from Muslim sources, but we know that Christian sources maintain that the attack on Waai was unprovoked. (A detailed chronology from the Christian vantage point was being prepared in Ambon as this report went to press.)

⁵¹ Tim Pencari Fakta Pos Keadilan, "Kondisi Kotamadya Ambon dan Sekitarnya, Pekan Empat," op.cit.

⁵² The communications post at the Maranatha Church reported six names: Jacob de Lima, Rudy Hehatubu, E. Telussa, Marthin Manukelle, Anthon Lopulalan, and F. Hitipeuw.

According to Muslim account, Tulehu villagers got angry after a vehicle belonging to a Tulehu resident was stoned in the Christian village of Passo. When they saw a vehicle with passengers from Waai go by their village, they threw stones at it, breaking the windows. People of Waai began massing and by 2:00 p.m. the two villages were facing each other across the bridge that separates them. People on both sides had equipped themselves with traditional weapons.⁵³

By the late afternoon, smoke was seen coming from a small Butonese settlement called Batunaga on the edge of Waai, and word spread that several houses and a mosque had been burned by the people of Waai. The people of Tulehu got angry and they gathered together to attack Waai. They had just crossed the bridge when they were stopped by police, among them a sergeant named Manu. The police opened fire and shot several of the Tulehu people. At least seventeen people were brought to the Tulehu hospital with gunshot wounds, one of whom died. The actions of the police infuriated the people of Tulehu, and they burned five houses belonging to people from Waai.

Meanwhile, according to this account, Butonese from Batunaga whose homes had been burned sought refuge in the Muslim village of Liang, whose residents, in solidarity, decided to attack Waai. They did not realize that some of the Waai people had equipped themselves with firearms, and when they opened fire, several from people from Liang fell. At least two of them died in Tulehu hospital. (Human Rights Watch has not confirmed that firearms were used.)

The people of Tulehu then declared all-out war on the people of Waai that began with the *raja* of Tulehu striking a mosque drum to announce the beginning of a jihad. All men, young and old, came out of the village dressed in white with white cloths around their heads and carrying knives, spears and arrows. Security forces blocked the bridge leading to Waai, but the Tulehu people were not deterred. They went around, crossed the small river and attacked Waai from behind. But the people of Waai were ready and had armed themselves with fish bombs filled with M-16 bullets. According to the same Muslim sources, the use of these bullets was confirmed when one bullet taken from the body of a Waai man was turned over to army intelligence. The battle continued until afternoon with Liang and Tulehu fighting Waai. Because, the Muslim account claims, some of the Waai people were using machine guns, the Tulehu people were forced back. As noted above, we have not been able to verify the use of firearms.

⁵³ Tim Pencari Fakta Pos Keadilan, "Kondisi Kotamadya Ambon dan Sekitarnya Serta Beberapa tempat di Kabupaten Maluku Tengah, Pekan Ketiga Bulan Februari 1999."

At the end of the day, the Muslims said they had ten dead⁵⁴ and the Christians had eighteen.

March 1-2, 1999, Ambon

Numerous house-burnings and attacks on vehicles took place between February 23 and 28, but there were no major clashes. On February 28, a peace agreement was signed by leading religious figures in Ambon. But on March 1, news reports reached Jakarta that thousands of Christians had attacked a Muslim neighborhood, Rinjani, in Batu Merah at sunrise, and that police, helping the Christian attackers, had shot four people while they were at morning prayer inside the al-Huda mosque. A Muslim family of five was also reported to have been massacred by Muslims. The reports deaths of people inside a mosque caused outrage around the country, but the initial reports were not accurate.

Muslim deaths did indeed take place; the exact circumstances, however, were disputed, as were the origins of the clash. According to one Muslim fact-finding team, a mob from three Christian kampungs (Ahuru, Waikhoka and Karpan) attacked Rinjani without provocation. Christian sources on the ground said that a Muslim wearing a white headband crossed the river into Ahuru and tried to set fire to a house belonging to the Sinai family at about 5:30 a.m. Angry Ahuru residents then massed to attack Rinjani. Someone threw a bomb at the mosque but it did not explode.⁵⁵ The local police said that about 200 people from Ahuru had attacked Rinjani with petrol bombs, arrows, machetes, and knives but gave no motive for the attack. They denied reports that anyone was shot at prayer and said two of those killed had been shot about one hundred meters away, and their bodies had been brought to the mosque. The rumor that people had been shot while praying had emerged after some people who had taken refuge in the mosque reported seeing traces of blood there.⁵⁶ In the clash in Rinjani, one Christian also died, a man named John Deparlila.

A report from the task force of the Ambon branch of the Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) noted that three of the victims, Armin, Mui, and Husein died in the vicinity of the mosque, and the fourth, Usman Wakano, died after being attacked with a machete. The report named three police responsible for the shooting, all with family names usually associated with Christians. The MUI also reported that a Muslim family had been massacred by Christians in Ahuru. Three of five children were killed together with the parents; one child was brought safely to the al-Fatah mosque.

⁵⁴ Abdurahman Parry (from Liang), Bahri Lessy (Liang), La Ode Wahi (Tulehu), Ibrahim Lestaluhu (Tulehu), M. Yusuf Marasabessy (Kailolo), Sulaiman (Tulehu), Ali Ohorella (Tulehu), La Thalib (Tulehu) and two others, unidentified, from Tulehu.

⁵⁵ "Laporan Kejadian Ambon, Senin, 01 Maret 1999," (no named author).

⁵⁶ "Tensions still shroud Ambon," *Jakarta Post*, March 3, 1999.

In the aftermath of the shooting, four police and a soldier were turned over to the military police for investigation, but witnesses could identify only one of the police as having actually fired a gun.⁵⁷ On March 4, Indonesia's national police commander announced a shake-up in the Maluku provincial police command, with the provincial commander, deputy commander and inspector all being replaced. The new commander and inspector are both Maluku natives, the new commander, a Muslim from southeastern Maluku, and the inspector, an Ambonese Christian. Sources on both sides said they were willing to give the new leadership a chance.

On March 2, three people were found stabbed to death. Two of the dead were Marlen Sitanala and Lukas Paliama, both Christian. The former was an instructor at the law faculty of Pattimura University in Ambon, the latter a community activist with the nongovernmental organization called Waiselaka in Ambon. The third was not identified.

On the afternoon of March 2, a battalion of Marines arrived in Ambon from East Java to add to the KOSTRAD and local troops already on the ground.

March 5-6, Ambon

If the attacks on March 1-2 became a rallying cry for the Muslims, the shooting of Christian youths near the Silo church on March 6 caused equal outrage among Christians. By this time, Christians and Muslims had set up barricades in the roads leading into their respective neighborhoods or around churches and mosques to guard against infiltration by "spies" and provocateurs from the other side. In some cases, the barricades operated as checkpoints, with youths demanding to see the identity cards of drivers and passengers in vehicles passing by.

Around 2:00 a.m. on March 6, two large jeeps filled with police in civilian clothes carrying automatic rifles tried to pass by a barricade near the Silo church, according to a chronology prepared by Christian sources. Christian youths demanded that the driver of the first vehicle open the window. When he did not, they began pounding the car, smashing the back left window. Suddenly the doors of the jeep opened, and the police jumped out, firing their rifles. As people around the church panicked and began running, KOSTRAD soldiers manning a nearby military post opened fire, killing one and wounding twenty. The second van then began moving forward, with the police inside also firing their weapons and causing more panic. The arrival of Marines gradually brought the situation under control, and the wounded were evacuated to a local hospital. Military police told the press that eleven members of the security forces had been detained for questioning in the incident.⁵⁸

March 10, Ambon

Christian and Muslim groups clashed in different areas of the city, and again, troops opened fire, killing at least three Muslims and as many as six Christians. About thirty others were wounded, all but six by gunshot wounds. The city was in flames, and the situation on the streets appears to have been one of total chaos with pitched battles taking place in several different areas simultaneously.

V. RESPONSE OF THE SECURITY FORCES

⁵⁷ "Bugis Saman, Kapolda Maluku Baru," *Kompas*, March 5, 1999.

⁵⁸ "Keadaan Ambon Masih Rawan, Seorang Tewas Dan Beberapa Rumah Penduduk Dibakar," *Suara Pembaruan*, March 10, 1999.

From January 19, when violence first erupted, until February 14, when security forces intervened in the clash on Haruku island, the military were roundly criticized for failing to prevent the attacks on villagers of both faiths. The official National Human Rights Commission in Indonesia (Komnas) said the military was slow to respond, and the first accusations of security force bias that emerged were based on their inaction, not action. By mid-February, both sides were accusing the military of actively helping one side or the other to attack or of shooting at only one party involved in a clash.

At first glance, Ambon appeared to have no shortage of personnel. There are three companies of army Infantry Battalion 733, the Pattimura Battalion, whose headquarters are strategically situated along the main road on the island. A regional military command, KOREM 174, is based in Ambon, and there is a district military command, KODIM, as well as several subdistrict military posts. A mobile police brigade (Brimob) company is also stationed in Ambon.

But accounts of the fighting in Batu Merah and other areas of the city of Ambon on January 19-20 suggest that the army and police were both understaffed and wholly unprepared for the violence. The fact that violence broke out during Lebaran meant that many soldiers were on leave. In addition, on January 14, many soldiers from Ambon had been sent as reinforcements to help in quelling an outbreak of violence in nearby Dobo, meaning the city's core territorial force had been reduced.

People interviewed by Human Rights Watch noted the presence of police when mobs started rampaging through parts of Ambon city, but they were ineffectual. Warning shots of one or two police had no impact on crowds numbering in the hundreds, even thousands.

While both Muslim and Christian communities alleged that military inaction favored the other side, it would have been difficult to allege communal bias in those first weeks. Muslims got little help when their neighborhoods were being torched during the first two days of the conflict. Christians cited military inaction as leading to the destruction of the village of Benteng Karang on January 20 and subsequent violence the same day in the village of Nania. Muslims tried to call for help when they were being attacked in Kamiri, Hative Besar on January 20, but no one answered the telephone at the three military posts they called. When people approached individual commanders directly, as in Passo, the response was either that the various posts were short of personnel or that they did not have orders to intervene. The latter is no excuse when lives are in jeopardy.

In a matter of days, local perceptions of the security forces had changed. On January 23, four days after the fighting broke out, additional KOSTRAD troops were sent to Ambon from Ujung Pandang. Many of the soldiers sent were ethnic Bugis and Makassarese, and therefore automatically assumed by Christians to be biased toward the Muslim side.

Those perceptions of partiality were reinforced by the fact that Maj. Gen. Suaidi Marasabessy, the head of the Ujung Pandang-based regional command, was himself an Ambonese Muslim. Marasabessy himself acknowledged the perceptions of bias and told the press on March 11 that because Christians believed that most of the KOSTRAD men were Bugis fighting with their Muslim brethren, he had taken steps to ensure they were not on the front lines.⁵⁹ (This was somewhat disingenuous for two reasons: KOSTRAD troops *had* been on the front lines from the time they arrived in Ambon, and by March, they were manning military posts around the city where there was no possibility of being behind someone else's front lines.)

⁵⁹ "Suaidi Sesalkan Pernyataan Gus Dur Aparat Lokal Ambon Ditarik ke Pangkalan," *Republika*, March 12, 1999.

Even with the reinforcements, however, the military by and large refrained from using lethal force until the Haruku violence of February 14. From that point on, the death toll rose precipitously, as did accusations of bias. By and large, the Christians accused the army of favoring the Muslims, and the Muslims accused the police of helping the Christians, although Christians also accused individual Muslim officers of siding with Muslims. The fact was that on both sides, local police may have been partial to their own. Major General Marassabessy acknowledged this when he said that starting March 9, local forces were order to return to barracks. Conflict prevention would be the preserve of forces from outside Mauku.⁶⁰

The problem of local forces taking sides was accurately diagnosed. For example, when additional troops were sent to the island of Haruku to try to prevent conflict between the Muslims of Pelauw and the Christians of Kariu, the Christians noted immediately that the commander of the extra troops was a Muslim Ambonese as were two of the soldiers stationed at a post in Kariu, one of whom was married to a woman from Pelauw. When the post was removed from Kariu shortly before Muslim villagers attacked, the army said there had been a decision from higher-ups to merge all the different posts into one, but the Christians interpreted it as a deliberate effort to leave Kariu defenseless.

Likewise, when police opened fire on Muslims on March 1, Muslim sources circulated names of several Christian policemen they said had been involved in the attack. Of the names circulated, one policemen was detained after witnesses identified him as having fired his gun. Christian sources said his house had been burned to the ground earlier that morning, and they did not discount the possibility that he had fired on the crowd.

It took almost two months for senior military commanders to realize that no one, including members of the security forces, was immune to the cancer of communalism, but even then, the solutions were not clear. When Christian sources first began raising questions about the KOSTRAD troops, they recommended that only local troops from Maluku be deployed to try and quell the violence. At least then, they said, they would have the confidence that local troops would understand the local culture. But when it was very clear that Ambonese were fighting Ambonese, it was a question as to how understanding Ambonese culture would make local troops any better equipped to confront communal warfare than troops from outside the area.

VI. CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict by early March had enormous social and political consequences. It had left close to 200 dead, although both sides agree that it is difficult to produce exact figures. The government did not release separate figures for Christian and Muslim deaths, but it is clear both suffered immense losses in terms of deaths, injuries, and destruction of property, including homes, businesses, and places of worship. In addition, tens of thousands of people had been displaced and were in need of assistance. The divisions between the two communities had become so deep that local politicians were suggesting complete separation of Muslims and Christians as a solution to the conflict, but one that everyone realized was impossible.

Politically, the conflict had polarized Christians and Muslims in other parts of Indonesia, but particularly among the political elite of Jakarta, in a way that could have serious repercussions for the forthcoming June elections.

The Displaced

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The number of displaced was constantly shifting as the violence waxed and waned, as migrants take family members home and return to Ambon, and as some families find local resettlement. Moreover, Muslim and Christian sources tend to only collect data on the displaced of their own faith, skewing the data in many local press reports. For example, data collected by the Muslim communications post at al-Fatah mosque noted a total of 14,540 displaced at twenty-six different sites, most of them either military posts or mosques. Data collected a few days later by Tirus (Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan), a largely Christian organization, listed 7,923 displaced persons at eleven different sites, including military posts, churches, and religious schools. There was overlap on only four of the sites.⁶¹ Neither source listed people displaced on other islands, of whom there were many. The eruption of violence in Haruku led to the displacement of 1,243 people from Kariu alone, and after the fighting in Ambon on February 23-25, the number of displaced in the al-Fatah mosque compound doubled to nearly 4,000. (Most had been moved to other locations by early March.)

As of early March, supplies of humanitarian aid, especially food and medicine, were not the problem so much as distribution of that aid after it reached Ambon, especially given road blockades and other security difficulties. International agencies had been discouraged by the local government from providing assistance, and much of the aid coming in was coming from sources linked to one side of the conflict or the other.

Where the displaced from both communities were forced to coexist in shelters, as in an air force barracks that we visited in Suli, Ambon, relations were said to be as good as could be expected. But where large numbers of displaced from one community were gathered in a single site, as with the displaced Muslims in the al-Fatah mosque or the Christians at the nearby Silo church, the concentration of victims of violence appeared to increase their militancy, just as refugee camps often become recruiting grounds for violent groups. That factor may have contributed to the outbreaks of violence in Ambon on February 23-25 and in early March.

The government's efforts to address the displacement issue were undoubtedly well-intentioned but misguided. Human Rights Watch obtained a copy of a questionnaire being distributed to people displaced by the conflict. Distributed to heads of household, it contains twelve questions. The only question relating to children asks about their grade level and thus provides no opportunity to register the number of infants, pre-school, or out-of-school children, in the camps. Respondents are asked, in question 10 relating to property to circle either "Nothing left" or "Some remaining," the analytical value of which is not clear. Most problematic is question 11, "Desire of the head of household." Respondents are asked to choose either "Return to original place" or "Resettle/transmigrate." There is no effort to ascertain the conditions under which a displaced family might be willing to return to their village. Given the fact that the displaced are likely to be still traumatized by their displacement and have no house left to go back to, chances are that given only those two choices, they would opt to transmigrate (move to another island). But without full information as to the conditions in transmigration sites, which are often extremely harsh, or the availability of alternative options, the "choice" may amount to little more than forced resettlement.

Many of the Bugis and Butonese migrants have opted, at least temporarily, to return to Sulawesi, and many of the photographs in the international press of people crowding on boats and inter-island ferries show this. The Ambonese displaced, however, both Christian and Muslim, have no original home to return to.

Political Consequences

The violence in Ambon is one more example of the damage done by former President Soeharto's destruction of political institutions. Had there been some political outlet for grievances on both sides as they emerged over the last ten years, the explosion of the last three months might have been avoided. As it is, it may take years, even generations, to repair the damage.

⁶¹ "Pengungsi Korban Musibah Idulfitri 1419 H. Seokotamadya, Data per 1 Februari 1999, jam 12 siang", and Tirus, "Data Sementara Pengungsi di Penampungan Ambon," not dated but produced around February 5.

The violence has weakened trust in civilian institutions. The deputy head of the provincial parliament has been calling for Ambon to have its own regional military command (KODAM), in order to increase the number of troops permanently assigned to the area. People in areas that have been razed or burned to the ground want protection and security, even as they accuse the military and police of bias, and the beneficiary of that desire may be the army.

The violence is likely to have a deep and lasting impact on Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia more generally. The shootings near the mosque triggered massive demonstrations around the country by Muslim youth groups, and by March 7, some of the more conservative organizations were signing up volunteers to join a holy war to defend Islam in Ambon.

If that happens, support among Christians for a separate state may grow. The situation in Ambon may also give a boost to hardline Muslim organizations as the national elections approach in June, in turn generating fears of Christians, not only in Ambon but elsewhere, about their place in post-Soeharto Indonesia. More than any other communal incident that has taken place around Indonesia, the civil war in Ambon has ripped apart the notion of Indonesia as a society tolerant of all faiths.

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