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East Timor: Humanitarian Emergency and International Assistance

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Summary

Following a vote for independence from Indonesia on August 30, violence and property destruction by anti-independence militias forced many East Timorese from their homes.¹ Failure by the Indonesian military to contain the violence finally forced the Indonesian government to allow international intervention. INTERFET, the U.N. international force for East Timor began arriving the weekend of September 18 and humanitarian workers came with them. The humanitarian programs are still evolving as the population begins to return, and reconstruction needs are still being assessed. This short report provides background on the crisis, looks at the assistance needs, and the U.S. response. It will be updated as the situation develops.²

Background

After voting by approximately 80% to 20% for independence from Indonesia, East Timor was wracked by violence at the hands of East Timorese militia who are supporters of continued Indonesian rule and are reportedly armed and trained by the Indonesian military. By September 28, the bulk of the Indonesian military forces had left East Timor with the last forces leaving on October 31 after the vote for independence was accepted by the Indonesian legislature. The security situation is still difficult due to continuing militia activity, particularly in western East Timor, which shares a border with West Timor,

¹For information on this crisis, see CRS report RS20332, *East Timor Crisis: U.S. Policy and Options*. For information on the U.S. military role, see CRS Issue Brief 94040, *Peacekeeping: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement*.

²This report draws on information from several web sites which provide daily updates on the situation in East Timor. These include web sites of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (www.unhcr.ch/news/media/timor/latest.htm) and the United Nation's Relief Web (www.reliefweb.int). U.S. assistance reports, voluntary agency activities, press coverage, and U.N. situation reports are all available on the Reliefweb site.

a province of Indonesia,. The U.N. peace restoration force (INTERFET) has 9,300 military personnel from 16 countries as of November 2. INTERFET began its activities in Dili, the capital of East Timor, and expanded its authority throughout the area, with a final push into the isolated territory of Ambeno on October 22. (A map of East Timor is available at www.un.org/peace/etimor.htm)

Most of the East Timor population has been displaced. About 80,000 East Timorese are still unaccounted for, according to the head of INTERFET, Major Peter Cosgrove. He reported on November 3 that between 220,000 and 250,000 are in West Timor and about 40,000 are on other islands which are provinces of Indonesia. About 334,000 have been accounted for in East Timor and an estimated 100,000 are in areas of East Timor not yet searched by INTERFET. Refugee repatriation began with airlifts on October 8 from Kupang in far western West Timor and several thousand have returned to East Timor by foot across the border. These returns have been described by U.N. officials as the easy repatriations, people living in government camps, churches, or on their own. Those who remain in West Timor are in camps controlled by the militias and they have very little contact with the relief agencies. Some of the East Timorese in these camps are among the minority who voted against independence. But many seem to have been forced out of East Timor by the militias against their wishes and remain in camps where the militia intimidate and assault both the East Timorese and the international workers trying to aid them. Indonesian officials say that about 178,000 East Timorese remain in West Timor. UNHCR and other humanitarian aid groups express great concern for the fate of these East Timorese. Indonesia has agreed to transport humanitarian aid to both East and West Timor and to allow U.N. monitors to accompany the food shipments, but access to the East Timorese remains difficult. The government is also registering the refugees to ascertain whether they want to return to East Timor. UNHCR has protested the government run registration program, the slowness of the return of the refugees, the lack of Indonesian control over the militia, and the slowness of the government in allowing humanitarian assistance to get to the refugees.

U.N. officials estimate that as many as 80,000 people have returned to Dili, and that a total of 334,000 persons are currently in East Timor. Nearly 42,000 have returned to East Timor from West Timor or other areas. Over 100,000 city and rural residents are estimated to be in areas still only partly controlled by INTERFET. Humanitarian workers are searching for them as INTERFET secures each area. INTERFET and U.N. agencies are working to get hospitals, schools and public utilities restarted. Some economic activity is occurring but most food is being supplied by international aid. General food distribution began October 4.

The province of Ambeno is a special area of concern. It is part of East Timor but physically separated from it and surrounded by West Timor. When INTERFET forces were finally allowed to enter the territory by the Indonesian government on October 22, they found that the enclave had been looted extensively and few of the 60,000 people who lived there remained. Since then, about 9,000 people have entered Oekusi. These are not former residents, but persons displaced from the countryside by continuing militia activity. INTERFET believes that most of the citizens of Ambeno are being sheltered in private homes just outside the enclave in West Timor. They expect these East Timorese to return when the border is reopened by Indonesian authorities.

Humanitarian Aid Needs

Because of destruction of homes, crops, and farmland, WFP estimates that 740,000 of a total East Timor population of 890,000 will need food aid over the next 6 months. Relief agencies are working against the clock to replace food supplies and housing materials before the rainy season arrives, closing many of the rural roads to truck traffic. A damage assessment by a joint United Nations/ private voluntary agency team estimates that 75 percent of East Timorese were displaced and 70 percent of private residences, public buildings and essential utilities were destroyed. On October 27, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) published an interagency appeal for \$199 million for humanitarian aid to East Timorese in both East and West Timor through June 30, 2000. The appeal includes \$73 million for refugee return and reintegration (including shelter), \$33 million for food aid, \$35 million for health, water and sanitation, and \$20 million for infrastructure and economic recovery. Both the summary and the full text of the appeal are available on the OCHA website: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/index.html. The United Nations placed East Timor under U.N. administration on October 26. The U.N. Administration, including 8,900 troops, 1,640 police, and additional military advisors and civilian administrators will cost up to \$1 billion the first year. The new U.N. entity, UNTAET, will replace INTERFET, and will help East Timor in its transition to independence over the next three years. On October 27, the World Bank announced plans to create a trust fund for East Timor to assist the new country in long term reconstruction and incentives for private enterprise and investment. A World Bank assessment mission began on October 29.

U.S. Assistance

The United States has provided aid from the beginning of the emergency through a variety of government humanitarian assistance channels.³ Through November 4, 1999, the aid totals \$21,813,744. The attached table shows the breakdown of the aid by agency. The USAID Food for Peace (FFP) aid consists of commodities. The Department of Defense provided HDRs or ready to eat meals and transportation of humanitarian aid. The Department of State and USAID aid consists primarily of cash grants to U.N. and private voluntary agencies.

Figure U.S. Assistance
(in millions U.S. \$)

DOD	1.86
USAID OFDA	3.59
USAID bilat.	1.30
USAID FFP	9.97
State Dept. PRM	5.10
Total	21.81

Source: U.S. AID

³Information on the emergency, including USAID OFDA daily situation reports, is available on line at www.reliefweb.int.

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