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THE UNTOLD TRAGEDIES OF MALUKU

*The findings of International Christian Concern following
a fact-finding trip to Indonesia in February 2001*

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

Maluku (Moluccas) is made up of approximately 1,000 islands (one count claims 999 and another 1,029) extending over an area of about 524,000 square miles, of which 90 percent is water. About two million people live among the many thousands of villages that dot the landscape of the Maluku archipelago. Maluku is a paradise with an abundance of natural resources, pristine beaches, lush flora, and exotic marine life. Also known as the "Spice Islands," Maluku is home to many of the spices that are used both in cuisine and for medicinal purposes. Like all Indonesia, Islam is the predominant religion of Maluku.

Sadly, the Malukan paradise has been torn apart by violence and strife. Most of Maluku was once home to both Christians and Muslims who dwelt together in harmony. However, over the past two years that has all changed. Since January of 1999 an estimated 5,000-8,000 people have died in conflicts between members of the Muslim and Christian communities. So far in North Maluku alone, 168 churches have been destroyed, and 34 mosques have been destroyed in counter attacks. On the island of Ternate, there is not one church left standing. Also, over the past two years, among both Christians and Muslims, more than 500,000 people have been displaced from their villages and their homes have been turned to rubble.

Though it is easy to classify the strife in Maluku as a religious war, the unrest in Indonesia today is the product of several factors, including problems of transmigration, a changing economy, modernization, the Islamization of the Indonesian bureaucracy, and ethnic rivalry. The call for a totally Islamic society and political system is not new to Indonesia. The aforementioned problems first led to ethnic clashes, which in turn have served as an opportunity for militant Muslim to advance their extremist campaign.

The current conflict in the Maluku islands can be traced back to the government establishing a new province, essentially dividing Maluku into two provinces, North Maluku and South Maluku. On January 19, 1999 the violence commenced and continues until today. Instead of resolving the problems, the problems have intensified due to a weak and ineffective government and the one-sided attitude of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI). What began as inter-ethnic violence rapidly turned to a religious conflict by provocateurs who immediately victimized Christians, costing many Christians their lives, properties and churches. What followed was a call for the "Christian Cleansing" of all Maluku. The violence has also been thought by some to be a means for the fundamentalists to destabilize the present government.

In Ambon, the expropriation of the police by members of the TNI (Field Artillery) resulted in the brutal assassination of Christians, thus allowing the aggressors to enter Christian residences at

will and to terrorize the Christian community. In the case of Ternate, the TNI used the riots as an excuse to strip the police of their weapons and took control. Some 15,000 Christian refugees were relocated to places in North Sulawesi and thousands more to Tobelo (Halmahera island) and Ambon.

Islamic fundamentalists entering Maluku from other areas of the country have also fomented strife. Behind most of the provocation is the Laskar Jihad (holy warriors) movement which has promoted the jihad violence by recruiting young Muslims seeking money and the promise of gratification in Paradise. In Jakarta, CD's were distributed as a means to recruit young Muslims into the Jihad movement and funds are solicited through the group's web site. It is unclear who is behind the financing of the movement, which lacks little in its military arsenal. The result has been violent attacks by well-armed Jihad warriors by both land and sea against Christian villages in the Malukan Islands. Armed mostly with sharp sticks and machetes, the Christians have attempted to defend their homes and in some cases have attempted to retaliate in order to recapture their villages, mostly without success except in the case of the town of Tobelo.

The leading figure of the Laskar Jihad is Ustadz Jafar Umar Thalib. His base is primarily in South and Central Maluku and, while working closely with other "jihad" groups, claims to be completely separate. He reportedly has publicly announced that his jihad warriors are going to drive every Christian in the Maluku islands into the sea. He has organized and dispatched jihad militias by the hundreds to the Maluku islands, and the government has made no effort to apprehend him or stop him. While in Ambon, Thalib called on Muslims to "kill every Christian." He said that the Christians have two alternatives. One is to "come and bow at their feet and kiss their feet and ask for forgiveness and then leave the Maluku islands." He then said, "The second alternative to us is better; to kill every Christian in the Maluku islands."

Frighteningly, it has become "trendy" by the various militant Muslim groups to use the name *Laskar Jihad*, even though they might not be working together.

The *Jihad fi Sabilillah* was proclaimed in late April 2000, at which time the organization calling itself Laskar Jihad became visible. They started to arrive by the thousands on the Malukan islands, causing much more suffering for the Christian communities. It can only be assumed that the Jihad warriors are now being supported by the Mujahideen from Pakistan and Afghanistan because of the vast number of boats and arms they have available. Other groups suspected to be supporting the Laskar Jihad with arms are the Moro Liberation Front in the southern Philippines, which receives its funding directly from Libya. [It is worth noting that while the ICC team was undergoing interrogation in Ternate by the military police, a police captain happened to mention that four people from Afghanistan had recently been in North Maluku, as well as a number from Pakistan.]

ICC'S INVOLVEMENT

Following appeals made to International Christian Concern (ICC) for help in rescuing 7,061 Christians said to be trapped by Jihad warriors at eight different locations, ICC responded by sending a team to Indonesia to investigate. ICC founder and president Steve Snyder and vice president Pat Bradley made the trip. Accompanying the ICC team were two visiting pastors from Australia, an Australian missionary who has resided in Indonesia for 27 years, and a member of the North Maluku Parliament.

The acts of violence that were reported to the ICC team from numerous and varying eyewitnesses are among the most vicious acts carried out in modern history. If and when the violence finally does cease, it will likely take a long time to heal the scars and mend the

divisions that have occurred as a result of neighbor rising up against neighbor and in some instances family member against family member.

The question now is, where are these people going to live who have lost everything? Someone needs to step in and serve as their voice and be willing to extend a hand to help. These Christians need to be set free from a cycle of tragedy and prolonged destitution.

TESTIMONIES GATHERED IN MANADO

ICC's first order of business in Indonesia was to interview Christian refugees in the city of Manado in northern Sulawesi.

Pastor Karl from the island of Ternate told us how he and his wife and two children, ages 10 and 12, had to flee for their lives when the Jihad warriors launched a large scale attack against the Christians of Ternate on November 6, 1999 at 4:30 in the morning. Karl says that his church was the first to be destroyed. Written by the Jihad warriors on the one wall that partially remained were the words: "Jesus is a pig and this is a pig pen."

The following testimonies are from Christians from the Island of Malakai:

"At 10:00am the Jihad Warriors attacked my village of Duma on the 19th of June. My husband was killed. While we were in the church, the Jihad warriors attacked and the soldiers were with them. My arm was severed by shrapnel from a bomb thrown by the attackers."

Singers from North Maluku expressed themselves best in song and it was a way for them to keep their faith strong. One man in the group who sang to us said: "We sing about what happened but we know God is really good and faithful to us. When we were on the Island of Ternate, we had no time to plan. We wanted to live in peace with the Muslims and we didn't really think that our neighbors would attack. We wanted to live in harmony and unity, but they deceived us by making their attack against us like a pregnant woman. We don't have guns, but the Jihad warriors had arms and bombs, as well as support from the soldiers. But God is faithful and He delivered us. We fled to the jungle without time to prepare any of our possessions. We were in the jungles for two weeks and were walking for one week from morning until night. Some of the women were pregnant and we had no doctors. We had no food and one day we had no water. The ladies had no way to nurse their babies. At that time, the only source of nutrients we had available was from the juice of wild roots. We knew that this was not healthy but trusted God would be with us and He was. There was a total of about 800 of us. Two of the elderly died in the jungle from natural causes."

"I am Pastor Willy, pastor of the Evangelical Church of Halmahera. I am married and have one child. The local government in Manado asked me to be the spiritual pastor for the refugees, for which I accepted."

Another pastor from the Pentecostal Calvary Mission Church from Halmahera painfully told about how his parents were massacred on the island of Halmahera. A total of four were killed when the Jihad Warriors attacked his village. Several other pastors identified themselves and it was clear that they too were having to cope with grief from losing loved ones, their homes and their churches.

Continuing introductions from the Christian refugees were the following:

"My name is Metabung. I have now been here for one year. My village was destroyed in one hour and two churches were destroyed."

“I am Pastor Soria Monia. My husband John is also a Pastor. We come from the Island of Bacan in North Maluku. We are from the Calvary Pentecostal Church. We, along with our congregation of 30 families escaped to Ambon then here. Six of the families are still in Bacan.”

“I am Willy, the pastor of the Pentecostal church in North Maluku. On the 9th of Nov. 1999 at 6:00 am at the village of Boso we were attacked. About 1,000 warriors attacked and they were armed with many different weapons, including rifles, pistols, machete knives and bombs. They also used catapults which they used to launch bunches of steel arrows. We Christians could only trust in prayer. It was obvious God was with us for not one person in our village was attacked. The military evacuated us from the area to the Island of Bacan and some to North Sulawesi. After we were evacuated to Bacan the Jihad came and burned every church and house, but only after they took all of our possessions for themselves. We can't go back now because it is not safe. I would ask Americans to help provide security and safety so that we can return, for it is obvious that the government, especially in Maluku, can not offer us protection.”

“I am Amos Chachung from East Gani, North Maluku. I am 20 years old and I am the youth leader in the church. We heard rumors that the Jihad Warriors were coming and three days later they did come, about 1,000 of them. A total of 149 Christians lived in our village. We were able to escape by running to the jungles. We ran to another village in East Gani in January 2000, we joined up with other Christians and then we were attacked again. In the first attack there were no deaths. The second attack there were 6 killed. We then ran to the jungles and lived there for three months. We were unable to take any food or possessions with us. After the three months, we learned that the military was in our village so we returned. However, the soldiers arrested us, for they were working together with the Jihad Warriors. They said to us that if we don't become Muslims we will be killed. If we refused, we would have all been killed. We were forced to follow Islam. We were held by the military and if we didn't cooperate they would hit us. We were then forcibly circumcised. Every Christian had to be circumcised, including all from the age of six on up, male and female. There was a doctor that performed the circumcision, except when the children were circumcised, it was a nurse.”

Brought before us was Yonis, age 12. When Yonis was asked what it felt like for him to be circumcised by the Muslim warriors he replied, “I was afraid... and I was sore... it really hurt.”

Another Christian, Amos, recounted his story. “We always had to be accompanied by the Jihad, even if we went into the jungle to gather wood. I managed to escape one night after everyone was asleep. 17 of us managed to escape but 132 are still being held. Our fellow believers encouraged us to run away and to try to get help for them.”

“I am Paulos from the village of Sicli from southwest Halmahera. On the 15th of January 2000 when the Jihad attacked we ran into the jungles. After one week we were told that it was safe and the Jihad said that we could come back and no harm would come to us. We returned only to find we had been deceived and the Jihad Warriors attacked us. My parents who were in their 80's couldn't flee and were caught. My parents told us, 'You run, you run and get away. We will take care of ourselves because we are old.' My father was killed by the Jihad Warriors, because he refused to convert to Islam. They thrust a spear into him and when he fell to the ground. They then took a sword and cut him into pieces. Some other family members are still being held by the Jihad Warriors. They are holding on to their faith in Christ and have some friendly military now helping provide some security. If the military should leave, everyone will be killed. All the houses and churches have already been destroyed.” When I asked Paulos what he would want to say to the Christians in America, he said: “We ask of American Christians only one thing, that you would help rescue those who cannot escape.”

A young Christian man described what it was like for him and his family the day the Jihad warriors attacked. "We were not able to defend ourselves, so we ran into the jungle. My father, mother and brothers and sisters were also trying to run. My parents were struck down with seven spears, but because they weren't sharp they fell to the ground and didn't harm them. The warriors were able to catch up with my father and took his own spear and then beat him on the head. After he fell to the ground they used the spear on him and then took his machete knife and cut him into pieces. Since we were scattered in the jungles, we were separated from one another. My nephew saw the events and described to me exactly what happened. He took the remains of my father and put them into a bag and buried them. I didn't learn about this until I was reunited with my nephew. When I learned about this, I first felt that I wanted to take revenge, because the one who did this was a Muslim neighbor with whom we had always got along fine together. We lived in harmony. But our Muslim neighbors joined with our Muslim neighbors because they were afraid the same would happen to us if they didn't."

The pastor from the Calvary Pentecostal Church of God in Obei recounted his ordeal. "I am a district leader overseeing 10 congregations of about 500 believers. The day the Jihad attacked, they were not alone, but were accompanied by the army. They had the support of the government, otherwise they could not have done this. We don't know who their sponsor is for the weapons and transportation, as well as all their supplies of food. I don't think that the Jihad could have overrun our village had they been alone. They have good backing. We had nothing but bows and arrows and machete knives. The Jihad had all these along with rifles, bazookas and the help of the army. The military was there as though they were to help the warriors. There are 800 in our village. We ran away with heavy hearts, for this was our homeland. Two churches were demolished. With grief, we gathered in the jungles. It was pouring with rain and was very muddy as we ran. The government did nothing to help but left us to our own fate. The Christians remain in a very bad position and the government is now in the hands of the Muslims. Our village has been destroyed. We can't return. What will become of our children. Our work is taken away. We have nothing. We left with only the clothes on our bodies. My child had diarrhea for one week and we could do nothing but keep re-washing his clothes. We are now in North Sulawesi which is our place of refuge."

Many of the Christians who did not escape were placed into military barracks where they remain today. The military, instead of helping the families to relocate to a safe area, helped the Jihad warriors to continue their campaign of terror against the Christians.

Our ICC team was able to meet and interview some of the survivors of the attacks of the Muslim Jihad warriors. One pastor from Tobelo (name withheld) recounted the horrors of one of the attacks by the Jihad warriors accompanied by the military. The pastor told how barracks had been erected by the government at several locations after the attacks. When the villagers had fled, they were later told by the military that they would be guaranteed safety if they were to return. Once they returned, they found they had been deceived and that the barracks were to become a prison for the returning villagers. The pastor went on to say, "When I prayed, the Lord put the fear in my heart that we must flee and that the Muslim Jihad warriors intended to kill us all. I told my in-laws about my feelings, but they trusted the government. I planned my escape and I was the last pastor to actually leave the camp. I escaped on December 23, 1999 and fled to the town of Bitung. Three days later, on December 26, 1999, the Jihad warriors attacked the city of Tobelo. On January 10, 2000 the Jihad came to the camp where my in-laws were at, attacking the refugees. The night before, the Jihad warriors had come to them and told them they were going to allow them to leave by boat and to prepare to leave the next morning. But at 4:00 A.M., the Jihad warriors came and were accompanied by the military. When the refugees tried to defend themselves, they were forced to retreat back to the barracks. Three

grenades were thrown into the building in which they had entered, but praise the Lord not one of the grenades exploded. Two of the local police, one Muslim and one Christian, tried to defend us and were shooting at the Jihad warriors in an attempt to drive them back, which gave the refugees an opportunity to escape into the jungles. Many of the refugees, including women and children, were not from this area and became disoriented in the jungle. They ended up being recaptured by the Jihad. My mother-in-law was one of them. The Jihad beheaded her on the spot. Without any pity, they left her body where it fell. All of our documents and titles of ownership were destroyed as well. My father-in-law managed to escape. He was carrying his son, who was a cripple, on his shoulders. They traveled for several days through the thorny jungles where they had to clear their own path. My father-in-law was exhausted and there was no food or water. He lost all his strength and was unable to continue. The last words spoken by his son before he died from hunger and dehydration were, 'Father, father, please help me.' There was nothing he could do to save his son. After several days my father-in-law managed to reach Tobelo."

I asked this pastor what he would like to say to the church in America. He replied, "I hope that the Christians in America will look to the future, to the future generation of Christians here in the Maluku Islands who have witnessed all these atrocities. The youth have no future without your help. They need to be given a chance to receive an education like all other young people. Also, we hope that you can somehow negotiate with the government so that those who are still being held by the Jihad can be evacuated. If the military are pulled out, the fate of the Christians is not good. They will most certainly be killed if they are not evacuated as soon as possible."

Among the many victims we met in the refugee camps was Yonis Dara and his wife Nema, along with their five small children from the village of Gebubu one of the villages where a number of Christians are still being held by the Jihad warriors and are targeted by ICC to be among those rescued. The family escaped only six weeks earlier. The family shared the tragic story about what they personally had to endure along with the other Christians from their village when the Jihad warriors attacked in January 2000. "When we were attacked we fled to the jungle. We were told by the military that it was safe to return, but when we returned we were taken hostage. We were told that we must become Muslims if we wanted to survive. All of the Christians were taken into the church. We were overcome with fear and to avoid being slaughtered agreed to become circumcised and become Muslims. We still held Christ in our hearts and were willing to let them do what they wanted to our bodies. We were told that starting tomorrow we were all going to be circumcised, starting with the children. My son Unis could not walk for a month afterward because of the infections. There were no medicines or antiseptic and the same instruments were used repeatedly without cleansing. Johanas is 16; Unis is 12; My daughter Yesti is 9 years old, and my fourth child Ulin is 6 years old, all of them were forced to be circumcised, as well as me. For the adults, scissors were used to do the circumcision. For the children, a Muslim nurse's aid did the circumcision. Those as young as one month were circumcised. Women over 40 were not circumcised. " Nema said that when she began crying for her children she was told by the soldiers to stop crying or she would be turned over the Jihad to be killed. The circumcision on the girls was performed by inserting a coin into the vagina and then a razor blade was used to cut the clitoris Their daughter Yesti told us, "It hurt a lot. I didn't want them to do it, but they said if I didn't let them do it they would kill me." Because of the infection that our son Unis suffered from the circumcision, he became very ill. He still has not fully recovered. Because of the seriousness of his infection, the military escorted us to a boat to go for medical treatment. That's when we made our escape. There are still about 132 people still trapped in Gebubu. Of the 149 that were originally trapped, 17 have escaped." When asked what are you hoping to happen next. Yonis said, "When we left the people in the church they asked me to see if I can organize some transportation and help to rescue them from the Jihad warriors."

In the largest refugee camp located in Manado on the island of Sulawesi, more than 7,000 Christian refugees live in overcrowded conditions with poor sanitation and an inadequate supply of water. We interviewed several of the fortunate ones who escaped from the Jihad warriors who painfully recounted their horrific stories of suffering. Many of the refugees, including children, displayed the scars from their wounds suffered from bullets, grenades, hand-tossed cluster bombs, and machetes. A number of the wounded, especially among those refugees we met from Duma, still have the remains of shrapnel in their bodies and are in need of surgery. I could hardly hold back the tears, and I still cry as I think about the horrible ordeal that these people have endured. I listened as parents and grandparents pleaded with me to rescue their children who are still in the hands of the Jihad. The grief and the fear expressed were real, for they know the fate that possibly awaits their children if they are not rescued. This continues to weigh heavily upon my heart. I will never forget what they shared with me; the often gruesome and painful loss of loved ones, the destruction of their homes, the looting of their possessions, and the sudden vanquishing of all their dreams for the future.

TESTIMONIES OF REFUGEES FROM DUMA

Most of the Christians from the village of Duma were not able to escape before the Jihad attacked on June 19, 2000. Jihad warriors had attacked Duma a total of 21 times. This was a Christian village of about 1,500 people. At least 400 died in the last attack and another 120 drowned at sea when the boat they were using to escape mysteriously sank.

We interviewed Ody, the coordinator of the refugee camp of the Christians from Duma. Like many of the Christians from Duma, his body shows the scars from the violent attack on his village. Ody told us: "We did everything we could to defend our village and our church, whether we live or die, we put our trust in God. I told everyone to run to the church hoping we could defend ourselves from the Jihad warriors. When it became impossible to do so, we escaped into the jungles. The Jihad warriors were calling out to all the men who were the last to escape saying, 'We are going to catch you and cut you up into tiny pieces.' I was unable to run fast enough because I had my young son in my arms. They caught up with me and one of the warriors slashed at me with his machete, cutting into my neck. With God's help, I managed to grab his machete and slew him, which caused the other warriors to fear so they ran away. A total of 56 men who were with me all died. I was able to escape with my young son and caught up with the women and children and helped them to safety. Only one of my family members died, my young brother. Surrendering my life into the hands of the Lord is perhaps the reason God gave me the strength to survive."

Another Duma survivor we interviewed was a young lady by the name of Alchi, who is 25 years of age. She showed us the wounds on her back and her hand which was missing a finger, the result of a bazooka-launched shrapnel bomb. She, like many of the others who displayed their wounds before us, was crying out for someone to notice, someone to care. Alchi told of her escape on June 19, 2000 from the village of Duma. "I was with my husband in our home when the Jihad warriors began attacking our homes. We, along with many of our neighbors, ran to the church. One of the bombs exploded next to me and I fell to the ground. My husband stopped to help me and was shot dead on the spot."

A 25-year-old man, among those wounded during the attack on Duma, still has shrapnel in his arm. He recounted how the village had fled to the church in an attempt to defend it. "I saw many of my friends and family members killed in the streets. Villagers were fleeing to the church seeking protection. I was trying to fend off the attackers at the front door of the church as the women and children escaped from the back door. The warriors then threw a bomb into the

church, which is how I was wounded. However, I managed to escape and catch up with the women and children.”

Cristina Sintoki, a 16-year-old girl, is one of the young people who was wounded in the attack on Duma while trying to defend their church. With tears in her eyes, she recounted the events of that day. “My legs were hit with bullets fired by the Jihad warriors as I was trying to roll fuel drums in the path of the advancing warriors in an attempt to form a barricade, but the bullets were piercing through the drums. I just didn’t want them to take our church. I fell to the ground wounded and was helped by some of the young people. My father and older brother were killed. They burned my father alive and cut my brother to pieces with their machetes.”

Yoly, a 38-year-old woman, lost her left arm just below the elbow. She was running from the Jihad warriors and the military. “I was shot by the Indonesian military unit Brawy Jiya 511. Several of my family members were shot, about 20 of my family in all. My heart is broken and I find it hard to forgive them because of the pain in my heart. But I have surrendered them into the hands of God and pray that they would come to know Jesus.”

The last words I was to hear from the Duma refugees came from Ody, who made a passionate plea for help. Ody said, “There are some of our children who are from Duma who were unable to escape, so they were trapped and taken to Ternate. We were told by a military man who is also a Christian from Duma, and is now in Ternate, that some of our children from Duma are in the hands of the Jihad Warriors in Ternate. Some of the children even come to his house on occasion to play. He says that he would like to rescue them, but has not been willing to do so because he is afraid of what would happen to him if he was caught. The parents of these children are living in Tobelo with the other refugees, praying that one day they will have their children returned to them. The children have been kidnapped and indoctrinated into Islam. The Jihad Warriors find this as one way to Islamize us Christians. Our children are the easiest to capture. Converting the children is one way of stopping the Christian faith from continuing to future generations. We Christians from Duma have lost everything and need help from our brothers and sisters in America because right now it looks impossible to return. What we need is help from our brothers and sisters in the West, to come and teach us new skills so that we can set up our own businesses and gain back our self respect. It is difficult for us after the slaughter of our people. If we could learn new skills and begin a new life for ourselves, then we would have hope, with something to pass on to the next generation.”

I came away overwhelmed by the grief and suffering the Christians from Duma have endured and I had to ask myself, why is the American church silent? And probably, like I had been, we are simply ignorant of what is happening or we have only heard the media reports about “ethnic violence” in Indonesia. We have not been fully informed! For the sake of these persecuted Christians with whom I prayed, wept, and shared their pains, I feel that I must tell the world and do all I can to help them.

THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT AREA: HALMAHERA ISLAND

On the 22nd of February, we chartered a plane to take us to the island of Halmahera. We landed in Kau where we had a vehicle waiting to take us to Tobelo, the Christian stronghold about one hour drive from Kau. Once we landed, the plane immediately took off as a half dozen soldiers arrived on motorcycles. After a brief questioning and inspection of our belongings, we were allowed to continue. On the road north to Tobelo, we saw villages where converts from primitive tribes of the island had built their homes after embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was like watching an eerie doomsday movie as we passed village after village that had been reduced to rubble and there were no signs of life.

In one of the refugee camps near Tobelo we met many courageous Christians. One was a brave Christian woman by the name of Sertasi Sallom. She recounted her story of the attack on Duma on the 19th of June 2000. As testified by refugees interviewed a few days earlier in Manado, the military had participated in the attacks against the Christians. Sertasi told us: Because of the help the Jihad received from the military units Brawy Jira 511 and 512, more than 400 people were slain. When I saw the Jihad warriors approaching, I cried out, "Lord help me." Then a Jihad warrior came up to me and said, 'I'll show you how God helps you,' and then placed a pistol in my mouth and pulled the trigger." Sertasi's face is evidence enough. Nearly half her face was blown apart. "They thought that I was dead," Sertasi continued, "so they left me lying there on the ground." Sertasi said that it was because she had faith in Christ that she was able to survive. Her fellow villagers found her and took her to a hospital some distance away. Amazingly, she lived to tell her story. Later on, she underwent some skin and bone grafts. She has returned to Tobelo to be with her children and the other refugees from her village. She needs about \$2,500 for the surgery to help restore her face.

Not only was Surtasi a victim of the vicious attacks from the Jihad warriors, but her father Norm Vincin was also attacked. The scars on the back of his neck are a witness of the brutal attack on their village of Duma. His neck was struck with a sword, exposing the bone of his spine. Left for dead, he amazingly survived the intended deadly blow. He told us: "On the day we were attacked, we retreated to the church but they continue to attack us in the church. I was unconscious, but was helped by my Christian brothers and sisters to escape to the jungles."

Among the many who were eager to tell us their story was a young man who had lost his eye after a piece of shrapnel from a grenade had fallen near him. The suffering was not limited to adults, for one small child under the age of two bore the scars of shrapnel wounds to his small body, another example of how children are among the victims of the atrocities.

A young mother by the name of Ela described how on the 19th of June, the Jihad had attacked her village of Duma and took her 4 year old son Alan. "I was told to follow them, but I could not keep up and when I arrived I could not find him. I don't know for sure where my son is, but I heard that he is in Ternate. I only want my son back. I know a man in Banito who said he knows where my son is, but he said that he was unable to get him. He also confirmed that Alan is being held by the Jihad warriors. It is difficult to accept the fact that my son is being forced to be a Muslim."

At one refugee camp, we were greeted by several grieving Christians. One was man who received a letter that had been smuggled out to him by his pastor Lamat. The letter gives the names of 13 people in his church who are being held hostage by the Jihad warriors and guarded by the military since June 6, 2000. These Christians are located on the island of Obi . A plea was made to help get these thirteen out, one of whom is a newborn baby, born two weeks earlier in captivity. One of the other names on the list is Helda who has been forced to marry a Muslim man.

A tearful woman came forward and said that the first name on the list is her mother, who is 80 years old. This woman pleaded with us to help get her mother out who is a Christian and forced to do Muslim rituals.

Another woman made an heartfelt appeal to our team to help get her grandchild off the island of Obi. The parents of the child were injured by a bomb and the child taken by the Jihad warriors.

“Please help me sir...please bring my grandchild to me,” was the cry of this brokenhearted grandmother.

And still another plea for help: “Please help me get my mother back so that she may be free.” This was another plea made by a Christian woman who told us that her cousins were caught by the Jihad warriors during the June 6 raid and were chopped to pieces with machetes. “My mother was unable to escape and is being held against her will.”

A young mother with a baby in her arms came and pleaded for help for the people of her village of Lata Lata. A total of 1719 people were in the village when attacked by the Jihad warriors. When the Jihad warriors demanded that the pastor come forward, he did and was cut to pieces with machetes.

A 12-year-old boy by the name of Noledy found it difficult to speak about the tragedy of the losing both of his parents in the attack against his village on the island of Halmahera. Both his mother and father were caught by their attackers, who showed no mercy as they hacked them with a machete. Still conscious, his parents were then buried alive by the Jihad warriors. Noledy managed to escape to the jungles where he managed to survive for one week before coming across some other Christian refugees.

ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF CHRISTIANS ON THE ISLAND OF HALMAHERA.

In order to assess the conditions among the refugees and to verify the willingness on the part of the other refugees to receive possibly another 7,000 more, six of us decided to charter a plane and fly to Tobelo on the island of Halmahera where many Christians were attacked by the Jihad warriors. I was accompanied by our three Australian friends and two Indonesian Christian pastors. One of the pastors, Carlos, is from the neighboring island of Ternate. He is a pastor and oversees five churches that were under his care. He also serves as the chairman of the Christian Party and is a member of the North Maluku Parliament. His own church was burned to the ground by the Jihad warriors during an attack on the Christians of Ternate. One of the pastors under his leadership was beheaded. His knowledge of the area proved invaluable to our team.

As we entered into the town of Tobelo, we witnessed the aftermath of destruction caused by the attacks from the Jihad. Homes and churches lie in rubble. We then visited a gathering of Christians who had assembled for a worship service. Many of those in attendance were refugees. Their faith in God remained strong and they worshipped with zeal. Tobelo was attacked and held by the Jihad for a day and a half. Christians from all over the island of Halmahera, along with animists who sided with the Christians, fearing that if Tobelo would remain in the hands of the Jihad that all Halmahera would fall, retook the city in a coordinated effort. Tobelo is now a safe haven for Christian refugees from all over the island of Halmahera and for refugees fleeing other islands as well.

We visited a refugee camp containing refugees from Morati, which once was the base of General MacArthur during World War II. These refugees were clearly happy to have us visit them. They wanted to entertain us by singing some wonderful hymns, again all sung by memory for they had no hymn books.

We met refugees from the Island of Bacan who were the first group of refugees who were successfully rescued in January 2001. It brought us great joy to meet these Christians and to know that we were able to play a part in rescuing them from the Jihad warriors.

Decky, 25 years of age and from the village of Galala, told us that his parents are being held captive by the Jihad warriors in their village. He managed to escape, but his parents and many others were not as fortunate. He asked the military to help get his family, but the military were told by the Jihad that if they attempted to do so that they would slit the throats of all the remaining Christians. Nevertheless, Decky is hopeful that ICC will help rescue his parents and the other villagers whose fate remains in the hands of their captors.

While in Tobelo, we happened to arrive at a time when the representatives for the Council of Evangelical Churches of Halmahera were meeting. We were introduced at the meeting and the pastors represented were eager to express their concerns and to appeal to us for help for education for children and for help with the physical needs among many of the refugees who have not received adequate help from organizations like World Vision or the International Red Cross, whose resources have been strained by the growing number of refugees fleeing to Tobelo.

We met a pastor in Tobelo who is the moderator of the Evangelical Churches on the island of Halmahera. He told us that the conditions in Tobelo are difficult and the leadership in the city are unable to cope with all the needs at present. "Many of us have been killed and tortured and many more taken captive and forced to convert to Islam. We have tried to set these free but we are limited in what we can do. There are still more than 7,000 who remain in captivity and are living in terrible conditions and forced to deny their faith. We have wanted to rescue them but lack the resources to do so. There are Christians in Bacan and East Ghana but we have not been able to communicate with them or help them and they are suffering grievously. We would like to ask of our brothers and sisters in America to help us rescue these our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have the determination to rescue them but we lack the resources needed to accomplish the task. Therefore, we would appreciate the help of our brothers and sisters in America. We know that you are already helping and have a desire to help us because we are in fellowship together in the body of Jesus Christ. As the scripture tell us, when one member suffers all suffer. We ask you to help us rescue these brothers and sisters for they are suffering greatly, especially having to be forced to convert to Islam, which for us is perhaps worse than suffering from hunger or any other form of suffering.

The question was asked of the moderator if there are enough Bibles among the refugees. He replied that there were plenty of Bibles before the Jihad attacks but now since the destruction of their homes and possessions, there is a need for Bibles, and especially now because of the need for strength from reading God's Word. These refugees don't have the money to buy Bibles, so any help would be appreciated.

A refugee pastor from Morotai, an island just north of Halmahera, pleaded for help for the Christians still trapped on the island since the Jihad warriors attacked on February 19, 2000, the same day when the village of Duma on Halmahera Island was attacked. The pastor said, "About 1,200 Christians are surrounded by hostile forces and they can not leave without risking being killed. Two have been killed trying to escape. Sixty more have died due to disease. My people are crying out to God in desperation and are asking, 'How can you leave us in this situation? Why hasn't anyone come to rescue us?' Now we ask, what will happen if the [Jihad] forces attack again?"

During our evening in Tobelo, we had the privilege to meet and fellowship with many of the Christian believers, mostly refugees from Duma where there had been much suffering. A group of men sung a beautiful song written by one of the believers. The song, titled "Duma" speaks about how God blessed Duma with His presence by bringing the Gospel first to Duma, blessed

among all places in the Maluku Islands. The song goes on to speak about the current tragedy of how blessed Duma has been taken away from them and how God's people of Duma now plead with God to give them back their beloved homeland.

ICC TEAM DETAINED!

Early in the morning on Thursday, February 22, we were told we must report to the military commander assigned to the Tobelo area. The army unit we were taken to was Satgas Yonif 321/13 Kostrad. We had already paid a cursory visit the day before and also had requested permission to visit Duma, a town south of Tobelo from which we had met many refugees.

Perhaps the military was wary of our visiting Duma where no foreigners had yet visited since the slaughter and destruction had taken place. After all, the military is predominately Muslim and some of the military units had taken part in the attack along side the Jihad warriors, helping to commit the atrocities against the Christians in Duma. Articles that followed in the *Jakarta Post* over the next several days following our release suggested that we "foreigners were spying on the Indonesian military."

It was in Duma where Christians were butchered with swords and children kidnapped. It was the Christians from Duma who shared in song with us last night which had so gripped our hearts. It was also here where more than 400 Christians lost their lives and another 120 men, women and children drowned trying to escape by boat.

The fortunate survivors of the attack on Duma managed to flee as the Jihad and military burned and totally destroyed their homes and churches, after taking from them all their possessions. Fortunately we had been informed that morning that we might be "escorted" by the military to Ternate, the government seat for North Maluku. Therefore, at the house where we had spent the night, that morning we gathered together all our film and notes and gave them to a local Christian who would later deliver them to us in Manado. We decided to take our cameras and personal possessions with us as we went to the military headquarters once we were summoned, not knowing whether or not we would be returning. That was a wise decision, for we were not allowed to return. I managed to phone our people in Manado and inform them of our situation. That was our last communication to the outside world for the next 36 hours. We then waited from 7:00 A.M. until noon until a military transport truck came. We were hastened to climb into the back of the truck and attempt to find a place to sit among crates of fruit, sacks of rice, a generator, and other supplies that were being taken to the military headquarters in Ternate. I asked myself the question as to whether or not the sacks of rice might have been provided by World Vision for the refugees in Tobelo but were being taken to the families of soldiers in Ternate.

We tried to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. For the next four and a half hours, we were driven along the winding jungle road to a seaport village. During our ride we encountered heavy downpours of rain and strong winds, which managed to find its way into the back of the truck that was only partially covered on the top and two sides. I found it rather amusing that as I tried to make a place to settle into for the journey that I had to move from under me an automatic rifle, which was loaded. Eventually, one of the two soldiers who was assigned to ride with us in the back of the truck realized that the rifle was there and asked for it to be handed over to him. Sitting next to me at the rear of the truck was the other soldier, whose pistol was strapped to his belt and was clearly exposed and within my grasp and was on occasion digging into my side. The careless manner in which they handled their weapons would seem to indicate that they did not consider us to be of any threat to them. Or perhaps they were just careless.

Once we entered into the Muslim-controlled sector of the island toward the south, one of the soldiers relocated to the top of the cab of the truck. There he sat, where a high caliber machine gun was mounted. I am still not sure if his move was because he was prepared to protect us or whether he simply wanted a more comfortable seat. I would have gladly traded with him.

Once we arrived at the western port of Sidangoli we were then told to board a 28 foot long boat that was powered by two older 40 horse power motors. It was comical to which the procedure of getting the motors started and the boat into motion. This boat was one of several used as taxis between Halmahera Island and the island of Ternate. Once we arrived at Ternate, the operators of the boat asked for payment for the boat ride. In order not to create more problems for ourselves, we simply paid the fee which covered our team and the soldier who had accompanied us.

Once we arrived at the port in Ternate, we were met by a number of policemen who are part of the security force serving to “maintain order” under what the governor of North Maluku had declared as a “state of emergency,” which for all practical purposes was martial law. The state of emergency had been enacted in the month of June, 2000 and yet had not been adequately communicated throughout the rest of the country.

From the port of Ternate we were escorted in police vehicles, flanked by additional police vehicles, as we were driven to the police headquarters. We had no idea of what to expect, whether the Muslim security forces had in mind to put us in jail or to make an example of us for propaganda purposes. It had now been more than five hours since the military security forces whisked us away from Tobelo. We were just glad to finally be able to stretch our legs and stand on our feet. At the police headquarters, we were then ushered into a small room where the four of us foreigners and two Indonesians were interrogated up until midnight. We were asked if we wanted something to eat, and we said yes. We provided the money to send out for Indonesian style take-out dinners, including enough to feed our Muslim hosts.

We were told by the security forces that the governor of North Maluku, Ternate being the capital of the province, had ordered the security forces (comprised of military and police under the command of the governor) to have us brought to Ternate. It wasn't until then that it was explained to us that we were not supposed to travel to North Maluku without the express permission of the authorities in Ternate due to the enacting of the state of emergency that went into effect last June. However, even the member of the North Maluku parliament was not aware of such restrictions on travel.

Sometime around midnight, we were escorted to a hotel where the police were supposed to have made reservations for us. However, because we had arrived so late, the rooms were given to others and we were then taken to another hotel where rooms were found to be available. We spent the night under police guard and were instructed not to open the door to anyone. We had no intention of doing so, since we were aware of the risk of what might happen if we were to have unwanted visitors from the Jihad. After all, Ternate has a concentration of Jihad warriors. It was here where a short time ago a pastor had tried to bring back food to his family who were living in hiding after their church and home had been destroyed by rioting Muslims, only to be recognized by some Muslims who then dragged him from the water taxi from which he had traveled and swiftly beheaded him.

The next morning, we were awakened early and told to be ready to depart on a commercial flight to Manado. We had already paid for the chartered plane to pick us up the day before but it was forced to return to Manado without us. Once again we had to pay out the money to purchase the airline tickets to take us back to Manado. Fortunately our Australian host who

resides in Jakarta had enough cash to cover the unexpected expense. I am not sure what the authorities would have done with us if we were unable to pay for the airline tickets.

Before we left Ternate, the police who were responsible for interrogating us and providing for our “protection” expressed their profuse apology for our having to be detained and for the way we had been treated by the military. The police and the governor, who met with two from our team, invited us to return one day, as long as we traveled first to Ternate to get permission. In the end, the relationship we established with the police chief and his officers, and the governor himself, may prove to be helpful to our efforts in the future. In God’s planning, “All things work together for good for them who love God and are called according to His purpose.”

Once we arrived back in Manado, we learned from one of the leaders of the refugees that thousands of Christian refugees from the Malukuans were prepared to demonstrate en masse at the airport if we were not released that day. They were prepared to hold up all air traffic until we were released by the security forces in Ternate, putting pressure on the government to intervene. Immediately upon landing I was handed a cell phone only to learn that David Martin from the U.S. Embassy had been trying to work for my release. I also discovered how quickly the prayer network of ICC rallied together to pray for us. This indeed was the reason for our release and a happy end to what possibly could have been a tragic ending.

Since I had already missed my airplane the day before, I had learned that there were absolutely no flights on the same carrier for another 10 days. Fortunately, there was one last seat remaining on Indonesia’s airline, Garuda Air. I quickly booked it, for I had yet another appointment to meet in the Middle East. But before I left, I visited one more refugee camp outside of Manado in the town of Bitung.

ESCAPE FROM LATA LATA

Ahnus is from the Maluku island of Lata Lata where today more than 1,700 Christians remain trapped by the Jihad warriors. Ahnus and his family were fortunate to have been able to escape. This is his story:

“My village was attacked on February 5, 2000. There were about 3,000 Jihad warriors who came in 34 speed boats. Another 3,000 troops came from the east side over the mountains. We had more than 1,000 Christians who attempted to stand up against the Jihad warriors and to stop them from taking our village. We fought with them from six in the morning until mid day. I personally saw more than 70 bodies of men, women and children, but the total number killed was more than that. When we could no longer hold them off, we fled into the jungles. By evening, the Jihad had destroyed and burned down all our homes in the village. We were in the jungles for about two weeks. Then the Jihad leaders of the warriors came to us in the jungles and said that they wanted the pastor to come forward. He said that if the pastor did not come forward today, he would order his warriors to attack and kill all the remaining 1,000 Christians. When the pastor of the village heard this, he revealed himself saying, ‘It is better that I go and surrender myself than have everyone slain.’ After he surrendered himself to the Jihad warriors, they took him in a speed boat and said that they were taking him away for his own protection. But we were informed by a man from the neighboring village that our pastor was slain on the beach at Chinga Chinga. The head of the Jihad warriors came again with 25 of his warriors and asked us if we would surrender. It was these 25 who kept guard over us. He said that we would have to accept surrender not as war prisoners but to become Muslims. Our people in the village did not agree with the idea of become Muslims, but in order to keep us from being killed the head of our village signed an agreement that we would all become Muslims. Then the head of the Jihad warriors said that he would be back in one week with a doctor to confirm our decision

to become Muslims by performing the required circumcisions. Over the period of the next month, about 1,000 of us were forcibly circumcised, including all men and women. The circumcision of the children didn't start until the month of January 2001. I am personally aware of 37 that suffered from serious infections and required medical treatment.”

After the first month, soldiers from Brawy Jira Unit 511 arrived and erected tents for us. When the circumcisions of all the adults had been completed, the Jihad leaders brought Muslims from Halmahera, Ternate, Kioa and also the governor and chief of police of Bacan. They came to hold a festival of circumcision and to witness the prayer of conversion. In March 2000, we were forced to build a Mosque in our village so that we had a place to say the Muslim prayers. We then were told to chant the verses of the Koran daily. We had to sign our names each time we came to chant the Muslim prayers so that the Jihad would know who attended and who did not. This caused a lot of confusion among us because we had done everything they wanted, having converted to Islam, were circumcised, and now we were being forced to learn the Koran and to chant the Muslim prayers in the Arabic language. For most of us in the village, learning to read and recite from the Koran was difficult, for we are common people with very little education. Many of the Christians did not attend the Koran classes. The Islamic priest, Ustad, discovered that many of us had not been attending the Koranic classes, he demanded that the head of every family group report to him so that he would be informed which individuals were not attending the classes. He also informed us that from now on everyone who died would have to be buried according to Islamic tradition. Before I escaped, three people had died in my village from natural causes and they had to be buried according to Islamic tradition. For all of us Christians, we were forced to comply to everything we were told. We did everything that was forced upon us we, but to us they were just formalities, for in our hearts we were still Christians. The head of our village talked to me and said, 'If you have the courage, escape from here and tell others what is happening to our village.' I knew that if I were caught escaping, we would have been killed.

On September 16, 2000 I made my escape. I used the excuse that I was going to sell some chickens. We were not free to travel around, not even to get water without a guard or special permission. The military were only there to help teach us the Koran and to keep us from escaping.

Then on Christmas day 2000, my wife wanted to have a Christmas service. So we gathered together with some elders and in secret we had a Christmas service. We couldn't sing out loud for fear that it would be discovered. My young son Franky, after escaping with his mother and arriving in Manado, asked me, 'Daddy, can we go to church now?' I told him that even though we don't have any clothes to wear to church, we would be sure to go.”

On February 21, 2001, my wife with three of our four children escaped from Lata Lata, telling the soldiers that she needed to go to Ternate to sell fruit. She made two trips before to sell vegetables until she had enough money saved to pay for the tickets to take a boat to Manado. Both my wife and I escaped so that we can beg for help to rescue the people from my village. More than 1,000 of my people want to get out but up until now there has been no one to help us. Every day and every night, there would be people who would break down and weep.

Ahnus's wife, Tatty, and their three children, came to meet us the next day. She and three of her four children escaped just two days earlier, on February 21, 2001. She described how the family had to survive in the jungle for two weeks after the Jihad raided their village of Lata Lata. "The only thing we had to eat was young coconuts and we had to sleep on the muddy ground for there was nothing else to sleep on. It was very difficult for me because I had no way to care for my children in the jungle. Then the military found us and took us back to Lata Lata (where all

the homes had been burned down). I had to build a shelter for my family made from the leaves of the coconut tree. The Jihad warriors told me that we would have to become Muslims and be circumcised. I was circumcised, but they had not yet circumcised my children. Everyone was required to be circumcised. I then made up my mind to make plans to one day escape, because I did not want to live as a Muslim. I knew that if anyone was caught trying to run away they would be killed. When I finally was able to escape, I had to leave behind my daughter with my parents and my in-laws. We left with only two sets of clothing, nothing else. They are all in danger. I would like to ask for help to get them out of there. Now all I want is to get my daughter back.”

Ahnus asked us for help for his family, because they have nothing and he has no means to provide them with the clothes they need. This is the situation we found all the refugees to be in. We found that there was a need for clothing, children’s toys, blankets, Bibles, reading glasses, and much more. Most of them don’t feel that it will be possible to return to their homelands and many are afraid to do so if they could. While in the refugee camps, the hard monsoon rains made it even more difficult for the refugees. Because there is not enough housing, many thousands of refugees had only plastic tarps as a shelter. Many of these had holes and the rain would pour in and their bedding and clothes would be soaking wet. Since they only had dirt floors, often they would be standing in mud or water. I recalled having taken my family tent camping in the rain and how unpleasant that was. But we always had a dry place to return to. These people don’t have that luxury. They need durable shelters for their families. They have lost everything when they fled their villages. The Jihad warriors looted and burned down their homes. The International Red Cross and Word Vision are providing some of the basic needs of the refugees, but much more that needs to be done.

Among all the refugees that I met on the islands of Halmahera and Sulawesi, the common plea was, “Please help rescue our Christian brothers and sisters.” Every effort must be made to help rescue and provide for the more than 7,000 Christians who are still being held hostage in the Malukan Islands by the Jihad warriors and assisted by some of Indonesia’s own military.

THE ATTACKS CONTINUE

The attacks against Christians by the Laskar Jihad continue to this day. I visited a young man in the hospital in Tobelo recovering from a bullet that was removed from his shoulder. He is one of the most recent victims from a vicious attack by 30 Muslim Jihad warriors. The attack took place on February 12 as eight men were shot while fishing from the shore on the island of Halmahera. The man’s friend died in the attack. Even more recently, in mid-March, Jihad warriors carried out another attack. This time they attacked the small island of Wasilay. About 30 Jihad warriors attacked and at least one Christian was reported killed. The rest managed to escaped into the jungles.

On February 21, 2001, as the ICC team was in Indonesia, according to the *Jakarta Post* (February 24, 2001 issue) the predominantly Christian village of Alang Asaude in the Seram islands was attacked by members of the Laskar Jihad. The attack, the third since January 19, 1999, took place during the early morning hours as armed assailants made their assault from three directions, by sea, land, and along mountain tracks. Three local residents were killed and the remaining residents fled to the jungles and were later evacuated by the military. Most of the houses were gutted by fire. John Tomaso, a civil emergency administration spokesman in Ambon was quoted as saying, “The attackers were reportedly members of the Laskar Jihad. It is terrible that these people keep on provoking unrest and looking for the chance to create chaos.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christian leadership of North Maluku are requesting that the United Nations act:

- (1) To insist that the Government of the Republic of Indonesia offer protection on human rights for minority groups (Christians) in Indonesia.
- (2) To make use of the International Court to settle the issue of human rights violations in Indonesia
- (3) To have the UN Security Council order troops to be sent to North Maluku to stop the violence.

Further recommendations presented by International Christian Concern include:

- 1) The international community must intervene by providing security and assistance to the refugees and the Christian minorities as a whole. The refugees must be allowed to return to their homelands or to be resettled elsewhere.
- 2) The Indonesian government must take control over the military leaders and hold responsible those working alongside the Jihad groups who have committed the atrocities against the Christians.
- 3) There needs to be a United Nations fact-finding mission to the Maluku Islands and to interview the refugee camps in other locations.
- 4) International pressure must be used to persuade the Indonesian government to see that the children abducted by the Jihad warriors be reunited with their parents or surviving relatives.
- 5) The international community must provide the urgently needed aid and assistance for the refugees of Maluku, which will require the cooperation of the Indonesian government to have free access to all areas where attacks have occurred and where refugees are residing.
- 6) There is a need for American leadership in order to resolve the conflict in the Maluku islands of Indonesia. The United States can help by setting up a forum that would allow both Christians and Muslims who live in the Maluku islands to come together to resolve the problems of the region in a fair and democratic manner.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN IS WORKING TO RAISE FUNDS TO HELP RESCUE AND RESETTLE NEARLY 7,000 CHRISTIANS WHO ARE BEING HELD HOSTAGE BY THE JIHAD WARRIORS. THE RELATIVES OF THESE CHRISTIANS PLEADED WITH ICC TO HELP GET THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OUT. DONATIONS CAN BE MADE ON ICC'S WEB SITE at www.persecution.org OR BY MAILING TO:

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