

Escaping East Timor

Pro-independence activist, **JOSE ANDRADE DA CRUZ**, writes of his chilling experiences during the lead up to last year's referendum in East Timor.

Jose Andrade da Cruz (alias Buregol), was born in Bobonaro, East Timor, in 1956. Until last year, Andrade lived in Maliana with his wife and two children, where he was an office worker. As a result of his involvement with the pro-independence movement, Andrade was forced to flee East Timor and seek temporary asylum in Australia. He is now residing at the East Hills Safe Haven in NSW where he is receiving physiotherapy for the beatings inflicted upon him by Indonesian soldiers. This is the first time he has been outside East Timor.

Early last year, the Indonesian government announced that a referendum for autonomy or independence would be held in East Timor. In response, Indonesian troops based in the region began plotting a civil uprising. It was hoped that by creating a disturbance among the East Timorese people, the need for Indonesia's presence in the region would be confirmed. If people were frightened of further uprisings it would be more likely that they would vote for an Indonesian-supervised autonomy.

The activities of Indonesian troops in my home town of Maliana were to affect me deeply, as I was one of those working for independence in the *Frente Politica Interna (FPI)* and the *Consellio*

Nacional Resistencia Timor (CNRT). On the night of 19 March 1999, nine Indonesian soldiers broke into homes of suspected Falantil soldiers [fighting for independence] 10 kilometres away from Maliana. After shooting dead innocent civilians, they handed their weapons to some East Timorese and forced them to shoot dead another five women and children. The dead were buried close to where they had been

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shot, and human rights workers later investigated the incident.

Three days after this had occurred, I heard that the Indonesian soldiers were looking for me with the intention of killing me. They had already taken possession of my car and captured my driver, Domingos Guterres. The soldiers beat Guterres and made him circulate rumours that would create trouble. One of the rumours was that I was the instigator of the murders that had occurred outside Maliana, and that I had ordered Falantil troops to kill my own people.

At about 4.30 p.m. on 22 March, armed Indonesian troops

circled my home and arrested me. My wife and children were not there but my niece, Eurosia, watched as they dragged me into an awaiting car. They began driving towards Maliana Markets and, on they way, the soldiers yelled at any nearby civilians: "This is a head of Fretilin within the Maliana region and we are going to kill him. His whole family will also be killed. Now we are going to slowly catch your leaders one by one.

"He is the one who sent Falantil troops to kill your own people. These people are the ones who are lying to you. How can you trust them to lead you if you become independent?"

I was beaten close to death, kicked, and hit with a cattle prod.

I lost consciousness and fell to the floor. Then the soldiers took me back home and ransacked my house, looking for weapons and information. At around 8.00 p.m. that night, they took me to one of their bases to get instructions from their commander.

The commander began to interrogate me about my work in the independence movement. He told me they had captured me because they wanted me to spread rumours for them, just as Domingos Guterres had. If I refused to spread the rumours, I would be killed. "Tonight, if you don't agree to our ultimatum, we will hand you to our troops who will kill you," he said. Then he opened the curtains of the room we were in so the troops



Jose Andrade da Cruz.

outside could get a clear view of me.

I had no other way of escaping with my life and so I agreed to the ultimatum. I said: "If you would like, tell me how I can help you. Anything to do with politics, I will not speak of, but in regard to the deaths near Maliana, I can help you to help people think differently. I can tell people that these people were killed by Falantil and not Indonesian soldiers."

And so, on this night, we negotiated the terms of this ultimatum and my life was spared. We held an interview in relation to our agreement, which was taped, and the tape was given to the police. Following this, at 3.00 a.m., I was put in jail. I was in extreme pain and swollen from head to toe.

The lord mayor of Bobonaro, Guilherme dos Santos, heard about my situation and visited me in jail on 23 March. The next day, some police came to take me to hospital as I was still suffering from the beatings I had received several days earlier. I was given medicine and brought back to

jail the same day.

After I returned, a Red Cross officer came to see me. We spoke for close to an hour and I managed to give him some information in regard to my imprisonment.

The police began investigating the deaths that had occurred near Maliana and, as they had defended me in the past, I decided to tell them the truth about the incident. On 26 March, human rights representatives, journalists, students and my colleagues visited me. Because of all the people who knew about my situation, and the fact that no evidence had been found to connect me to the killings near Maliana, I was released from prison on 6 April.

However, I did not go home after my release. The Indonesian soldiers were enraged that I had not been charged and I was informed that if I did go home, I would be quietly taken away and killed. Therefore, I went to stay at the Maliana church.

On 12 April, Indonesian troops and pro-autonomy militia ransacked

and destroyed 27 homes in Maliana. My home was among those destroyed. All my belongings were stolen including two televisions, two telephones, a refrigerator, jewellery, furniture and money. The militia, as well as destroying homes, raped women and children.

My wife and children ran to the police station and hid. The next day I joined them at the police station and we stayed on there, for protection, until 1 August when I returned to the remains of my home. Soon after, the commander who had previously interrogated me, came to see me and threatened that I must keep working for the Indonesians. I just listened to what he had to say and after this he left.

Throughout August, attacks on East Timorese civilians in Maliana continued. On 27 August, we were forced to attend a rally organised by pro-autonomy organisations, where they tried to convince us to vote for autonomy in the upcoming referendum. While the rally was held, Indonesian troops burnt 29 homes in the area as well as wheat crops, livestock and farm equipment. Two people died, and one person was badly injured.

Some East Timorese who attended the rally retaliated by burning cars and attacking those who had staged the rally. Others fled to the Maliana police station to save their lives. I was among those who fled to the police station and from there, on 29 August, I hid in a car which was going to Dili, the capital. Once in Dili, I entered the UNAMET compound and, on 14 September, they took me to Darwin. ■

This is an edited version of a testimony written by Jose Andrade da Cruz in November 1999. Many thanks to ASETTS staff and interpreters in Western Australia, who assisted with the translation from Tetum to English.