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# Will U.S. still turn blind eye on Indonesian military abuses

Thomas C. Fox | Jul. 24, 2009 NCR Today

More than 50 U.S. organizations Thursday urged the U.S. government to "strictly prohibit any U.S. cooperation with or assistance to the Indonesian Special Forces (Kopassus)' in a letter sent Thursday to President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and members of Congress. The letter was coordinated by the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN).

"Restrictions on U.S. military assistance to Indonesia are needed to support democracy and human rights in Indonesia. Supporting Kopassus, which has a long history of terrorizing civilians [1], would send the worst possible signal to those fighting for justice and accountability in Indonesia and East Timor," said John M. Miller, National Coordinator of ETAN.

The letter, signed by human rights, religious, peace and other groups, states, "The history of Kopassus human rights violations, its criminality and its unaccountability before Indonesian courts extends back decades and includes human rights and other crimes in East Timor, Aceh, West Papua and elsewhere."

A recent Human Rights Watch report [2]documents how Kopassus soldiers "arrest Papuans without legal authority, and beat and mistreat those they take back to their barracks."

In 2008, the Bush administration proposed to restart U.S. training of Kopassus. the State Department legal counsel reportedly ruled that the ban on training of military units with a history of involvement in human rights violations, known as the Leahy law, applies to Kopassus as a whole.

"The previous administration was forced to conclude that training Kopassus was both illegal and bad policy. The Obama administration should maintain this restriction," said Miller.

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[1] http://www.etan.org/news/2008/04brikop.htm
[2] http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/06/24/indonesia-abuses-special-forces-continue-papua