
INDONESIA: VIOLENCE ERUPTS AGAIN IN AMBON

I. OVERVIEW

The city of Ambon, in Maluku (Moluccas), which had been relatively quiet for two years, erupted in violence on 25 April 2004 after a small group of independence supporters held a ceremony commemorating the 54th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of the South Moluccas (Republik Maluku Selatan, RMS).¹

As of 5 May, the death toll had reached 38, about two-thirds of whom were Muslim.² The fact that many were killed by sniper fire has led to a widespread belief that the violence was provoked. Two churches, a Muslim high school, the office of UN humanitarian agencies, and hundreds of homes were set on fire. Close to 10,000 people have been displaced from their homes, adding to the some 20,000 displaced during earlier phases of the conflict who remain unable to return to their original dwellings.³ Until 5 May, the deaths and arson had

been confined to Ambon city; religious and community leaders had kept many previously hard-hit communities elsewhere on the island and in the central Moluccan archipelago from exploding, a tribute to the reconciliation efforts over the last two years. But that day, gunmen killed two people on Buru island, and there have subsequently been isolated outbreaks elsewhere, although the city itself has returned to a tense calm. The longer it takes to uncover the perpetrators of this latest round of violence, the greater the danger of a new eruption.

The response of the Indonesian government at both local and national levels has been poor, from the short-sightedness of the police to the unhelpful portrayal of the violence in some quarters as Christian independence supporters against Muslim defenders of national unity. That said, the violence has been largely contained. What is needed now is a thorough, impartial, professional, and transparent investigation into the causes.

But as the *Jakarta Post* editorialised on 6 May, events in Ambon may be part of a larger political game. The question as the 5 July presidential elections approach is whether anyone benefits by making trouble there.⁴ As usual, conspiracy theorists have been hard at work, and as usual, hard evidence is in extremely short supply.

II. HOW IT BEGAN

On 25 April, around 9 a.m., about 75 supporters of the Front for Moluccan Sovereignty (Front Kedaulatan

¹ The Republic of the South Moluccas was proclaimed in 1950 by a group of Moluccans, mostly Christian but including some Muslims, who rejected Indonesian independence in favour of continued ties with the Netherlands. A bitter war with the new Indonesian army ensued, and eventually the RMS was defeated. Many of its supporters fled to the Netherlands. RMS supporters today are overwhelmingly Christian. For background to the communal conflict in Ambon, see ICG Asia Report N°10, *Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Violence in Maluku*, 19 December 2000; and ICG Asia Report N°31, *Indonesia: The Search for Peace in Maluku*, 8 February 2002.

² The figures are not precise. A doctor at al-Fatah Hospital, to which most Muslim victims were taken, confirmed that as of 10 May 2004, 24 people had died and 113 had been wounded. All but three of the deaths were reportedly from gunshot wounds. On the Christian side, by the same date, according to local journalist sources, twelve had died, five from shooting and seven from machete wounds. Statistics from a Christian NGO, Yayasan Kasih Mandiri, dated 11 May 2004, list 45 dead, 23 at al-Fatah hospital, fifteen at hospitals serving Christian communities, and six others.

³ The newly displaced were all from the city of Ambon; the 20,000 figure is for Ambon island, including the city. Several observers noted that the longer term displaced, many

of them unemployed youth, provide a ready pool of recruits for violence.

⁴ "Police and Civil Society" (editorial), *Jakarta Post*, 6 May 2004.

Maluku, FKM) gathered in the Kudamati area of Ambon at the house of FKM leader Alex Manuputty.⁵

FKM is a small, mostly Christian group that sees itself as continuing the RMS struggle for independence from Indonesia. It was created on 18 December 2000 as a response to the activities of the Muslim militia, Laskar Jihad (which had come to Ambon the previous April to defend not only fellow Muslims but also the country against "Christian separatists"). It has never had more than a few hundred supporters and does not represent the larger Christian community, most of whose members disapprove of tactics that can only be described as deliberately provocative in the context of ongoing communal tension.

It was known to everyone in Ambon that a gathering at Manuputty's house would take place. Every year since 1950, there have been small, largely peaceful commemorations of 25 April in old RMS strongholds. They usually involve raising the RMS flag and inevitably end in arrests. They are as predictable as the rain, and well within the capacity of local security forces to handle.

FKM, which was formally banned on 16 April 2001, first celebrated the RMS anniversary a week and a half later, and held similar ceremonies in 2002 and 2003. Alex Manuputty was arrested after the 2002 event and charged with rebellion (*makar*).⁶ A ceremony at his house in 2003 was stopped by police after it had been underway for only ten minutes.

This was the first 25 April since a civil emergency had been lifted in September 2003. It had been clear for weeks that the FKM was planning to mark the occasion. On 8 April, at a ceremony marking the installation of new military officers, the regional military commander, Major General Syarifuddin Sumah, warned that FKM/RMS activities would be increasing as 25 April approached.⁷ On 12 April, the police, army, and local government officials met to discuss the security implications. The local police had decided that as long as the demonstration did not involve the raising of the RMS flag, and "didn't lead

to anarchy", it would be manageable.⁸ They asked the local Christian leadership to exhort their congregations not to raise flags.

In the meantime, rumours were circulating in the Muslim community that FKM/RMS supporters would march into Muslim neighbourhoods carrying the RMS flag. As a result, two Muslim groups, the Forum Pemuda Muslim Baguala and the Pemuda Reformasi Maluku, issued a statement that they were ready to confront any FKM demonstration with physical force. Anti-FKM sentiment reportedly had also been fuelled during the campaign for the 5 April parliamentary elections, particularly by the local candidate for one of the smaller Muslim parties, Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB).

On Saturday, 24 April, a large RMS flag was hung on a tree behind the post of a military unit, Arnahud 11, in the Karang Panjang area of the city; those who did this either made their way past sleeping soldiers or were given access to the area by the soldiers themselves.⁹ That night, FKM supporters held a religious service at Manuputty's house.

On Sunday, the planned ceremony commemorating the anniversary of RMS took place at the house, led by the FKM secretary general, Moses Tuanakotta. Police stood by for almost an hour, during which not only the RMS flag, but also the UN flag, were raised. When the ceremony was over, police moved in to take down the flags and arrest Moses and other leaders. Around 11 a.m. they began to march the participants to the police station, some three kilometres away [see map]. Ambonese have asked why the police chose to take them to the station in this fashion, because to any observer, it looked like an RMS parade, complete with flags, that the police were protecting. Given that the procession had to pass by the regional military commander's home and cross a Muslim neighbourhood, the decision was, at the very least, ill-judged.

At the police station, Moses was detained, and when the police asked, "Who else is RMS?" about 25 people raised their hands. They were all locked up as well. The others were ordered to leave, and as they marched from the police station back toward the centre of town, it again looked like a political

⁵ Alex Manuputty was not present. He has been living in the U.S. since November 2003. See below.

⁶ He was sentenced to three years in prison on 29 January 2003, but was released on 6 November 2003 on a technicality pending the outcome of his second appeal

⁷ "Pangdam: Aktivitas RMS akan Meningkatkan Bulan Ini", *Siwalima*, 9 April 2004.

⁸ "Kronologi Dan Catatan Terhadap Peristiwa Kekerasan Di Ambon 25-26 April 2004" (no author), 26 April 2004, and ICG interview, 26 April 2004.

⁹ ICG telephone interview, Ambon, 5 May 2004.

demonstration, although this time without a police escort. There were periodic shouts, and an occasional stone was hurled as they went through a Muslim neighbourhood. But about 1 p.m., when they reached the intersection known by the name of a monument on the site as Tugu Trikora, they were confronted by Muslim youths carrying the Indonesian flag, who claimed to be defenders of the unitary state of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia or NKRI). The procession had passed this point on its way to the police station some two hours earlier so the youths had had ample time to gather.

This latter group began stoning the FKM members, who fought back. No security personnel were in evidence to stop the fighting.¹⁰ As the melee was taking place, snipers opened fire, apparently from the higher floors of nearby buildings. Bank Danamon, the electricity authority PLN, and a building called Planet 2000 are among the several structures in which the snipers could have hidden. Eight people were shot, six of whom died, all of them Muslim.

Shortly thereafter, the anti-FKM crowd began to move from Tugu Trikora toward one of Ambon's main thoroughfares, Jl. Anthony Rebok, where the UN office is located. Security guards had called police, asking for help, but none came. Instead, two trucks of youths drove up to the UN building and set it on fire.¹¹ Arson attacks broke out in other areas of the city, with homes of newly returned Christian refugees targeted, and physical clashes between men identifying themselves as red (Christian) or white (Muslim) then ensued. By one account, these arson attacks erupted suddenly in four different locations in the city (Poka, Mardika, Talake, and Pohon Pule), in a way that seemed coordinated. By that night, at least sixteen people had been killed, some hacked to death, others from bullets to the head.

III. VIOLENCE CONTINUES

On Monday, 26 April, at 4 a.m. a group of men burned down the main building of the Maluku Christian University (UKIM). It then moved on to other Christian neighbourhoods, burning houses.

¹⁰ "Fresh Ambon clash kills six", *Jakarta Post*, 26 April 2004.

¹¹ When it was inaugurated in 2003, the UN building was the target of a demonstration by students at the Islamic academy, STAIN, who claimed the UN should support independence as it had in East Timor.

Whatever the origin of the original clash, it seemed that Ambon was back to communal fighting, despite the efforts of Christian leaders to convince the media that to be a Christian was not the same as to be an FKM member. Reinforcements from Jakarta -- 500 paramilitary police (Brimob) and an army strategic reserve (Kostrad) unit -- began arriving as periodic sniping continued.

One of the sniper victims was Abdullah Daeng Matta, a widely respected subdistrict leader of the Islamist political party PKS, who was a candidate for the Ambon municipal council. The father of five children, he was shot in the chest around 10 a.m. on 26 April and died shortly thereafter.

On that Monday night, a group attacked a ship arriving from Kupang, the *KM Doloronda*, because rumours had spread that its passengers were bringing in reinforcements for RMS/FKM. Police sent ten men and a few trucks to provide safe conduct for the Christian passengers through the Muslim harbour area, but this small force was no match for a mob armed with machetes.¹² The police reportedly used walky-talkies to appeal desperately for reinforcements but none came. Three people were killed, and eighteen injured, some critically. As of 2 May, a few passengers remained unaccounted for, including an infant.¹³ On Tuesday, 27 April, snipers shot and killed two Brimob officers and seriously injured a third; all three were reportedly shot in the head or neck.¹⁴ More buildings were set on fire, including a school belonging to the national Muslim organisation, Muhammadiyah, that had welcomed Christian students displaced by earlier rounds of conflict and become a model of inter-religious cooperation. On Wednesday, two Muslim youths, aged 17 and 23, were shot fatally in the head by snipers in the Waringin neighbourhood; ten others were injured.¹⁵

That evening, the Nazareth church in the Karang Panjang neighbourhood of the city was burned down. Villagers who guarded it are convinced that men from the local military post, Arhanud 11, were responsible.

¹² ICG phone interview to Ambon, 2 May 2004, and Crisis Centre Diocese of Amboina, "The situation in Ambon/Moluccas", Report N°423, 27 April 2004.

¹³ ICG interview by phone to Ambon, 2 May 2004; a report from Yayasan Kasih Mandiri lists three dead, eighteen injured. "Menyaksikan Sniper Beraksi", *Republika*, 29 April 2004.

¹⁴ "Snipers kill police, death toll hits 29", *Laksamana.net*, 27 April 2004.

¹⁵ "Menyaksikan Sniper Beraksi", *Republika*, 29 April 2004.

ICG spoke with a villager by telephone on 2 May. He said he and about twenty other men had been protecting the church since about 8 p.m. that night, because there were rumours it would be attacked by Muslims. They were equipped with long knives (*parang*), sticks, and homemade bombs. Around midnight, a squad from the Arhanud post came by and ordered them out, saying that if it had to enter the church later, it did not want to shoot someone by mistake. The men were also ordered to hand over their bombs. They stayed around the church grounds, however, until about 2 a.m., when someone from the squad told them that two men from the Pattimura command were inside the church, and the squad would go back to its post, 75 to 100 meters away. The local men did not go home, however, but watched from a point looking down on the church. Around 2:30 a.m., they saw about eight to ten men in camouflage uniforms throw benzene from plastic cans on the roof of the church. It caught fire immediately and fell in. Six houses near the church were also burned. The villagers are certain that the army was responsible, although camouflage uniforms, like guns, are widely available in Ambon and not proof of military involvement. They demonstrated later that morning at police headquarters to demand that military units be withdrawn. The deputy provincial police chief told them he could not order the withdrawal, because pursuant to the current division of labour among security forces in the field, the army, not the police, was in charge of Karang Panjang.¹⁶

Periodic sniping and arson continued on 29 and 30 April by when the death toll was over 30, with 22 of the victims Muslim, mostly killed by bullets. In terms of arson, the worst hit areas were in the western part of the city, the mostly Christian neighbourhoods of Waringin, Batu Gantung, and Talake, where hundreds of houses were burned.

IV. THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Indonesian media have pilloried the police for their ineffectual response to the FKM, but responsibility for the latest outbreak should be shared more widely. If the violence was not premeditated -- and most Ambonese seem to believe it was -- local incompetence and negligence are the only other

explanations. The tendency has been to blame FKM/RMS for all the trouble, without paying sufficient attention to government lack of preparedness and poor decision-making, and the possibility of third party involvement.

Instead of working to uncover the identity of the snipers, the government has focused on belatedly rounding up FKM members. The manager of the Maluku Media Centre, Dino F. Umahuk, told reporters, "Everyone knows Moses Tuanakotta is the secretary general of FKM, and he's been operating openly in Ambon." If people were worried about FKM, he wondered, why did they wait until 25 April to arrest him?¹⁷

Some problems with the government response are as follows:

Rivalry between the police and military. Since the civil emergency in Maluku formally ended on 15 September 2003, police have had responsibility for law and order, and the *schadenfreude* of the army at the calumny heaped on the police has been palpable. On 28 April 2004, Major General Syarifudin Sumah told reporters if the Maluku police were not able to control the situation, his troops were ready to take over. He said they were prevented from taking the firm measures necessary because police had formal authority.¹⁸ When asked about snipers, Sumah replied, "Ask the police chief -- he's responsible for security."¹⁹ He was right, but the police claim that Karang Panjang was outside their control is indicative of limits on real operational capacity. Institutional cooperation between the two forces is further hindered by the fact that the police chief, a one-star general, is supposed to have authority over the military commander, a two-star general.

All reports of local government shortcomings focus on the security forces, but in fact, it was the governor, Karel Albert Ralahu, who had the authority, at least on paper, to force local cooperation and who should have taken the initiative to prevent trouble in the first place or contain it more effectively once it erupted. But he complained privately that as governor, he was totally paralysed.²⁰

¹⁶ "Jemaat Bethabara Demo", *Suara Maluku*, 29 April 2004.

¹⁷ "Pertikaian di Ambon bukan Proyek", *Kompas*, 1 May 2004, p. 38.

¹⁸ "Pangdam Siap Ambil Alih", *Indopos*, 29 April 2004.

¹⁹ "Menyaksikan Sniper Beraksi", *Republika*, 29 April 2004.

²⁰ Information made available to ICG, 30 April 2004.

Failure to anticipate trouble. The local government knew perfectly well that an FKM ceremony marking the RMS anniversary would be held at the Manuputty home, but it was also true that for two years, the ceremony had been peaceful, confined to the Kudamati neighbourhood, and the participants had been arrested as soon as it had begun. This year, it was allowed to proceed to conclusion, almost an hour, before police made arrests.

It was clear that neither the police, nor other local officials, considered the FKM a serious threat. When President Megawati visited Ambon on 3 March 2004 to open a meeting of governors from across Indonesia, a few RMS flags appeared. The head of the Pattimura command, Major General Sarifuding Sumah, told the press not to make a big deal of it -- you wouldn't want to let these people think they were important, he reportedly said.²¹

Another indication that no trouble was anticipated was the transfer on 8 April of the one military officer in Ambon who by all accounts could have prevented trouble from getting out of hand. Lt. Colonel Yudi Zanibar, the head of the district military command for the city of Ambon, was promoted and sent to Ternate, North Maluku. It was he who prevented the 25 April celebrations in 2002 and 2003 from getting out of hand, according to local sources. His transfer appears to have been part of a regularly scheduled rotation, but the fact that someone with as many contacts and as much experience as he had was transferred just as the anniversary was approaching suggests at best another bad decision.

Poor judgment in the field. The police decision to march their captives to the police station, along Ambon's main thoroughfare, was a grave mistake. For FKM, a small group bent on publicity, it was heaven-sent. Members were able to march past hostile neighbourhoods flaunting their flags in a way they would never have dared to do on their own initiative. On 5 May, the police chief of Ambon, Bambang Sutrisno, was sacked, but the poor police performance needs more serious analysis than just removing the commander.

No autopsies of sniper victims. ICG understands that there have been superficial examinations, called *visum et repertum*, of sniper victims rather than full autopsies that could provide evidence for future

prosecutions. In part, this is because of lack of forensic capacity in Ambon. But ICG was also told that should a decision be taken later to examine the victims more thoroughly, many families would be reluctant to allow exhumation not only for religious reasons but also because of conviction that the police would not be impartial investigators. Police have searched alleged sniper locations, but as of the time of writing, had announced no leads as to the identities of the gunmen.

Instead, officials publicly have suggested that the weapons used were from a June 2000 raid on a Brimob depot, for which Muslim militias (Laskar Jihad backed up by other mujahidin groups) were responsible.²² Only some of these weapons were turned over as part of the peace process known as Malino II; many were hoarded, and some undoubtedly made their way to other parts of Indonesia. The one group that militia members are least likely to have sold these weapons to is FKM. It is not clear that the officials in question are basing their claims on any hard data.

Assumptions of guilt without evidence. Likewise, the assumption in much of the press that the snipers were FKM appears to have emerged merely because it was the FKM ceremony that provoked the conflict, and so many victims were Muslim. The newspaper *Republika* reported that Brimob had put ten snipers in place on 28 April to "counter the RMS snipers".²³ FKM unquestionably has a few supporters in police ranks; one of those arrested in 2003 was a policeman, Alex Manuputty's son-in-law (he was arrested for sewing FKM uniforms, not for obtaining arms). But it is dangerous to assume on the basis of no evidence that FKM is the culprit, because that would divert all resources into rounding up and arresting FKM members rather than into a thorough investigation of the killings.

Accusations of foreign involvement. Two cabinet ministers have suggested that FKM must have had

²¹ "Lintas Kerusuhan Maluku N°21: Februari-Maret 2004", Crisis Centre Keuskupan Amboina, 22 March 2004.

²² Comments of Indonesian military (TNI) spokesman General Syafrie Sjamsuddin in "Buru Penembak Gelap, Kodam Pattimua Bentuk Tim Khusus", detik.com, 1 May 2004. Syafrie said that of the 893 weapons seized in the June 2000 raid, some 300 remain unaccounted for. In late October 2002, after a peace agreement had been signed and the fighting for all practical purposes had ended, members of both Christian and Muslim militias told an Indonesian academic that they had retained weapons because they doubted the peace would last. Communication to ICG, 10 May 2004.

²³ Ibid.

outside backing, perhaps from a foreign country. There have been similar remarks from other officials.²⁴

The insinuations of foreign involvement appear to be linked to the fact that Alex Manuputty, the FKM leader and founder, has been in the U.S. since November 2003. He was released from prison on 6 November 2003 pending the outcome of an appeal of his three-year sentence for rebellion, and shortly thereafter walked calmly into Jakarta's main airport and boarded a flight to Los Angeles. His "escape" generated outrage on the part of Muslim groups in Jakarta, who demanded his extradition and saw the U.S. as protecting a dangerous Christian separatist at the same time it was exerting maximum pressure on Indonesia to detain Muslim terrorists.²⁵

The major impact of the allegations of foreign involvement is to deflect attention from the need to investigate local sources of the trouble.

The Jakarta government did send a high-level team to Ambon on 28 April, an important expression of government concern which would have been more meaningful had the team actually gone into the city instead of restricting its brief visit to the airport. The delegation consisting of armed forces commander General Endriartono Sutarto, police chief General Da'i Bachtiar, intelligence chief Hendropriyono, and acting Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Hari Sabarno promised to investigate the violence and crush separatism.²⁶

It met with a number of Ambonese leaders, from whom it got decidedly mixed messages. Drs. Idris Toekan, the head of the Maluku branch of the Indonesian Islamic Scholars Council (Majelis Ulama

Indonesia), asked the delegation to impose a military emergency in Maluku. His request was supported by Muhammad Attamimi, head of the local state Islamic academy and a former militia leader, and the local leaders of two Muslim political parties: Lutfi Sanaky of Partai Bintang Reformasi, and Sulaiman Wasahua of Partai Persatuan Pembangunan. They said that without a formal state of emergency, it would be difficult to crush separatism.²⁷ Attamimi implied that if Christians did not want to be identified with RMS, they should call for such measures, too. Bishop Mandagi of the Catholic church and Protestant synod head Rev. I.W.J. Hendriks said they did not believe a military emergency was the solution.²⁸

V. WHO ARE THE SNIPERS?

The most important question now is who the snipers are. From the beginning, three possibilities have been discussed in the media: FKM itself; radical Muslim groups; or the security forces. The general assumption has been that the same group is responsible for all the shootings, and this may not be the case. But whoever was responsible had to have some degree of professional training. The marksmanship displayed is not something a garden-variety thug acquires, nor does that kind of shooting take place without careful planning, in terms both of choosing location and timing. With that in mind, how do the various possibilities measure up?

A. THE FKM

According to both Muslim and Christian sources in Ambon, the FKM has never had any military capacity. "They make war with their mouths, not with guns", one source told ICG. While at least one policeman -- the son-in-law of Alex Manuputty -- has been arrested for ties to FKM, the organisation as a whole is not believed to have any significant ties to the police. On 15 May, the regional military command in Ambon announced that a Christian army deserter, Corporal Benyamin Yakob Sinay, had been arrested for membership of the FKM after his name was found on a list in Alex Manuputty's home.²⁹ But

²⁴ "Kunjungan Menko Polkam 'Hanya Sampai' Bandara", *Kompas*, 29 April 2004.

²⁵ The U.S. government considers that it lacks legal grounds to detain and deport Manuputty. He has stated that he had a valid U.S. visa issued prior to his arrest in 2002, and he encountered no problems entering the U.S. as a result. But he also had a valid passport that the Indonesian government made no effort to cancel. After Manuputty's legal detention period expired, immigration and police authorities failed to take effective steps to prevent his departure from the country. Indonesia and the U.S. have no extradition treaty. The rebellion charges brought against him in 2002 involved only flag-raising, not acts of violence, which is not a crime in the United States. The Indonesian government has not made public any evidence that Manuputty himself carried out acts of violence.

²⁶ "Tension down; Ambon still fears snipers", *The Jakarta Post*, 29 April 2004.

²⁷ "MUI usul Maluku Darurat Militer", *Ambon Ekspres*, 29 April 2004.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Army deserter apprehended as suspected separatist", *Jakarta Post*, 17 May 2004.

there was no suggestion that Sinay had been involved in the late April violence, and no one ICG talked to seriously believed that the FKM had suddenly acquired a sniper unit.

The major reason for assuming FKM involvement is that most victims of the snipers were Muslim, and the shots have been described as coming from Christian neighbourhoods, although most in fact were border zones between Christian and Muslim areas. At least one victim was killed by a sniper on a speedboat. But there is no reason to assume that geographic location can determine the identity of the perpetrators -- although pinpointing the exact locations of snipers and investigating those sites thoroughly for forensic evidence would clearly be crucial.

B. RADICAL MUSLIM GROUPS

Because of the history in Ambon and Poso (Central Sulawesi) of radical Muslim groups with military training exploiting communal violence for broader jihadist goals, ICG examined the possibility that such groups with training in Afghanistan or Mindanao might have been involved. But those groups would be most unlikely to shoot other Muslims deliberately, and ICG was also able to establish that they had sent no personnel into Ambon, although they were monitoring the situation closely.

Shortly after the outbreak of violence, Jafar Umar Thalib, former head of the Laskar Jihad militia, which was disbanded in October 2002, announced that he would revive the organisation unless the violence was brought under control. This statement, repeated several times on national television, led to rumours that an influx of Laskar Jihad forces into Ambon was imminent. But Laskar Jihad has been well and truly disbanded, and Jafar Umar Thalib by all accounts has no forces to deploy. While some members of the militia stayed in Ambon and married local women, they would not be shooting at members of their own faith and never had the sharp shooting skills that rival mujahidin groups, such as Mujahidin KOMPAK or Jemaah Islamiyah, acquired.

Again without any evidence, some Christian groups are interpreting the 6 May killing of two Christians on Buru island as the first sign of Muslim retaliation for deaths in Ambon, another dangerous rumour that can only be quashed by hard facts.

C. THE INDONESIAN SECURITY FORCES

On 30 April 2004, a Brimob police team was reported to have detained two police and shot and killed one soldier whom they accused of being snipers.³⁰ ICG spoke with two separate sources who said they were told of this incident by a police officer. But no further information has emerged, and the police will not confirm the incident. Some members of the police and military would certainly have the level of professional skills to carry out sniper attacks, but they could easily be deserters or "rogue elements". M. Najib Azca, one of Indonesia's top specialists on the Moluccan conflict, notes that hardliners on the Ambon issue in the security forces fall into three groups: those who believe that a military approach is the best way of handling conflict there; those who are trying to justify their existence in a post-conflict situation; and those who actively took part in earlier phases of the conflict but were never caught or prosecuted.³¹ Some of the snipers, he suggests, could come from the last group.³²

The question is what their motivations could be. Here several explanations have been offered, none satisfactory and all lacking in hard data. One suggests that the underlying cause could be rivalry between the police and the military, and that the local military has been unhappy since the lifting of the civil emergency in September 2003 turned authority for local security back to the police. Stirring the communal pot, the argument goes, particularly by playing the FKM/RMS card, was bound to lead to calls from Muslim groups for reimposition of a military emergency, as in fact it did, and the local military benefits, economically and politically. A second theory, raised publicly by the bishop of Ambon but circulating much more widely, suggests that what happened is the result of presidential campaign politics playing out on a local level, and

³⁰ Crisis Centre, Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia, "Situasi Ambon Menuju Chaos Total", press release, 30 April 2004.

³¹ "Membaca Konflik Baru Ambon," *Koran Tempo*, 9 May 2004.

³² In his master's thesis, Azca notes that after the burning of the historic Silo church in Ambon in December 1999, many Christian police became active participants in the conflict in response to what they saw as the partisanship of Muslims in the army. "Many of them, particularly those from Brimob, acted as snipers hiding in tall buildings and shooting at both Moslem civilians as well as military personnel". See "The Role of the Security Forces in Communal Conflict: The Case of Ambon", Australian National University, 2003.

that a certain unnamed candidate was looking to use the violence to increase his popularity.³³ The bishop's statement drew an immediate response from the Golkar party's presidential candidate, former General Wiranto, the likely target of the bishop's allegations, who said they were dangerous charges, and anyone with a conscience would not be trying to wreck the peace in Ambon.³⁴

Those who subscribe to the Wiranto-as-culprit theory have suggested renewed violence serves to discredit the two men who brokered the 2002 peace agreement in Ambon, presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his running mate, Yusuf Kalla.

The currency of this theory was heightened on 28 April, when Jafar Umar Thalib was interviewed on Jakarta television about the Ambon violence. Jafar, who is known to have had close ties to the army, said that Yudhoyono bore responsibility, because throughout his tenure as Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security, he always argued that RMS was not the significant threat that the army and Laskar Jihad claimed it was. The size of the RMS demonstration on Sunday, and its consequences, Jafar said, proved Yudhoyono wrong.

But precisely because Wiranto is such an obvious target, some have argued that only those out to discredit him could have arranged the sniping.³⁵ A member of President Megawati's political party, Partai Demokrat Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) told ICG that one of the party's strategies is to support the "anti-militarism" campaign now gaining popularity on Indonesian campuses, because Megawati, as the leading civilian candidate, will benefit from rejection of both Wiranto and Yudhoyono. But it is a far cry from supporting such a campaign to engaging in active violence. It is also worth remembering that in

any election campaign, supporters of political parties will have an interest in putting their own spin on events which they had no hand in initiating.

At this stage, no one has produced any evidence that would support *any* of these theories. The immediate priority should be a professional investigation. Given the universally low opinion of police skills in Maluku, that investigation needs to take place either with oversight from civilians who are not part of the police or through the participation of outside experts whose impartiality and technical skills can instil confidence in the results.

VI. CONCLUSION

Less than a week before the violence, an Ambonese leader involved in the peace process told ICG reconciliation was going well, and he was optimistic Ambon had seen the last of communal violence.

That he was wrong was illustrated not only by the suddenness of the eruption, but by diametrically opposed versions of what actually has transpired since 25 April. Several Muslim organisations, as well as several senior government officials, have sought to portray the outbreak as separatists vs. the Indonesian state. Christian leaders have argued that this is dangerous, because it legitimises violence by the side seen as defending Indonesian unity.³⁶ Nationally, it is clear from discussions in the print and broadcast media that the public perceives FKM/RMS as the primary culprit and believes the government needs to do more to eradicate the separatist threat.

Even if the police arrest every member of FKM in the city of Ambon, which they now appear bent on doing, the question of who was responsible for the killings will remain unanswered. It is the snipers, more than a short-sighted police force or a small group of rowdy but unarmed separatists, who have most undermined peace in Ambon, and unless they are found and prosecuted, the danger of further conflict remains.

As for who benefits from the new upsurge, the only certainty is that ultimately, everyone loses.

Jakarta/Brussels, 17 May 2004

³³ "Uskup Mandagi: Mengin Ada Capres Terlibat Rusuh Ambon", detik.com, 30 April 2004.

³⁴ "Wiranto: Isu Capres Terlibat Konflik Ambon Berbahaya", detik.com, 30 April 2004.

³⁵ For details on the PDIP-as-culprit theory, see "Sekongkol Keji di Balik Rusuh Ambon Sampai Makassar", *Sabili*, Vol. XI, No. 22, 21 May 2004, pp.17-22. The article suggests that election politics led the Megawati government not only to provoke violence in Ambon in the interests of destroying the credibility of ex-military candidates, but also arranged the re-arrest of alleged Jemaah Islamiyah leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in order to curry favour with the U.S. Ba'asyir was released on 30 April after serving a short prison term for immigration violations but was immediately detained as a terrorist suspect.

³⁶ Crisis Center Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia, "Situasi Ambon Menuju Chaos Total?", 30 April 2004.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF AMBON

