

UN verdict on East Timor

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THE Indonesian military used starvation as a weapon to exterminate the East Timorese, according to a UN report documenting the deaths of as many as 180,000 civilians at the hands of the occupying forces.

The 2500-page report, obtained by *The Australian*, has been suppressed for months by the East Timorese Government and will infuriate Indonesia, which has punished only a handful of soldiers for the murders, assaults and rapes that occurred during its 24 years of occupation.

Napalm and chemical weapons, which poisoned the food and water supply, were used by Indonesian soldiers against the East Timorese in the brutal invasion and annexation of the half-island to Australia's north, according to the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation report.

The violence culminated in the 1999 reprisals for the independence vote, when the Indonesian military and its militia proxies rampaged through East Timor, killing as many as 1500 people and destroying most of the towns.

The report blames the Indonesian government and the security forces for the deaths of as many as 183,000 civilians, more than 90 per cent of whom died from hunger and illness.

It claims Indonesian police or soldiers were to blame for 70 per cent of the 18,600 unlawful killings or disappearances between 1975 and 1999.

Based on interviews with almost 8000 witnesses from East Timor's 13 districts and 65 sub-districts, as well as statements from refugees over the border in West Timor, the report also relies on Indonesian military papers and intelligence from international sources.

It documents a litany of massacres, thousands of summary executions of civilians and the torture of 8500 East Timorese - with horrific details of public beheadings, the mutilation of genitalia, the burying and burning alive of victims, use of cigarettes to burn victims, and ears and genitals being lopped off to display to families.

Thousands of East Timorese women were raped and sexually assaulted during the occupation and the report concludes that rape was also used by the Indonesian military as a weapon of war.

"Rape, sexual slavery and sexual violence were tools used as part of the campaign designed to inflict a deep experience of terror, powerlessness and hopelessness upon pro-independence supporters," the commission found.

The deaths amounted to almost a third of East Timor's pre-invasion population.

The report found that after taking into account a peacetime baseline mortality rate, the number of East Timorese whose deaths could be directly attributed to Indonesia's deliberate starvation policy was between 84,200 and 183,000 people

from 1975 until 1999.

East Timor, one of the world's poorest nations, with a population of just over one million people, had a pre-invasion population of 628,000.

The Indonesian security forces "consciously decided to use starvation of East Timorese civilians as a weapon of war", the report says. "The intentional imposition of conditions of life which could not sustain tens of thousands of East Timorese civilians amounted to extermination as a crime against humanity committed against the East Timorese population."

A culture of impunity prevailed in the occupied territory and "widespread and systematic executions, arbitrary detention, torture, rape and sexual slavery was officially accepted by Indonesia", the commission found.

"The violations were committed in execution of a systematic plan approved, conducted and controlled by Indonesian military commanders at the highest level."

The report, due to be handed by East Timorese President Xanana Gusmao to UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan tomorrow, also criticises Australia for its long-term de jure recognition of the Indonesian occupation and its failure to try to prevent the use of force in East Timor.

It recommends reparations from Indonesia and the members of the UN Security Council, including Britain and the US, who gave military backing to Indonesia between 1974 and 1999, as well as those nations that provided military assistance to Jakarta during the occupation, including Australia.

The report will worsen the already noxious reputation of the Indonesian military, which has largely escaped punishment for human rights crimes in East Timor. All but one of the accused at the Indonesian tribunal on East Timor was acquitted or found innocent on appeal.

The commission carefully notes that many of the Indonesian military officers who played key roles in the occupation have since been promoted and details their ascension in the military.

The report said many of the current senior members of the Indonesian military "could be held accountable" for the violations in East Timor.

Titled *Chega!*, which means "Enough!" in Portuguese, the report is one of the most detailed and comprehensive of its kind ever compiled.

Sponsored by international donors, including Australia, and 3 1/2 years in the making, the report was given to Mr Gusmao in October. But he is only now preparing to publicly release it.

Last night Mr Gusmao, in Bali en route to New York to hand over the report, said it was an extremely important document, "because it's representative of the law".

It is understood he was both concerned about offending East Timor's giant neighbour and worried the report's detailed and trenchant criticism of the resistance - which

also summarily executed and tortured civilians, particularly in the 1970s - could lead to social and political anarchy.