



Armed Conflicts Report

Indonesia - Sulawesi (1998 - first combat deaths)

Update: January 2005

Summary

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Summary:

2004 Conflict violence abated dramatically since 2002 although sporadic low-intensity conflict between Muslims and Christians continued in 2004 and tensions remained in the area around Poso. A door-to-door weapons sweep conducted by security forces over a period of a several months revealed the prevalence of weapons in the region.

2003 The relative tranquillity of most of the year ended in October when several attacks attributed to local Muslim militant groups resulted in the death of over 10 Christian civilians. The attackers were allegedly linked to the regional Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist network, and the violence led to an influx of Indonesian security forces to the province.

2002 Inter-communal clashes continued despite government efforts to step up security in the province. An upsurge of violence in the Poso district in August left over 25 people dead, mainly Christians, and threatened to undermine the peace agreement brokered in December 2001.

2001 Intercommunal violence broke out again in November between rival Muslim and Christian communities following the influx of hundreds of Muslim extremists. More than 100 civilians died in armed clashes before a peace agreement was reached in December.

Type of Conflict:

Failed state

Parties to the Conflict:

1. Christian groups, including:

“Black Bat” vigilantes, allegedly based in Tentena; and

“Christian Red Force” paramilitary, based in Poso.

“In Poso, a rival paramilitary organisation, the Christian Red Force, emerged to retaliate against what Christians say are attempts to intimidate them into leaving their homes.” [BBC News, 20 December 2001]

“Tentena is allegedly the base for the “Black Bats,” so-called ninja raiders who have allegedly been the perpetrators of some of Poso’s worst violence.” [“Actors - Sulawesi,” Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001, available at http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/main/maps_sulawesi_actors.php.

2. Muslim groups, including:

Laskar Jihad, a Java-based organization led by Jaffar Umar Thalib. Laskar Jihad is estimated to have 7,000 fighters in the province; and

Mujahidin KOMPAK militia, a group based in Sulawesi.

These two groups are alleged to have links with the regional Islamic militant group, Jemaah Islamiyah, which is based throughout Southeast Asia.

"... ICG [International Crisis Group] found that Mujahidin KOMPAC was responsible for many, if not most, of the violent acts committed in the Poso area between the signing of the Malino declaration on 20 December 2001 and the Makassar bombing of 5 December 2002." [*International Crisis Group*, 'Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi,' February 3, 2004]

3. Indonesian government, led by Former Army General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who won a September 2004 election for President by a wide margin.

"Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won by a huge margin, giving him a powerful mandate, which he has promised to use well." [*BBC News*, October 9, 2004]

"Two hundred police reinforcements have arrived in the eastern Indonesian district of Poso after renewed attacks... [Deputy Police Chief] Trenggono said the reinforcements arrived Sunday night. One hundred are from the paramilitary mobile brigade unit based in East Java while the other 100 are anti-riot police from South Sulawesi. They will join some 1,500 police and soldiers already in the district." [*Agence France Presse*, December 1, 2003]

Status of Fighting:

2004 Sporadic inter-communal violence continued at a lower intensity than previous years. A few reported incidences resulted in the deaths of less than 25 people.

"A small home-made bomb exploded in eastern Indonesia's sectarian violence-plagued town of Poso but there were no casualties, a report said Monday." [*Agence France Presse*, August 23, 2004]

"The clash took place on Wednesday evening between residents from two rival villages in Sigi Biromaru, about 260 kilometers from Poso regency, where some 2,000 people were killed in two years of religious fighting until 2002." [*Jakarta Post*, January 23, 2004]

2003 Although sporadic attacks on civilians occurred throughout the year, October attacks on Christians were the deadliest, resulting in over 10 deaths. Several members of the militant Muslim group, Mujahidin KOMPAK – widely believed to be linked to the regional militant group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) – were arrested in connection with the attacks. A fatal attack on two Balinese Hindus suggested the conflict, which thus far has been limited to Christian and Muslim communities, could envelope other religious groups as well.

"While the violence in October 2003 finally attracted Jakarta's attention, it had been preceded earlier in the year by a number of 'mysterious killings' and bombings... Although many of the attackers appear to have had training under JI instructors and some Javanese were involved, it seems unlikely that the decision to undertake the attacks was made by JI... Police... arrested eighteen others [in connection with the October attacks], an initial group of fourteen, followed by another four. The first fourteen are all believed to have been members of Mujahidin KOMPAK..." [*International Crisis Group*, 'Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi,' February 3, 2004]

"A total of four persons were killed in two different attacks in an area near Poso, a city in the Central Sulawesi Islands. Two of the victims were Protestant Christians, while the other two were Hindu immigrants from Bali.... The... attack is the first of its kind on the Balinese Hindu community. According to some observers, this is a sign that such conflict - to which military and fundamentalist factions are no strangers - aims at destabilizing relations not only between Christians and Muslims, but the whole fabric of Indonesia's multi-ethnic population." [*AsiaNews.it*, December 5, 2003]

"Earlier this month masked gunmen killed 10 people in attacks on mainly Christian villages in the district... Police deployed scores of extra officers to track those behind the earlier attacks, shooting dead six suspects and arresting 13.... Tempo magazine... quoted an anonymous JI member in Poso as saying the October 12 attacks on Christian villages had been carried out by the network to 'commemorate one-year anniversary of the Bali bombing.'" [*Agence France Presse*, October 27, 2003]

2002 After a short respite following the December peace agreement, violence broke out again in August when heavily armed civilian militia began bombing churches and buses, burning houses, and attacking Christian civilians. The government's approximately 3,000- strong security force stationed in the Poso district was incapable or unwilling to stop some of the more serious attacks.

"Five churches were burned and hundreds of houses destroyed in the latest violence." [*ABC Radio Australia*, August 15, 2002]

"The government has sent more troops to boost security in Poso, bringing the number there to at least four battalions. An Indonesian battalion comprises between 650 and 1,000 men." [*Radio Australia*, August 20, 2002]

2001 Following the arrival of thousands of Muslim members of the Laskar Jihad, armed violence between Muslims and Christians erupted again in November in the Poso area of Central Sulawesi. The Indonesian government sent hundreds of paramilitary police reinforcements in an effort to restore peace to the region.

"In Poso, Muslim holy warriors seized five villages during a three-day offensive that began on Nov. 27 and left five Christians dead." [*The Washington Times*, December 13, 2001]

Number of Deaths:

Total: An estimated 1,000 to 2,500 men, women and children have died as a result of religious-based violence since 1998. The majority of those killed have been Muslim.

"After three years of episodic fighting, death toll estimates range from 1,000 to 2,500, with thousands more injured." [*Inside Indonesia*, June 2002]

"An approximate tally of deaths from the religious violence over the past three years is the loss of 1,500 Muslims and 40 Christians." ["Sulawesi - Impacts on Human Security," *Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research*, President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001, available at www.preventconflict.org/portal/main/maps_sulawesi_impacts.php]

2004: Less than 25 people were reported killed in sporadic inter-communal clashes in 2004.

"Tension returned to the restive regency of Poso, Central Sulawesi province, on Sunday, following a bomb explosion and two separate murders on Friday and Saturday." [*Jakarta Post*, July 19, 2004]

"At least two people were killed and eight others, including a police officer, were injured in Wednesday's brawl." [*Jakarta Post*, March 6, 2004]

"Sectarian fighting erupted in Donggala regency, Central Sulawesi, leaving one person dead, two others seriously injured and four houses burned." [*Jakarta Post*, January 23, 2004]

"Four people have been killed and three injured in a bomb explosion on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi." [*BBC News*, January 10, 2004]

2003 Over 30 people were killed as a result of the conflict in 2003. Militant attacks and the response of security forces in October accounted for approximately two-thirds of the total.

"Some 35 people were killed in Muslim-Christian violence in the Indonesian province of Central Sulawesi in 2003 despite a peace pact signed in December 2001, a report said Wednesday.... There were 19 bomb explosions, 19 cases of shootings and 16 cases in which bombs were found before they exploded, according to the report by the government-sponsored working group." [*Agence France Presse*, December 31, 2003]

2002 The number of conflict deaths in 2002 was not available. Media reports claimed at least twenty-five people, mostly Christians, died in August during the latest round of violence.

"Four people have been killed and 17 injured in an bomb explosion on a crowded bus in Indonesia... Indonesian National Police Chief General Da'i Bachtiar said the explosion was an attempt to provoke religious unrest following a peace deal signed between Muslims and Christians in December." [*BBC News*, June 6, 2002]

"Gunmen have shot dead at least five people in raids on two Christian villages on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The attacks came just hours after Christian and Muslim leaders reaffirmed their support for a nine-month-old truce in the troubled region of Poso." [*BBC News*, August 13, 2002]

2001 At least 100 civilians died in attacks late in the year.

"Now the violence has broken out again, with at least 100 people killed in the Poso area during the Muslim fasting month that ended in mid-December." [*BBC News*, 20 December 2001]

Political Developments:

2004 Reports from Indonesian and international human rights groups accused government forces and police personnel of more than 80 human rights violations over the past two years. A door-to-door police operation in the region searching houses and properties for weapons was conducted over several months and resulted in the confiscation of hundreds of weapons and homemade bombs. Former Army General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, campaigning on economic and security issues, won a September 2004 election for Indonesian president by a wide margin.

"Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won by a huge margin, giving him a powerful mandate, which he has promised to use well." [BBC News, October 9, 2004]

"Three Poso community organizations have complained that police personnel committed at least 83 human rights violations over the last two years. The report has dealt a severe blow to the National Police, who are celebrating their 58th anniversary. The Center for the Development of Law and Human Rights Studies (LPS-HAM), the Protestant Church Crisis Center and the Poso Fi Sabillillah Mosque Youth Organization reported that the abuse included beatings, threats at gunpoint, shootings and intimidation by security personnel." [Jakarta Post, July 5, 2004]

"A joint police and military unit found at least 168 homemade bombs, 102 firearms and 485 live bullets during three months of door-to-door searches for weapons since January in Poso regency, Central Sulawesi." [Jakarta Post, April 28, 2004]

2003 The relative calm of the first part of the year enabled the Indonesian government to withdraw some soldiers and police deployed to Sulawesi at the height of the conflict. However, following the October attacks forces were redeployed to the province. The arrest of al Qaeda operative Hambali in June was a significant development in the government's nation-wide campaign against Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the group widely believed to be involved in the Sulawesi conflict.

"Two hundred police reinforcements have arrived in the eastern Indonesian district of Poso after renewed attacks... [Deputy Police Chief] Trenggono said the reinforcements arrived Sunday night. One hundred are from the paramilitary mobile brigade unit based in East Java while the other 100 are anti-riot police from South Sulawesi. They will join some 1,500 police and soldiers already in the district." [Agence France Presse, December 1, 2003]

"Hambali, also known as Riduan Isamuddin, was arrested by Thai authorities two days ago in the central town of Ayutthaya, and was handed over to the CIA, according to U.S. officials... Intelligence experts have long suspected Hambali of being al-Qaeda's point man in Southeast Asia ; its mastermind and operations planner for the region; and its key link with the regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)." [CNN.com, August 15, 2003]

"Indonesian authorities are withdrawing 1,000 soldiers and policemen from the Central Sulawesi district of Poso... What is important is that security in the former conflict zone has improved," [Central Sulawesi Police Chief] Ridha said..." [Agence France Presse, May 28, 2003] Z

2002 The government in Jakarta sent security reinforcements to the province as part of a country-wide effort to crack down on civilian militias like the Lashar Jihad which was blamed for the latest round of violence. However, Christian leaders in the Poso district accused security forces of complicity in the atrocities committed against Christians by Muslim extremists. Despite the violence, some Christian and Muslim leaders met in August to reaffirm their support for the peace deal reached in December 2001 and security forces reported the collection of over 30,000 weapons.

"... many of the victims who have suffered the brunt of the fresh violence doubted that the attackers were ordinary civilians as they were armed with automatic weapons, and moved and acted in a combat-trained manner." [The Jakarta Post, August 21, 2002]

"... Christian and Muslim leaders reaffirmed their support for a nine-month-old truce in the troubled region of Poso." [BBC News, August 13, 2002]

"Police records in Poso showed that people have so far surrendered 35,413 pieces of weapons, including home-made firearms, to the security authorities." [Asia Human Rights News, February 24, 2002]

2001 Leaders of the Muslim and Christian communities met in government-sponsored peace talks in December. These resulted in the Malino Declaration and an apparent end to the violence.

"Leaders of the Muslim and Christian communities in Poso district last month agreed to a deal to end more than two years of intermittent sectarian violence in which more than 1,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands forced from their homes." [The Jakarta Post, January 8, 2002]

"The pact includes a call for the surrender of weapons, the repatriation of tens of thousands of refugees to Poso and a pledge by both sides to respect each others' religion." [CNN.com, December 20, 2001]

Background:

Central Sulawesi and its town of Poso lie at the intersection of four peninsulas which make up Sulawesi, the fourth largest island in Indonesia. Traditionally, the majority Muslim population has co-existed harmoniously with the minority Christians, most of whom live in the north and in the Poso area. Following President Suharto's resignation in 1998, tensions between the two religious groups rose when Poso's Muslim governor proposed a Muslim successor instead of the customary alternate Christian. A brawl triggered Muslim attacks on Christian homes and churches, and sporadic violence continued until it escalated in April 2000 when hundreds of Christian homes were destroyed and many people killed. In May 2000, Christian "ninjas" retaliated by attacking Muslim villages, terrorizing and killing occupants, and reportedly dumping bodies of many victims in the Poso River. In mid-2001, hundreds of members of the Java-based Laskar Jihad began arriving on the island, allegedly from fighting between Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas, and violence escalated again in November. Since early 2002 clashes have been sporadic. In addition to more than a thousand deaths, the fighting has displaced an estimated 50,000 people.

[Sources: *BBC News*, 20 December 2001; "The Conflict in Central Sulawesi," *Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research*, President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001]

Arms Sources:

Both rival religious groups have used traditional weapons such as spears and bows and arrows as well as homemade knives, firearms, and bombs. The Laskar Jihad is reported to use automatic weapons.

Economic Factors:

Central Sulawesi is an impoverished, and comparatively under-populated, region of Indonesia where most earn a living from fishing and farming. Some regional tensions are attributed to the influx of Muslim migrants from Java, an influx which has reduced the numbers and influence of the Christian population.

"The financial crisis beginning in late 1997 spurred further immigration into the ebony-producing Poso area. Entrepreneurial Muslims arrived from South Sulawesi to cash-crop cacao, an agricultural export that maintained an exceptionally high value during the crisis. Pamona Protestants lost their religious and ethnic majorities in the district. Many also had been displaced from their ancestral lands through processes of land commodification that had nothing to do with religion." [*Inside Indonesia*, June 2002]

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