

# Human Rights at SFU

—*Bob Russell*

Through small amounts of financial support, in the form of an honorarium or a partial payment of travel expenses, the Institute is often able to play the determining role in bringing human rights activists to SFU to give public lectures. Over the past two years, I have been involved in organizing several such events.

For the last ten years SFU has been involved in a very large (\$50,000,000) international project, the Eastern Indonesia Universities Development Project (EIUDP). For much of that time, Jerry Zaslove and I have expended considerable effort questioning the judiciousness of SFU's involvement during the Suharto's rule, largely because of human rights concerns. The EIUDP's influence on campus has been large; so it is not surprising that Indonesia has been a strong influence in human rights activities.

As some background on activities in which the Institute has been involved, I quote from a message which we sent to sfufa-forum (the faculty email forum) in September of 1999:

Several years ago the Institute for the Humanities conducted a forum on the condition of human rights in Indonesia and Simon Fraser's opportunity to influence Government policy there. Subsequently we hosted with several North American universities a forum in Vancouver which the Nobel Laureate, Jose Ramos Horta, attended. He is now in the news, as you know. One of our speakers at both of those events was Geoff Robinson, a Canadian who was for many years the Amnesty International expert on Indonesia in London and who is now a history professor at UCLA. Geoff has recently been with the Political Office Staff of UNAMET (United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor) in Dili. It has recently been reduced from a staff of 20 to 4, with Geoff being one of those, and we have been informed that there is considerable concern about his safety. After the second Forum and when it appeared that Indonesia was opening its eyes to democratic changes, with the help of Chris Dagg of SFU's Eastern Indonesia Universities Development Project, the Institute and other SFU organizations, we invited many teachers and journalists from Indonesia to discuss the questions of democratic transition and how we could assist their efforts.

We are now asking for you to use your voice in contacting the individuals below in order to express your opinion about Canada's role in achieving some meaningful and permanent action to stop the atrocities going on in East Timor.

This message resulted in a number of faculty members writing to politicians appealing for a peaceful resolution

of matters in East Timor, but while our friend Dr. Robinson was to survive the ordeal in Dili, as you know, many East Timorese did not.

A short time later, on October 25, 1999, we were fortunate to have an important individual from East Timor, Reverend Arlindo Marcal, past moderator of the Protestant Church of East Timor, visit SFU. In the March 1997 "Symposium on Human Rights and Democratic Development: the Case of East Timor and Indonesia," which the Institute had held primarily in conjunction with the Government of Portugal, Reverend Arlindo Marcal was scheduled to participate.

Unfortunately, there was strong intimidation by the Indonesian Government, and all of the East Timorese living inside of East Timor or Indonesia, including Reverend Marcal, were forced to cancel their participation. Several Indonesian security agents and private citizens sent by the Indonesian Government did attend our events on campus in order to disrupt some of our events. For these reasons, Reverend Marcal's visit was all the more significant. He participated in a forum entitled "East Timor: What Now?" Sponsors included the Institute for the Humanities and Amnesty International. Its timing was particularly opportune given that on October 20, the Indonesian parliament had renounced all claims to East Timor, and a UN transitional administration was to be put in place soon. It was also relevant to members of the university community because there was an upcoming review of the EIUDP which had been approved by Senate.

Soon after his informative talk at SFU, Marcal returned to a very difficult situation in East Timor. I received moving accounts of his activities over the next several months. Several follow-up activities occurred on campus. For example, in November I talked to an SFU student East Timor group who, determined to bring forward its concerns about SFU's role in Indonesia, was formulating a response to SFU's "Internationalization for the New Millennium" paper.

Troubles across Indonesia went on. For many months, it was unclear how many East Timorese were killed or trapped in Indonesia. In December the European Parliament called for extension of their arms embargo for Indonesia. They asked the Indonesian Government to bring to account those responsible for violations of human rights in Aceh, the Moluccas Islands, West Papua as well as other parts of the country, and in East Timor, called on all the parties concerned to

collaborate fully in a Governmental investigation, and called on the Indonesian Government to disband the special troop command Kopassus. As we shall see below, these occurrences were to shape later events at SFU.

In January 2000, the Institute hosted a lecture by Anto Sangaji, who works with Yayasan Tanah Merdeka, an organization in South Sulawesi opposing some of the activities by Inco, the largest Canadian investor in Indonesia. INCO's mine at Soroako is one of the largest in the world and has been criticized on environmental, human rights and labour rights grounds. Sangaji is originally from Ambon but has lived in Sulawesi since college. He is director of YTM, an organization which works for community self-help development, environmental conservation, political advocacy for indigenous people, and human rights. He had come to Canada to speak on the activities of INCO, particularly the threatened eviction of indigenous people due to the proposed expansion of PT Inco's nickel mine. In his talk "Mining Nickel, Moving People: A Public Forum on INCO in Indonesia & at Home," Anto gave a moving account of disruption which takes place in the local communities. He addressed in detail issues regarding INCO's operations in South Sulawesi and its planned expansion to Central Sulawesi, as well as addressing its operations elsewhere in Indonesia (Irian Jaya, Ambon, Aceh). As recently as last May, he was making news in the Indonesian press, raising concerns about effects of INCO mining on local communities.

In February of this year, Jeff Halper and Salin Shawanreh spoke in their "Israel/Palestine Science for Peace Tour". I had discovered their visit to Vancouver through a mailing of Science for Peace, an organization in which I have been involved for some time. The presentation was co-ordinated with the SFU Student Society, who also paid some expenses and helped advertise the event.

On March 12, the Institute sponsored a talk by Mr. John Rumbiak entitled "West Papua—the Next East Timor?" Mr. Rumbiak is a leading human rights activist in West Papua who works as program coordinator for the Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy in Jayapura. He has travelled extensively to promote awareness of human rights violations by the Indonesian authorities and after speaking at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva was on a pan-Canadian tour to raise awareness of these issues.

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As background, West Papua (also known as Irian Jaya) has been under Indonesian colonial rule since the 1960s. Home to a million Melanesians and forming half of the world's second largest island, West Papua is of growing concern today. The same sort of terror campaign that tore East Timor apart (militia terror groups, Indonesian troop build-up, arrest and killings of pro-independence activists) has been building in West Papua. For more than thirty years, West Papuans have been struggling for their right to self-determination. The Indonesian military has responded with massive human rights violations. The international community, including Canadian companies, has largely ignored the situation, except to profit from the exploitation of West Papua's enormous natural resources. The university in Jayapura, West Papua has been one of the scenes of mounting violence. In December, for example, a student dorm was attacked by Indonesian Brimob police, with the result that over 100 students were arrested and three killed. It is also

one of the five universities involved in the EIUDP, and a number of the EIUDP students attended the event. In addition to seeing a remarkable video on East Timor during the violent times leading up to its referendum, the audience witnessed a moving talk by Mr. Rumbiak. I found him to be a person of remarkable strength of character and presence, with an absence of bitterness over what has happened to West Papua. It is from such rare individuals that one finds optimism.

Events at SFU have taken an interesting turn in the past year. Although not well publicized in the local media, one critical situation exists at the University of Pattimura (UNPATTI), the state university in Ambon, Indonesia, which was burned in an attack on July 4, 2000. The university, one of several involved in the EIUDP, was home to approximately 10,000 students and 900 faculty members. The surrounding housing complex where many of the faculty, staff and their families lived was also attacked and burned. I became involved with an "Indonesian Assistance Fundraising Appeal" to raise money to support the people in Ambon. People involved were a broad coalition of people across campus, from those of us who have criticized SFU's involvement with Indonesia in the past, to the project's participants and supporters, including many Indonesian students at SFU, all of whom share the belief that SFU has a responsibility to aid Indonesia's citizens and universities as the country struggles with its current unrest and political upheaval.

I feel very fortunate to be an Associate member of the Institute for the Humanities. I am grateful for the opportunity it has afforded me to organize these events on human rights issues and to play some role, while SFU's involvement in Indonesia, through the EIUDP, is coming to a close.