

## Indonesia: Trouble Again in Ambon

### I. OVERVIEW

Clashes on 11 September between Muslims and Christians in Ambon, capital of Maluku province, and sporadic incidents thereafter raised fears of a return to the communal fighting that wracked the region from 1999 to 2002. This time, an extraordinary effort by grassroots “peace provocateurs” and local officials largely kept the violence from spreading further in Maluku. But the unrest triggered efforts by extremists elsewhere to manipulate communal tensions, apparently motivating the bombing of a church in Solo, Central Java on 25 September.

The outbreak exposed the lasting impact of the earlier conflict, the depth of the fault-lines between the communities and glaring police inadequacies on every count: community relations, intelligence, investigative capabilities and preparedness. The government must quickly answer questions about how the violence started, who opened fire and why, as well as rebuild homes and address the needs of newly displaced without the usual corruption. An independent review of local police performance should identify shortcomings and solutions. Most importantly, government, civil society and donors must intensify efforts to build interaction between the communities through practical projects of mutual benefit.

The violence was sparked by the death on 10 September of Darfin Saimin, a Muslim motorcycle taxi driver. Police said it was an accident; circumstantial evidence convinced the family he had been murdered. Text messages that he had been tortured and killed by Christians began circulating, and by the time Darfin was buried (about 1:30pm on 11 September), hundreds of mourners had gathered. Violence erupted as they left the cemetery and continued in two areas until about 9pm, leaving three dead and dozens wounded. Over 100 homes, mostly Muslim but about twenty Christian, were burned to the ground. Around two the next morning, a clash that claimed four shooting victims erupted at the opposite end of town, in a sensitive area dividing the communities. About 50 Christian houses were burned.

By 13 September, markets, schools and offices were returning to normal, but Ambon had some 4,000 newly displaced, with some having lost their homes for the fourth time in twelve years. Polarisation was greater than ever, with mostly Christians believing the accident theory, most

Muslims believing the murder theory and many on both sides seeing provocateurs active from the sidelines.

Speculation about who might possibly benefit from the violence – the army, the police, local political figures, national political figures, extremists – obscures the fact that post-conflict Ambon is a tense, violent and divided city, much as local boosters like to evoke the idyllic image of “Sweet Ambon” (Ambon Manise). Inter-village gang fights are frequent, as are common crimes that, because of the victim’s or perpetrator’s religion, can instantly take on communal overtones. Everyone knows where the borders are between Muslim and Christian communities; public schools are largely segregated. Where the two groups mix, in the state university, government and a few large markets, there is an obsession with communal balance. A high population density, exacerbated by a steady influx of economic migrants from Southeast Sulawesi, does not help. Thus, even though many in Ambon believe that the latest violence had to be planned rather than spontaneous, there was more than enough kindling to start the fire.

The government in Jakarta made clear its concerns by taking two unusual steps: sending its top three security officers – the armed forces commander, the police chief and the coordinating minister for political, security and legal affairs – to Ambon on 15 September to meet with local officials and community leaders to discuss solutions; and sending a team of investigators from police headquarters to examine the accident/crime scene. It also acted quickly to stop potential troublemakers from traveling to Ambon to exploit the unrest. Three weeks after trouble erupted, however, the issue of “attacks by Crusaders” against Muslims in Ambon is still roiling extremist websites. Old grievances are being dredged up, and a new narrative of Muslim persecution is taking root that needs urgently to be countered. An independent forensic analysis of Darfin’s death and quick rehabilitation of burned-out neighbourhoods would help. Longer term action is also needed to improve policing and break down communal barriers.

## II. THE DEATH OF DARFIN SAIMIN

Around 9pm on 10 September, a Christian family living in the Gunung Nona area of Ambon, heard a loud noise and went out to check.<sup>1</sup> They found Darfin Saimin gravely wounded by his motorcycle near a trash dump, the site of frequent accidents, especially at night. It was raining, making the hilly road slippery. The family flagged down a public transport vehicle, and Darfin was taken to the nearest hospital, but he died en route. The first his family knew was shortly afterwards, when Darfin's aunt called his mobile phone to arrange a ride for the next morning, and it was answered by a policeman at the hospital. The same officer accompanied the body when it was returned to the family around 11pm, with the wounds sewn up: a cut under his eye, another on his foot and three on his back. He told them Darfin had crashed his motorcycle into a wall on Gunung Nona.

### A. FAMILY SUSPICIONS

The family was immediately suspicious. Gunung Nona is a Christian area, and Darfin had no plans to go there. He was a motorcycle driver for hire (*tukang ojek*) and did have one regular rider in the area but not on that night. They asked the police officer for a copy of the *visum*, the medical report based on a visual inspection, not an autopsy.<sup>2</sup> The officer said he would get it and left but did not return with it until the next day.

The family's misgivings intensified when they saw what looked like stab or puncture wounds on Darfin's back, corresponding to rips that went through three layers of clothing: his jacket, shirt and undershirt. Police said he must have fallen on something sharp, but in the family's view, only a knife could have produced those rips. Photos of the wounds taken with a mobile phone spread quickly throughout the Muslim community and Muslim websites.<sup>3</sup> There were other anomalies. Darfin's motorcycle was undamaged, except for a bent license plate; how could it have

crashed into a wall and not have marks, the family asked. His helmet was full of blood but also intact, and he had no major head wounds, so where did the blood come from?<sup>4</sup> These were reasonable questions that deserved answers. Within hours of his death, the Muslim community was convinced he had been murdered. Dissemination of the news by text, in addition to the fact that Darfin was a popular man with many friends, brought hundreds to the family's home before the burial the next day.

Vice Mayor Sam Latuconsina, after seeing the crowd and talking to Darfin's mother, immediately understood the danger. He called the police chief, Superintendent Djoko Susilo, and asked him to come to the house. The chief did so, but again assured the family that it was an accident, and when Darfin's mother presented the ripped clothing as evidence of stabbing, he would not take it.<sup>5</sup> Many of those interviewed in Ambon – Christian, Muslim, government and non-government – believe the subsequent violence could have been averted if the police had taken the family's concerns seriously and promised a full investigation, regardless of their private convictions and those of the doctor who signed the *visum*.

### B. LOW POLICE CREDIBILITY

The police should have been doubly careful in their handling of Darfin's death because their credibility in the Muslim community was so low. In the earlier conflict, they had been widely seen as siding with Christians because of historical recruitment patterns, in which far more Christians than Muslims chose policing as a profession. This had changed somewhat in the last decade, and both the provincial and local police commanders were Muslims from outside Maluku, but basic distrust remained.

Family members and others in the community said Darfin's death was the third in the last two years in which a Muslim motorcyclist's murder was passed off as an accident; Christians also had vague recollections that there had been similar cases with their own members as victims.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For related Crisis Group reporting on Ambon and Maluku, see Asia Report N°5, *Indonesia's Shaky Transition*, 10 October 1999; Asia Briefing N°2, *Indonesia's Maluku Crisis: The Issues*, 19 July 2000; Asia Report N°10, *Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku*, 19 December 2000; Asia Report N°31, *Indonesia: The Search for Peace in Maluku*, 8 February 2002; Asia Briefing N°32, *Indonesia: Violence Erupts Again in Ambon*, 17 May 2004; Asia Report N°103, *Weakening Indonesia's Mujahidin Networks: Lessons from Maluku and Poso*, 13 October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Autopsies are normally not conducted for victims of accidents.

<sup>3</sup> See "Inilah Bukti Tukang Ojek Muslim di Ambon itu Dibunuh, Bukan Kecelakaan!!", [www.voa-islam.com](http://www.voa-islam.com), 13 September 2011.

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<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group interview, Darfin's cousin, Ambon, 17 September 2011. The same questions were being raised on many Muslim websites.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Darfin's cousin, Ambon, 17 September 2011; and Sam Latuconsina, 24 September 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Multiple sources said it was the third instance involving a resident of the Muslim neighbourhood of Waihong, but no one could remember details about the first. The second, which took place in 2010, involved a motorcycle driver named Tofan, who fell off his bike when drunk and then was beaten to death by persons unknown.

Local journalists were quick to point out a more recent case of police dissembling, not in Ambon city but in Maluku province. On 16 December 2010, their colleague Alfrez Mirulewan, a reporter from the tabloid *Pelangi* who had been investigating corruption in fuel distribution, was found dead in the water off the island of Kisar. Police said he had probably fallen into the water and drowned while drunk. In fact, he had been clubbed on the back of the head by a member of the police, now in custody, who is related to one of the men Alfrez had been investigating.<sup>7</sup> The real story only came out after an investigation by the Independent Journalists Alliance (AJI). Given the Muslim community's lack of trust to start with and the sensitivity of the circumstances of Darfin's death, no one should have been jumping to conclusions until a thorough forensic examination of the alleged accident scene and the body had taken place.

Tensions were compounded by the burial site, a Muslim cemetery in a Christian neighbourhood that since the conflict has been rarely used. Darfin's grandfather and other relatives are buried there, however, and the family never considered another location. Under the circumstances, the police should have been out in force, an official said. Instead, they sent three men, who stood across the street and watched. The head of the Protestant synod, who was at the burial, said about 200 people attended; other estimates were double that, but whatever the number, it was clearly more than an ordinary death would have warranted; that in itself should have signalled that additional security measures were in order.

### C. VIOLENCE STARTS

At least three sources saw or heard things that in retrospect convinced them that trouble was planned, even before the burial on 11 September. One man had been in Pasar Mardika, a market used by both communities, at about 1pm on that day, when Manan Latuconsina, a former mosque youth leader who now heads an association of vendors, saw him and said urgently, "go home, go home, it's about to happen!"<sup>8</sup> Another source was in a Muslim neighbourhood shopping centre (Ambon Plaza), around 11am when suddenly shoppers and sellers alike began panicking and leaving; text messages reportedly were circulating that trouble had broken out in the city though nothing had happened yet.<sup>9</sup> He said the market was virtually empty by 11:45. Those messages could have been simply a response to the tension that had been building from the night before, however.

A team from the National Commission on Human Rights interviewed a witness who saw three Muslims and a Christian, near the cemetery before the burial, taunting each other and throwing stones in what in retrospect seemed to be an effort to start a brawl. When the trouble actually did erupt, these men were nowhere to be seen.<sup>10</sup> The team considered this odd, but given the rumours, a minor confrontation could easily have erupted spontaneously before the larger one.

Violence broke out as mourners left the cemetery in the afternoon, some shouting "Allahu Akbar!" The crowd split in two, with one group heading north toward the city centre, torching a Christian motorcycle base as they went. A friend of Darfin's in the crowd at the time said it was a completely spontaneous act of anger.<sup>11</sup> A second group moved toward the Talake neighbourhood, with no serious security force in evidence. A tripwire incident happened in front of the military hospital on Dr. Tamaela Street, where a Christian man with his two grandchildren got caught in the middle of the mob. The elder of the children got the younger one over the fence of Pattimura University to safety, then tried to climb over herself. Someone swung a knife at the grandfather, and it struck the child. A soldier took her on a motorcycle to the general hospital, driving through Christian neighbourhoods en route in a way that stoked anger there.

Rumours swirled by text and word of mouth that the child had been killed – she had not – and Muslim houses in the Waringin area were set on fire. Because Waringin is a border area between the two communities, some Christian homes went up in flames as well. Information that the al-Mukhlisun Mosque there had been damaged spread – in fact, its door had been singed – as did text messages that the landmark Silo Church in the city centre was under attack or had been destroyed.

### D. GUNFIRE AND ARSON

On Jalan Dr. Sitanala Street, a border street where youths from the two communities were hurling stones at one another, a military tank rolled down around 4pm on 11 September, two hours after the violence erupted, with a soldier popping up through its top and firing his gun into the air. A witness said the tank went to the end of the street, turned around and then someone in it fired again, single shots; this time several people were hit by bullets.<sup>12</sup>

At eight that evening, Governor Karel Albert Ralahu came by with the provincial police chief and military

<sup>7</sup>"Polisi ikut aniaya wartawan", [www.poroswartawanjakarta.com](http://www.poroswartawanjakarta.com), 22 January 2011.

<sup>8</sup>Crisis Group interview, activist, Ambon, 14 September 2011.

<sup>9</sup>Crisis Group interview, Ambon, 15 September 2011.

<sup>10</sup>Crisis Group interview, Ot Lawalatta, head, Maluku office, National Commission on Human Rights, 17 September 2011.

<sup>11</sup>Crisis Group interview, 16 September 2011.

<sup>12</sup>Crisis Group interview, witness, Ambon, 17 September 2011.

commander, but when he tried to speak he was shouted down and left amid a hail of stones. Paramilitary police (Brigade Mobile, Brimob), arrived shortly thereafter, and then, according to the witness, there were several exchanges of gunfire. Because it was dark, no one could tell who was shooting at whom. The assumption was that Brimob troops were doing some of the firing but it was not clear who was returning it.<sup>13</sup>

It was indicative of the slow response of the police that Brimob, the only force supposedly trained to handle a riot, showed up on this street close to six hours after the trouble had started. It did not cover other areas much better. The governor explained the slow reaction by noting that units had been deployed elsewhere in the province that day, and personnel levels were unusually low. They were expecting possible disruptions of the ceremony to install the district head (*bupati*) of West Ceram, scheduled for 13 September and had sent extra troops there.<sup>14</sup> An election for *bupati* was underway in Buru, and by law, security had to be provided for the polls. An ongoing feud between two Christian villages, Porto and Haria, on the island of Saparua was occupying three platoons (about 90 men).<sup>15</sup> All this meant too few forces on hand to deal with trouble in Ambon.

By 9:30pm, the city was mostly quiet. Local officials, activists and ordinary residents knew that other border areas in the city could flare up at any time, particularly around Batu Merah and Mardika at the northern end of town, but no additional police were deployed as a preventive measure; a military post was nearby. At 2am on 12 September, the torching of Christian homes in Mardika and fighting between the communities began. Security forces eventually appeared, and by daylight, it was mostly quiet again but not before four people had been killed by gunfire.

In one last paroxysm before all violence ceased, another house in Mardika was burned on the morning of 13 September. By 14 September, the toll was eight dead including Darfin; more than two dozen seriously injured, many of them by gunfire, and over 150 lightly injured, mostly from stoning and broken glass. The social affairs office in Ambon registered 159 houses burned, 109 in Waringin on

11 September and 50 in Mardika early the next day.<sup>16</sup> Isolated incidents continued, including text messages on 17 September that proved to be false about an attack on Ahuru, a Christian neighbourhood bordering the largely Muslim area of Karangpanjang. A small homemade bomb went off in Terminal Mardika on the night of 24 September, and a small pipe bomb was discovered the next morning in front of the office of the Protestant synod, all raising fears of further conflict.

## E. THE “PEACE PROVOCATEURS”

In the midst of the first days of chaos, dozens of brave activists of both faiths who called themselves “peace provocateurs” rushed around dispelling rumours and urging calm.<sup>17</sup> One of their leaders was Jacky Manuputty, a Protestant priest who returned four months earlier from graduate study at Hartford Seminary in the U.S.; another was Abidin Wakano, a lecturer at the State Islamic Institute. They worked together with a group of young people called “Ambon Bergerak” and some members of the Moluccan Interfaith Institute (Lembaga Antar Iman Maluku, LAIM). Their core group was about ten, each of whom had some ten or fifteen contacts around the city’s major flashpoints. They were on the phone with each other constantly, checking out stories and sending information over Twitter and Facebook and by text messages. When a member of the network in one part of town heard the rumours about the Silo Church being destroyed, he called a member of the network stationed at the church to take a photograph with his phone and circulate it, to prove it was standing undamaged.

They identified influential “strategic partners” in border neighbourhoods and put them in touch with one another to help coordinate the dissemination of information. They were very conscious of the impact national media could have on the way the unrest was being portrayed outside Ambon and designated one person to monitor the reporting and send clarifications as necessary to the relevant journalists. Overwhelmingly, however, their activities focused on collecting and verifying reports of attacks, threats, street blockades, injuries, crowds massing and then trying

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The incumbent *bupati*-elect, a Christian, had been accused two weeks earlier of having an affair with a Muslim woman. Some Muslim groups were protesting that he was morally unfit for the job and threatened to disrupt his installation.

<sup>15</sup> “Polisi Perketat Keamanan Porto-Haria”, *Ambon Ekpres*, 8 September 2011. The conflict, largely over who controls the source of water for the two villages, has been taking place on and off for decades. A “peace agreement” signed on 18 August 2011 in the presence of church and customary leaders as well as security officials has had little impact on resolving the dispute, which has taken the form of stone-throwing, occasional bombing, use of homemade firearms and house-burnings.

<sup>16</sup> “Almarhum Darfin Saiman Terdaftar Sebagai Korban Bentrokan Warga”, *Radar Ambon*, 17 September 2011.

<sup>17</sup> They chose the term because they believed that under the circumstances, stopping the violence required direct, targeted and urgent intervention. More generally, they believe it is a mistake to see peace as something that emerges naturally from a conflict area; the conditions for it have to be deliberately created. Communication to Crisis Group from Jacky Manuputty, 25 September 2011. Local officials also acknowledged the importance of their work. The group had no formal structure but was more an informal network of activists who had worked together in the past.

to defuse the threats. Had it not been for their work, the violence would have been infinitely harder to bring under control.<sup>18</sup> Separately, city officials also worked frantically, on the phones to religious leaders, gang leaders and anyone else with influence, trying to lower tensions.

But one of the biggest casualties of the unrest was the notion that Ambon had fully recovered from the past, because the lasting wounds were on display for all to see.

### III. SPONTANEOUS OR “BY DESIGN”?

By the end of the first week after the violence, more and more people were beginning to ask whether the violence in Ambon in response to Darfin’s death was spontaneous or premeditated, and even if spontaneous, whether there were individuals or groups who stood to benefit from the trouble. Conspiracy theories ranged from the plausible to the ludicrous, but the fact that they were widely believed underscores the prevailing distrust.

#### A. ARGUMENTS FOR SPONTANEITY

No matter how many theories of provocation are in play or how valid or invalid they may be, the city of Ambon was ripe for violence. Since the earlier conflict ended, it has been almost completely segregated into Christian and Muslim communities, and everyone knows where the borders (*perbatasan*) are between residential neighbourhoods. A local journalist took a city map for Crisis Group and coloured in these boundaries, which sometimes divide a street in two. In the entire city, there are only three or four streets that count as neutral because of government offices or military posts. People cross these borders daily, but outside the political elite and activist community, there is visible discomfort in staying too long in an area not one’s own.

The segregation has been compounded by the city’s growth of some 5 per cent per year since 2000, more from immigration than from birth, so that the population in the sub-district where almost half the city’s inhabitants live is more than 1,500 people per square kilometre.<sup>19</sup> With residents packed on top of one another and almost no parks

or recreation places for young people, inter-neighbourhood brawls triggered by the most trivial causes are common.<sup>20</sup>

In fact of all the areas hit by conflict after 1998, including Aceh, Poso, Central and West Kalimantan and North Maluku, Maluku in general and Ambon in particular have been the most violent.<sup>21</sup> The province has experienced 73 incidents of violent intercommunal conflict in 2010 and 36 thus far in 2011, according to a member of an interfaith group.<sup>22</sup> Most of the incidents were in Central Maluku and Ambon.

In this climate, Darfin’s death would have been enough of a trigger to explain the violence without resorting to elaborate conspiracy theories. Such theories quickly emerged, however, for several possible reasons:

- No one could think of a motive for Darfin’s death, other than to stir up trouble. He had no known enemies, and robbers would have taken his motorcycle. If he indeed was murdered, the argument went, it had to be part of a bigger plan.
- Having an outside provocateur steers the debate away from serious introspection within both communities about lingering problems from the earlier conflict. Most community and business leaders as well as elected officials want to project an image of peace in order to boost investment, development and tourism. It may be more satisfying to think of an external cause of violence, because it removes responsibility from local players.
- Finally, some groups are seen as benefiting from violence, regardless of how it began. These include the military, dispossessed members of the political elite and violent jihadis.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid; and Crisis Group interview, four “peace provocateurs”, 14 September 2011.

<sup>19</sup> “Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2010”, Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Ambon, August 2010, p. 6. The city’s population in 1990 was 275,888. After the conflict, with huge numbers fleeing or displaced to other areas, it shrunk to 191,561. As of 2010, it had shot up to 330,355, all packed into a tiny land area. The governor said he thought the population could be approaching half a million. Crisis Group interview, 17 September 2011.

<sup>20</sup> This is true not just for the city of Ambon but for central Maluku more generally, and not all of them are communal – many are intra-Muslim or intra-Christian. These include the feuds between the villages of Hitu Lama and Hitu Mesing; Mamala and Morela; Ulat and Ouw; Sepa and Tamilouw; Kamriang and Seriholo; Kailolo and Pelauw; and many others.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Barron “What causes peace to consolidate? Local politics and ‘post-conflict’ violence in eastern Indonesia”, paper presented at the Indonesia Council Open Conference, 27-28 September 2011, University of Western Australia, Perth. Using data from the World Bank’s Violent Conflict in Indonesia Study (ViCIS) data set, Barron notes that from March 2002 to December 2008, there were 489 incidents of popular justice violence in Ambon, leading to 50 deaths, 534 injuries and 68 damaged buildings. Across all types of violence (including crime), there were 1,400 incidents, 179 deaths, 1,656 injuries and 558 damaged buildings in the same time period.

<sup>22</sup> The data was collected by Lembaga Antar Iman Maluku (LAIM). Crisis Group interview, Ambon, 16 September 2011.

## B. WHO BENEFITS?

Conspiracy theories included suggestions that the violence was designed to force a halt to corruption investigations in Ambon; give a rationale for U.S. counter-terrorism operations in Indonesia; stop the installation of the West Ceram *bupati*; prevent Maluku from hosting a national Quran reading contest in 2012; and bring down President Yudhoyono. While each theory had supporters, none seemed to be widely believed, although some opponents of the governor were trying to push the first, based on investigations by both the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Centre for Reporting and Analysis of Financial Transactions (Pusat Pelaporan dan Analisis Transaksi Keuangan, PPATK) into his wealth.<sup>23</sup> No one seriously believed the popular governor had an interest in provoking a riot, however.

Three other theories seemed to have more currency, though none is supported by hard evidence.

### 1. The police and/or military

At a 15 September meeting between community leaders and the top three security officials from Jakarta – the police chief, the military commander and the coordinating minister for political, security and legal affairs, the bishop of Ambon, P.C. Mandagi, shocked the visitors with his bluntness in suggesting that security forces, particularly the police but also the military, might have deliberately allowed the unrest to spiral out of control so they would continue to have opportunities to sell their protection. “If conflict takes place, there are those who grow lean but many who grow fat”, he said. “If you go to the airport later, you’ll have to pay to be taken there and guarded en route. Going anywhere needs bodyguards. That’s the advantage of conflict”. He added that police intelligence should have anticipated trouble but let it happen so that they could enrich themselves.<sup>24</sup> His accusations came as the media reported that individual officers were charging as much as Rp 1 million (\$114) to provide protection for one truck from the city to the airport.<sup>25</sup>

A more complex theory posits the Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) as culprit, with the aim of keeping Maluku under military control after Governor Ralalahu, a former army officer, finishes his second five-year term in 2013. Throughout late August and early September 2011, the theory goes, there was a flurry of political activity by possible candidates, giving speeches and public interviews, conducting polls and generally assessing the playing field. The potential candidates included the current deputy governor, Said Assegaf, said to be supported by some of the Islamic parties; Abdullah Tuasikal, *bupati* of Central Maluku; Jopie Papilaya, a former mayor of Ambon; Alex Litaay, a member of the national parliament; and Edison Betaubun, deputy head of the Maluku provincial legislature.

All of the above are civilians. The one person with a military background who expressed an interest in standing for election and came to test the waters was Lt. General (ret.) Nono Sampono, a former Marine, born in Madura of Moluccan extraction, who had come to public attention during the earlier conflict.<sup>26</sup> His opinion poll numbers were poor, and a few days before the riot erupted, he announced that he was contesting the Jakarta governorship instead. This left no one with a military background as a plausible candidate, potentially threatening lucrative military interests, including in illegal logging and fishing. Having unrest flare again in Ambon, according to this theory, was a good way to persuade the public that a military man was needed at the helm.

Proponents pointed out that even after the clashes erupted at 2pm following Darfin’s burial, the army made no effort to secure the border between Batu Merah and Mardika, even though it had a post nearby. This had been one of the flashpoints in the past and was almost certain to blow – as it did that Sunday night. Like the bishop, they wondered why no preventive action was taken and pointed to all the ways that the military benefited from the earlier conflict, including in terms of protection fees.<sup>27</sup>

### 2. The dispossessed elite

The second theory was that a dispossessed elite wanted to use the unrest to return to power. From the early 1990s until the advent of direct elections for local officials in 2005, the Muslim political elite in Ambon had come from

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<sup>23</sup> The governor was named in the local and national media in late July and early August 2011 as one of several provincial politicians whose bank accounts were under investigation by the PPATK for being larger than their profiles warranted. See “Ralalahu Dalam Pusaran Rekening Gendut”, *Ambon Ekspres*, 9 August 2011; and “Feeding at the Regional Trough”, *Tempo*, (English edition), July 27-2 August 2011. He was asked to provide clarification to the Anti-Corruption Commission on a separate matter related to his personal wealth in October 2010.

<sup>24</sup> “Jaringan Intelijen Lemah Antisipasi Rusuh”, *Suara Maluku*, 18 September 2011.

<sup>25</sup> “Manfaatkan Kondisi, Oknum Cari Untung”, *Ambon Ekspres*, 16 September 2011.

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<sup>26</sup> Together with General Suaedi Marasabessy, he had been part of the “special team” (*tim khusus*) of native Moluccans sent by then armed forces commander Wiranto to Ambon in March 1999. His father was from Maluku Tenggara Barat; his half-brother is Ongen Sangaji, a reformed gang member who now heads the Jakarta branch of Wiranto’s Hanura party.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview in Kebon Cengkeh, Ambon, 16 September 2011.

the Hatuhaha federation on Haruku island consisting of five Muslim villages – Pellauw, Ori, Kailolo, Rohomoni and Kabauw, and one Christian, Hulaliu – all of which share a common language. This group produced the former governor of Maluku province, Saleh Latuconsina; the former deputy governor, Mehmet Latuconsina; the *bupati* of Central Maluku, Abdullah Tuasikal; the former Ambon mayor, Olivia Latuconsina; the head of the provincial development board, Zidik Sangaji; and the current vice mayor of Ambon, Sam Latuconsina. It also includes a gang leader, Sulaiman Latupono, and Maman Latuconsina, a former mosque youth leader who controls the vendor association in Pasar Mardika, one of the main markets in Ambon.

This group traditionally had better access to education and influence than other Muslim groups and so was in a position to rise to power when Suharto started reaching out to political Islam in the late 1980s. As its members consolidated power in Ambon and Central Maluku, antipathy towards them rose in both the Christian and Muslim communities.

Better access to education for all and the advent of direct elections produced a strong anti-Hatuhaha movement within the Muslim community, with a base in East and West Ceram. One representative of this group is Fathani Sohilaaw from East Ceram, a politician from the Golkar party who now heads the Maluku provincial legislature. The decline of the Hatuhaha elite was brought into sharp focus with the 2008 gubernatorial election that Karel Ralalahu and his running mate won with more than 60 per cent of the vote against two Hatuhaha opponents: Abdullah Tuasikal (26 per cent), and Mehmet Latuconsina (6 per cent).

Ambon and Central Maluku are the last bastions of Hatuhaha influence. Some in the group want to regain lost status. One way to do this, the theory argues, is by playing the Islamic card, trying to generate sympathies among fellow Muslims by focusing on Christians as the common enemy. A Muslim source said that in his neighbourhood, near the State Islamic Institute, all the rumours about Governor Ralalahu fomenting the riots to divert attention from corruption are coming from the Hatuhaha elite. Rumours about Christians murdering Darfin and provoking a riot would fit into this framework.

While the loss of influence of the Hatuhaha faction and the rise of a new elite from Ceram are established facts, it is a big leap from political setbacks to provocation. One of the biggest holes in this theory is the tireless effort made by Vice Mayor Sam Latuconsina to try and stop the violence from spreading.

### 3. Violent jihadis

The third major group that could benefit from violence in Ambon is the much weakened Indonesian jihadi network, on the theory that an outbreak of communal violence might provide renewed motivation and sense of purpose. The first conflict was the most effective recruiting mechanism that groups like Jemaah Islamiyah ever had. A faction of Darul Islam, the Abu Bakar Battalion, emerged in 1999 just to fight in Ambon, and the charity KOMPAK developed its own fighting force to defend the Muslim community there.<sup>28</sup> In July 2004, KOMPAK took advantage of a flare-up in violence in Ambon the previous April to hold a military training course in West Ceram; this led directly to what was supposed to be an attack on a Christian village in May 2005 but ended with an assault on the Brimob post guarding it, killing five police and their cook.<sup>29</sup>

While the masterminds of that operation are either in prison or dead, several participants have been released and are believed to have been in Ambon when the trouble broke out. They are unlikely to have had a role in provoking the outbreak but would certainly have sought to exploit it.<sup>30</sup> This was shown by a number of messages that appeared on radical websites afterwards. One read:

Our forces are concentrated at three points, Batu Merah, Waringin and around Ahuru. We are undertaking preparations under very constrained conditions. We only have arrows, long knives and Molotov cocktails, even those in limited quantity. May Allah send any mujahidin fully equipped with weapons. May Ambon become a battlefield until the Islamic religion can be implemented in full. We in Ambon ask your assistance with sincere prayers, show proof of your love of Islam

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<sup>28</sup> For an earlier analysis of the role of the Ambon conflict in jihadi recruitment, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°92, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing*, 22 February 2005.

<sup>29</sup> For a description of this report and those involved, see Crisis Group Report, *Weakening Indonesia's Mujahidin Networks*, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> One man in particular who was reported to be mobilising potential fighters on 11 September 2011 was Nazaruddin Mochtar alias Harun. Originally from Cilacap, Java, he had fought in Ambon and Poso, then attached himself to the Ring Banten faction of Darul Islam. He was reportedly responsible for the radicalisation of Heri Golun, the suicide bomber in the 2004 Australian embassy bombing. Earlier that year, he was teaching bomb-making in Cimanggis, outside Jakarta, but fled to Ambon in June 2004 when the others connected to that training were arrested. He was arrested on 19 May 2005 in Namlea, Buru for having prior knowledge of 16 May 2005 attack in Loki, West Ceram, Maluku. He was sentenced to nine years in prison on 13 February 2006, but with regular remissions, he was released in late April 2011 from Porong prison near Surabaya, East Java. He reportedly returned to Ambon immediately thereafter.

and your fellow Muslims. God willing we will try to continue the jihad.<sup>31</sup>

Websites such as [www.voa-islam.com](http://www.voa-islam.com) circulated photographs of Darfin's body, showing the wounds on his back, and the destruction of Muslim houses in Waringin, with headlines such as "A Glimpse of the Ruins of a Muslim Neighbourhood in Ambon after the 9/11 Crusader Attack".<sup>32</sup>

The central government acted quickly to try and stop an influx of would-be mujahidin by conducting searches of ships and planes leaving from Java and of ships arriving at the harbour in Ambon. Using Emergency Law No. 12/1951, which bans the possession, transport and distribution of sharp weapons, firearms and explosives, they stopped, questioned and sometimes detained Ambon-bound passengers. By 15 September, East Java police had detained 25 people with a total of 105 weapons.<sup>33</sup> Intelligence efforts by the police counter-terrorism unit, Detachment 88, were also stepped up. On 20 September, the unit arrested at the Ambon airport three members of Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), the radical organisation set up by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in 2008, who were coming in on a Sriwijaya Air flight.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. The bomb in Solo

The dangers of leaving the radicals to fan the flames of communal tensions unchecked were dramatically illustrated by the suicide bombing of the Bethel Church in Solo, Central Java on 25 September 2011. Only the bomber, a 31-year-old native of Cirebon, West Java named Pino Damayanto alias Ahmed Yosefa Hayat, was killed, but several parishioners were seriously injured. If Hayat had arrived a little earlier or chosen a different entrance to the church, the casualty toll could have been much higher. The link to Ambon was explained in a statement apparently issued by Hayat's network on 28 September that appeared on the radical website, Forum Islam al-Busyro:

To the Oppressor Government of Indonesia:

We would like to convey the following:

When you allow our brothers in Ambon to be massacred and their homes burned in the past and again just recently; when you imprison and murder our brothers who are trying to shake the evil government and your apostate system in this country; when you support America and its allies in a new crusade against mujahidin around the world; when your treachery toward Muslims becomes ever greater, we are coming with a little explosion to shake up your apostate throne.....

To defend our brothers massacred in Ambon, our brothers whom you have had killed and arrested by Detachment 88 and imprisoned only because they believe in the oneness of Allah and reject your apostate government; to show you that we will never retreat, we will continue to terrorise you as long as we do not feel safe in upholding the law of Allah in this country, as long as Muslims experience oppression by your evil system and as long as you remain an ally of the Crusader America ...

To show you that the value of a Muslim life is very expensive, to show our friends whose spirit has weakened that you are easy to attack, and that you in fact are very brittle..... this is our brother Ahmad Yosepa Hayat who sacrificed his life for the above mission. May Allah receive him as a martyr.....<sup>35</sup>

Hayat was part of an extremist group in Cirebon responsible for the suicide bombing of a mosque in the police station there on 15 April 2011; since late 2009, it has worked closely with an anti-vice group in Solo called Tim Hisbah.<sup>36</sup> Several members of the network, now the target of an intensive police manhunt, had experience fighting in Ambon in the earlier conflict, and the Solo bombing may not be their last effort, particularly as they are said to have prepared several other bombs for future use.<sup>37</sup>

If the Ambon unrest provided the rationale for the Solo bombing, Solo in turn has generated deep concerns among Christians, particularly in eastern Indonesia, that a new

<sup>31</sup> This is an extract of a longer message that appeared on [www.facebook.com/groups/211142722278097/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/211142722278097/) and <http://ghur4ba.blogspot.com/2011/09/perkembangan-jihad-ambon.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Melongok Puing-Puing Kampung Islam Ambon Pasca Serbuan Salibis 9/11", [www.voa-islam.com](http://www.voa-islam.com), 22 September 2011.

<sup>33</sup> "Polisi Sita Ratusan Senjata tajam Pendatang Ambon", *Suara Maluku*, 16 September 2011.

<sup>34</sup> They were Bagas Eko, originally from Sumenep, Madura; Didin Rohidin, from Sumedang, West Java; and Kahyari, from Garut, West Java. JAT later acknowledged Bagas as a member of JAT-Solo but denied knowledge of the other two. See "JAT Akui Anggotanya Ditangkap Densus", [www.muslimdaily.net](http://www.muslimdaily.net), 23 September 2011.

<sup>35</sup> The statement was reposted on several other radical sites, including <http://ghur4ba.blogspot.com/2011/09/1-seri-dukungan-bom-solo-pernyataan.html>.

<sup>36</sup> The Cirebon-Tim Hisbah network includes men who were activists and sympathisers of JAT, but it is not a JAT cell. The biggest ideological influences on the group are said to be Aman Abdurrahman, convicted of terrorism for the second time in 2010, and Halawi Makmun, a former JAT member who left the organisation. Hayat himself moved to Solo after the Cirebon mosque bombing.

<sup>37</sup> "Tujuh Bom Siap Meledak", *Indopos*, 28 September 2011.



round of targeting may be in the works. It was the first round of conflict in Ambon, after all, that led to a wave of attacks against pastors and churches by Jemaah Islamiyah, then the largest jihadi organisation in the country.<sup>38</sup> On 30 September, a demonstration in Manok-wari, West Papua by a group calling itself the Christian Solidarity Forum of Manokwari, called on the government to be firmer in its handling of terrorists.<sup>39</sup>

Two days of unrest in Ambon have thus produced a rise in communal tensions nationally that will only increase unless the issue gets serious and sustained attention at both national and local levels – especially as extremist groups are likely to continue to exploit it.

#### IV. NEXT STEPS

Officials at central, provincial and city levels understand how dangerous the current situation is and how critical it is to move quickly and visibly to address the causes and consequences of the unrest. The problem is that no solution is without potential pitfalls. Some of the measures needed are as follows:

**A professional autopsy to determine conclusively how Darfin died.** Police announced on 15 September that they were prepared to conduct an autopsy “if the cause was still in doubt”, which it is.<sup>40</sup> The family is willing to have his body exhumed in the interests of finding the truth, but only if an independent doctor is involved.<sup>41</sup> Local officials want to know the real cause of death, but they are concerned about the consequences: if an autopsy shows it was an accident, will the Muslim community accept the findings, and what happens if they do not, particularly when the exhumation itself is religiously problematic to begin with? If it shows he was murdered, will that inflame sentiments further? And if it is inconclusive, could that make things worse? These issues can be addressed by full transparency in the selection of the forensic team, good preparation and communication with the family and community leaders and discussion beforehand on the possible results. As long as each community clings to mutually exclusive explanations of Darfin’s death, however, tension and suspicion will continue.

**Public release of the findings of the investigation team sent to Ambon by the criminal investigation service of national police headquarters on 15 September.** Even if the investigation is still underway, the government needs to find a way of giving regular progress reports to the public to indicate that all angles are being thoroughly explored. Again, police should consult with community leaders about how to convey the findings in a way that reduces rather than exacerbates tensions.

**A commission to conduct an independent investigation into who fired bullets into the crowd and why.** The most likely explanation for the shots is panicky members of the army or Brimob, but if so, it raises the question why existing procedures for handling civil unrest were not followed and why live bullets were used instead of tear gas or a water cannon that in a place with Ambon’s history should be in plentiful supply. One reason proffered by officials is that the violence erupted too quickly, but if it took hours for police to arrive at the scene, there was enough time to prepare non-lethal equipment. The independent commission needs to gather all amateur videos, of which there are hundreds taken on mobile phones, and interview witnesses. If others were involved in the shooting, they need to be identified and apprehended. A member of the national parliament from Ambon, Edison Betaubun, has called for an investigation into the shootings, but there has been surprisingly little focus on this aspect of the violence.<sup>42</sup>

**Serious attention to the shortcomings of the local police.** They failed at every stage of the unrest, almost certainly more through insensitivity and incompetence than any deliberate effort to worsen the situation. The performance of the provincial and municipal police chiefs are appropriately under review by the national police commander, but concrete lessons need to be learned and reforms undertaken immediately.<sup>43</sup> The original death, given the circumstances, should have been thoroughly investigated before the police jumped to the conclusion – publicly announced through the national police spokesman in Jakarta – that it was an accident. The family’s concerns should have been heeded. Intelligence (and basic common sense) should have predicted possible violence and the need for security precautions in sensitive border areas.

The deployments elsewhere in Maluku for whatever reason should not have left the city unprotected – or perhaps the area just needs more police than it currently has, given the level of violence. Repeated efforts of the police to blame everything on provocative text messages suggest a simplistic view of a very complex situation, as if catch-

<sup>38</sup> See Crisis Group Asia Report N°43, *Indonesia Backgrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, 11 December 2002 for a description of the 2000 Christmas Eve bombing campaign against churches in eleven cities.

<sup>39</sup> “Warga Manokwari Tuntut Pemerintah Serius Tangani Teroris”, 30 September 2011.

<sup>40</sup> “Polisi Akan Otopsi Jenazah Tukang Ojek di Ambon”, news.okezone.com, 15 September 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interview, 17 September 2011.

<sup>42</sup> “Polisi Harus Ungkap Pelaku Penembakan Ambon”, *Ambon Ekspres*, 16 September 2011.

<sup>43</sup> “Kapolri Evaluasi Kapokda dan Kapolres”, *Radarm Ambon*, 17 September 2011.

ing one individual sending a tendentious message would somehow resolve a decade of accumulating tension and suspicion. Given the already low credibility of the police, it should have been more important than ever to respond publicly to this outbreak in a measured and sensitive fashion. Clearly intensive retraining in all basic policing skills is in order, and it may take new leadership for that to happen – or for the public to accept that genuine reform is underway.

**Quick and effective rebuilding of damaged buildings.**

Local officials recognise the need for this, because burned out homes especially constitute a visible, festering source of resentment. The Christian motorcycle base that was the first site burned by the mourners coming out of the cemetery was rebuilt within days, but that was just a zinc shelter. Photographs are circulating on radical websites of the slightly singed door of the mosque in Waringin; this should have priority for replacement. It is more difficult to rebuild homes when decisions have to be made about size, quality and sequence of construction. Some of those living in Waringin were already complaining that the houses built after the last round of violence were shoddy and were demanding compensation; it may be harder to satisfy them this time round.<sup>44</sup>

**Sustained attention to the displaced in a clean and transparent fashion.**

Even as the violence was subsiding, officials and non-governmental groups were providing the displaced with food and other basic needs, but the numbers were rising. On 14 September, the social affairs office for the city of Ambon said the number of displaced was 4,298, but three days later, estimates had risen to 7,157. While this could well be due to more accurate counting as additional information became available, it is also true that providing assistance to the displaced has been a major source of corruption in the past. There needs to be strict oversight of assistance programs.

**Support for the “peace provocateurs”.** Donors should find ways to support and strengthen this informal network, since the potential for violence in Ambon remains high.

**Ongoing efforts to prevent the unrest in Ambon from being exploited by extremist groups.**

The communication and information ministry has begun a program to block radical websites – 300 sites have been blocked in 2011 – but given the ease with which new ones can be set up, it ultimately may be as futile a gesture as publishing books with “moderate” interpretations of jihad.<sup>45</sup> The government instead should be aggressively applying provisions in the Criminal Code on incitement to individuals

who through whatever media are deliberately trying to inflame communal hatred.

All these are steps to be taken in the immediate aftermath of the unrest, but there are clearly longer-term problems caused by fear, suspicion and segregation. Some thrice-displaced Muslim families in Waringin were calling for a “Berlin Wall” to be built separating their houses from Christians so they would be safer from arson attacks.<sup>46</sup> Post-conflict reconciliation efforts may have worked at the elite level, but they have failed abysmally at the grassroots. Efforts to reduce segregation in the school system might be one way to begin.

Governor Ralahalu believes that one solution is to move the administrative capital of Maluku province from Ambon to Masohi, on the island of Ceram, to ease overcrowding and reduce the potential for violence – and he hopes to accomplish this before he leaves office in 2013.<sup>47</sup> The proposal may well have merits on its own terms, but it will not directly address the communal mistrust.

The most difficult task ahead is to find ways of easing social divisions by finding projects that will include youths of both communities, especially the “border areas”, in undertakings of mutual benefit that have nothing to do with religion: joint computer literacy classes, environmental action clubs and so on. Improving law enforcement in Ambon may be difficult, but breaking down communal barriers is both harder and even more urgent.

**Jakarta/Brussels, 4 October 2011**

<sup>44</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ambon, 14 September 2011.

<sup>45</sup> “Tifatul Sudah Blokir 300 Situs Radikal”, [www.nasional.vivanews.com](http://www.nasional.vivanews.com), 29 September 2011.

<sup>46</sup> “Minta Perlengkapan Masak, Rumah Tipe 36, Hingga ‘Tembok Berlin’”, *Ambon Ekspres*, 16 September 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interview, 17 September 2011.

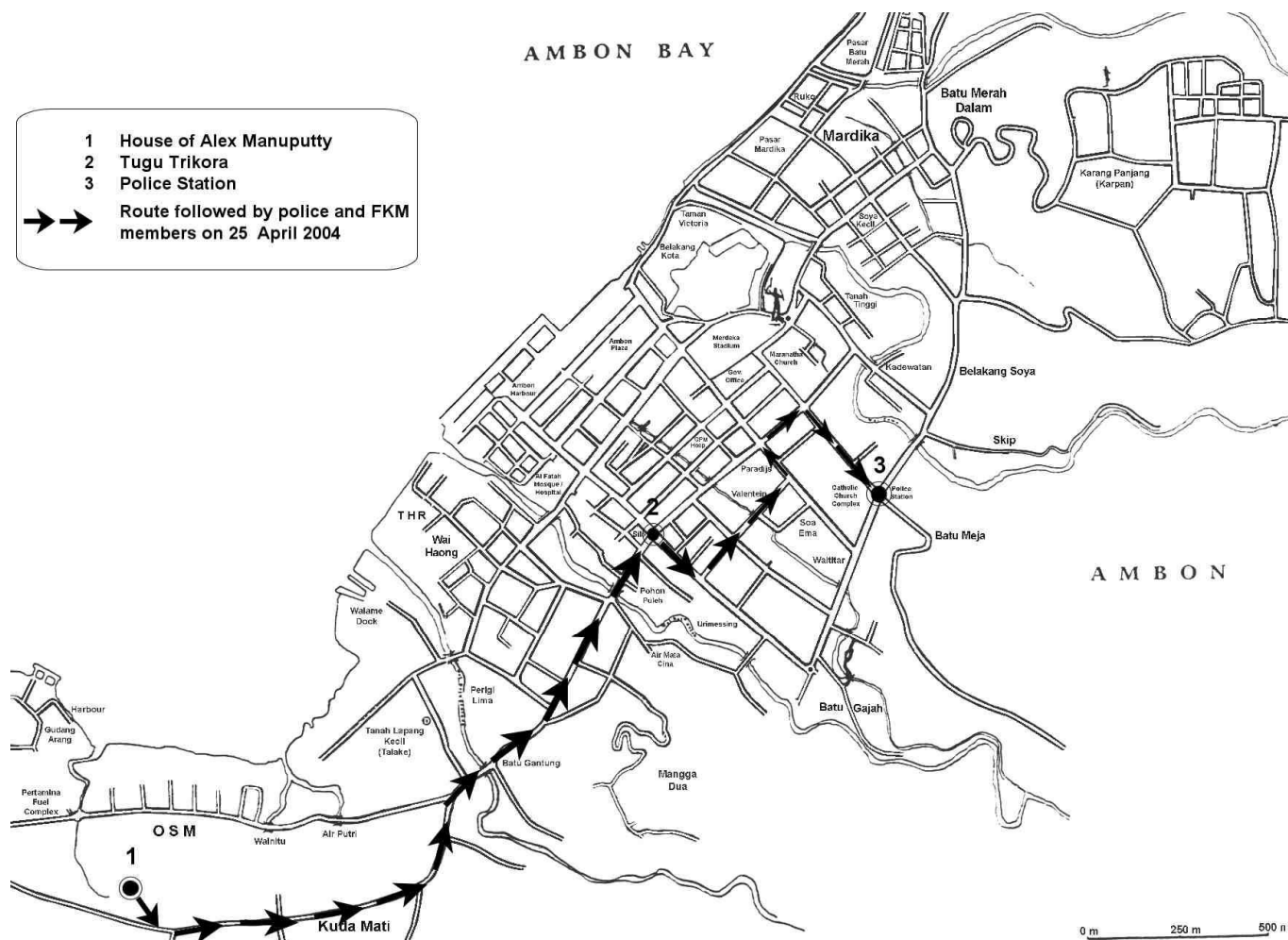
## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF INDONESIA



## APPENDIX B

### MAP OF AMBON



## APPENDIX C

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in fourteen additional locations (Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Bujumbura, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo and Seoul). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz-

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**October 2011**

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