

FACT SHEET 11

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By UNTAET Press Office

REFUGEES

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNTAET have since October 1999 **assisted more than 193,000 East Timorese** in voluntary returning from West Timor. More than 50,000 refugees are still living there.
- Some **3,200 East Timorese refugees returned** during the month of **October 2001**. This is the highest number to have returned in a single month since March 2000 when 9,485 returned. This **significant increase** may be attributed to the **growing confidence** of the refugees with the situation in East Timor, especially since the **successful and peaceful 30 August elections**.
- **Many more are expected to return after harvesting their crops in late March and another wave is expected after the 14 April presidential election**. A proactive approach by the Government of Indonesia together with the reconciliation process driven by the East Timorese leadership has added further impetus to encouraging refugees to return.
- The UNHCR established a presence in East Timor in May 1999 at the request of the UN Secretary-General and the Government of Indonesia to provide protection to internally displaced persons. Following the violence surrounding the August 1999 ballot, UNHCR's main focus in East Timor shifted to facilitating the voluntary repatriation of refugees to East Timor under the protection of various reconciliation and reintegration measures.
- UNHCR currently encourages voluntary repatriation through mass information campaigns, **"go-and-see visits"** to East Timor by representatives of the refugees and border meetings between relatives in East and West Timor.
- The UNHCR also informs the refugees in West Timor on the situation and developments in East Timor through a **letter-photo campaign** and the distribution of **audio-visual productions**. Other mass information activities include the supporting of cultural events such as theatre performances, music and sports competitions to further reconciliation and community building.
- UNHCR's protection activities within East Timor include the preparation of communities for the reception of returnees, ensuring that the actual repatriation movements take place in safety and dignity, and monitoring the well being and safety of returnees once they have been re-integrated into their communities. The UNHCR also has a programme specifically aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals such as unaccompanied children, women victims of sexual and domestic violence and people who have been traumatized by the violence following the ballot in 1999.



- As part of the Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs' emergency response to the refugee crisis, the UNHCR has provided **shelter assistance** to meet the needs of East Timorese who lost their homes during the destruction of 1999. This assistance has included the delivery of some **56,000 metric tonnes of construction materials** that have benefited some **35,000 families**.
- The UNHCR has also funded some **250 Quick Impact Projects** totalling some US\$ 756,555 that assist **20,000 families** by supporting small-scale and community-based initiatives. These projects are identified by the East Timorese themselves to address specific community needs and bridge the gap between short-term humanitarian assistance and longer-term development programmes.
- UNHCR's operations have been extended until June 2002.
- **The International Organization for Migration (IOM)** has been operating in East Timor since October 1999, during which time it has directly **assisted over 136,000 East Timorese** in returning to their communities.
- In the last 22 months, over **40,000 people** have been brought from West Timor to East Timor on boats chartered by the IOM as part of its returnee program. More than **77,000 refugees** have been transported **overland** and more than **19,000** refugees have been returned **by air**.
- The IOM has also carried out a wide range of activities to stabilize communities that receive refugees, most often through emergency infrastructure rehabilitation projects. These include the **IOM's Community Assistance Project (CAPS)**, which, after assessments in coordination with local communities, have provided communities with technical, material, financial and management resources to carry out projects. Through 82 different CAPS projects, IOM has rebuilt schools, markets and clinics, repaired roads, bridges and community drainage systems, and rehabilitated community water supply systems.
- In December 2000, the IOM launched a **US\$ 3 million FALINTIL Reinsertion Assistance Program (FRAP)** to reinsert a total of 1,321 ex-combatants into productive civilian life in their home communities. The objective of the program is to provide assistance to former FALINTIL combatants to begin economic activities as they return to civilian life. This assistance includes counselling, providing information about employment opportunities and vocational training, and initial financial assistance to beneficiaries to begin self-sustaining, income-generating activity.
- The IOM's operations are spread throughout **nine districts** in East Timor, allowing IOM to operate in a **decentralised** manner. In addition to its central office in Dili, there are eight sub-offices located in Aileu, Baucau, Batugade, Ermera, Suai, Oecussi, Viqueque, and Lautem.

