

No peace without justice in East Timor

Lindsay Murdoch – *The Age* - 4 April 2009

<https://www.theage.com.au/world/no-peace-without-justice-in-east-timor-20090404-ge7rz8.html>

WE CONFRONTED the alleged mass killer as his men were hosing blood off his balcony. Leoneto Martins angrily denied that any massacre had taken place in the East Timorese town where he was the Indonesian-appointed mayor.

Five people had died in clashes between rival groups, he said, before suggesting it might not be safe for myself and three other journalists to remain any longer in Liquica, a seaside town of 55,000 people 30 kilometres west of the capital, Dili.

We suspected Martins was lying.

Shops and markets were closed and the usually busy streets were largely deserted, except for groups of menacing-looking men wearing bandannas and ribbons in the red and white of the Indonesian flag.

Wide-eyed, trembling terror showing in the faces of women searching for family members confirmed something terrible had happened here.

But we didn't know on that stifling hot April morning the extent and brutality of the violence at the town's quaint Sao Joao Brito Church, the first of a series of massacres and attacks across East Timor that left about 1500 people dead and thousands more raped, maimed and wounded.

Worshippers in many Catholic churches across Australia will be asked to observe a minute's silence this weekend to mark the 10th anniversary on Monday of what the world came to know as the Liquica massacre.

Eurico Guterres, one of its alleged organisers, will spend the anniversary campaigning across the border in Indonesian West Timor to be elected a member of Indonesia's national parliament.

Former general Wiranto, the man who was in charge of the military that inflicted terror across East Timor that year, will be campaigning to be elected Indonesia's next president.

But in East Timor, 10 years has not dimmed the memories or fervour.

"When I speak with the victims, the one thing they ask me is, 'When will there be justice?'" says Christina Carrascalao, who works to help improve the lives of the survivors, many of them poor, illiterate farmers. "I tell them I can't answer that."

The then church priest in Liquica, Rafael dos Santos, has retold the story of the massacre many times, the horror of it etched in his memory.

"At first the police shot tear gas into the church. Then they fired periodically into the air. Brimob members (riot police) fired shots in the air. Brimob members shot at people in the church. The Brimob shooting into the air gave a chance for the Besi Merah Putih (pro-Indonesian militia) to enter the church grounds, then the BMP began to massacre the people with arrows and spears. The people hit by the tear gas ran outside with their eyes closed, then the BMP hacked them. The name of this is murder."

Father Rafael was hustled away at gunpoint by an Indonesian soldier as people inside his house tried to grab his robes, touching them and shouting, "We are dying. We are dying."

Attackers shot dead people cowering in the priest's bedroom. When several teenagers hid in the crawl space between the ceiling and the zinc roof, troops climbed on the roof and shot downwards.

Witnesses said the killing continued as machete-swinging militiamen chased people running from the church to Martins' house, 100 metres away. But there was no sanctuary there.

Numerous inquiries and investigations have put the Liquica death toll at between 30 and 100.

The most commonly accepted figure is 86, the worst massacre in East Timor since the indiscriminate killing at Dili's Santa Cruz cemetery in 1991.

But only low to mid-level militiamen have been convicted over the massacre or any of the other atrocities committed in East Timor in 1999, with higher ranking personnel, including Indonesian military and police officers, beyond reach in Indonesia.

Martins was among 19 accused who stood trial for crimes against humanity at a tribunal in Jakarta that human rights groups described as a sham. All were eventually acquitted.

Guterres served two years of a 10-year sentence for crimes against humanity before being acquitted on appeal in 2008.

East Timor's leaders Jose Ramos Horta, a 1996 Nobel laureate, and Xanana Gusmao, a former freedom fighter, oppose calls for an international war crimes tribunal, saying reconciliation is more important than new trials and warning of a possible backlash within elements of the Indonesian military and destabilisation of their country's fledgling democracy.

Gusmao is scheduled to go to the church this weekend to mark the anniversary. He will not receive the hero's welcome he did in 1999 when he returned to East Timor after spending six years in a Jakarta jail.

Clinton Fernandes, a former Australian intelligence officer who was reporting on East Timor in 1999, says most East Timorese cannot see why they should be punished for petty crimes, such as stealing a chicken, when people responsible for mass murder go unpunished.

"The rule of law today cannot succeed amid a culture of impunity for horrific crimes," says Fernandes, who now lectures at the University of NSW. He says the Liquica massacre particularly shocked the world because of the clear involvement of Indonesia's powerful

military in escalating violence against pro-independence supporters, which was being denied at the time by the then Indonesian and Australian governments.

Fernandes says the massacre also violated the sanctity of the church, where an estimated 2000 people had fled to escape violence

"There is no statute of limitations for serious crimes such as murder, torture and sexual slavery," he says.

"With time and pressure, there will be an international tribunal. It is a cause worth pursuing and the only way ahead."

Christina Carrascalao says the survivors' hunger for justice will not diminish over the passing years.

"They see that their leaders have opted for reconciliation over justice. They understand the need for reconciliation, but at the same time they believe there must be justice if what happened is not to happen again," Carrascalao says.

"Many of the victims I meet have severe psychological problems ... they are poor villagers who have received little help."

Carrascalao says survivors who have lost family members often lapse into deep depression.

"But I find those with wound marks on their bodies often have even more serious problems ... they find it hard to integrate into society ... I find many of them drunk and they cannot hold down jobs or feed their families."

Carrascalao says only five bodies were returned to their families after the massacre.

"Most of the families of survivors don't know where their loved ones are buried. That makes it very hard for them," she says.

Witnesses say that the bodies were dumped on trucks and taken from Liquica almost immediately after the massacre.

When Father Rafael returned to the church after four hours, he found no bodies, just blood and parts of a brain.

A few days later, as news of the massacre was reverberating around the world, the military arrived at the church unannounced, mopped up the blood and patched the bullet holes in an apparent attempt to cover up what had happened.

Carrascalao, who earns a meagre salary working in the office of President Ramos Horta, buys what she can for survivors when they are hungry.

She provided materials to build cemetery memorials "so the families feel there is some sort of honour, some sort of dignity given back to the victims who were killed only because they supported independence from Indonesia."

Christina Carrascalao, too, knows suffering.

ELEVEN days after the Liquica massacre, Eurico Guterres stood in front of a crowd of pro-Indonesian militia in Dili and called members of her family "traitors" and enemies and urged attacks on them.

Carrascalao, then 20, and her father Manuel, a pro-independence leader and respected figure in one of Dili's most influential families, learned soon after, as they were driving to Dili's airport, that armed militia were gathering at their house in central Dili.

Carrascalao received a call from her 18-year-old brother, Manelito, who told her that Guterres had stormed the house with other militiamen and was holding a gun at his head.

"My brother told me that Eurico was asking where my father was. My brother replied he was out," Carrascalao says.

"Eurico then asked, 'Where's Chris?'" she says.

"My brother replied, 'Out.'"

Carrascalao says Manelito then told her: "Don't come home. He will kill you."

After the call, Mr Carrascalao and Christina hurried to see Suhartono Suratman, the then Indonesian military commander in East Timor, and urged him to prevent an attack on the family. Colonel Suratman had ignored the request.

Mr Carrascalao and Christina then tried to reach the house but were stopped by armed Indonesian police nearby, who refused their pleas to go to the house to protect Manelito and about 100 supporters of independence who had sought refuge there, half of them survivors of the Liquica massacre.

Guterres was said to have led minutes later a frenzied attack on people in the house, killing Manelito and at least 11 others and wounding many more.

The United Nations Serious Crimes Unit in Dili, which investigated the attack, said in court-filed documents that militiamen and Indonesian soldiers took part in the killings.

A campaign of terror targeting independence supporters continued across the half-island nation for months.

What the Indonesian organisers did not count on is the bravery of the long suffering East Timorese, who defied the intimidation and voted overwhelmingly in a United Nations referendum in August that year to break from Jakarta's rule and become the world's newest nation.

"Ten years later we want to get on with our lives but it's difficult when there hasn't been justice for what happened," Christina Carrascalao says.

Lindsay Murdoch is Darwin correspondent.