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Violence has been far worse than in East Timor

By Jakarta correspondent Richard Galpin

Indonesia's respected national human rights commission has joined mounting calls for an international peace keeping force to be sent to the Moluccan Islands.

It's the first time a state run organisation has called directly for foreign intervention in the region, where continuing fighting between the Christian and Muslim communities has left around 4,000 people dead.

The commission, which reports directly to the president, said the United Nations peacekeeping force should be made up of civilian police, preferably from Indonesia's South East Asian neighbours.

A senior official from the commission said the force should help mediate a cease fire.

The human rights commission bluntly says all this is necessary because the government has failed to halt the bloodshed.

This is a very significant move as the issue of foreign intervention is highly sensitive.

“How many more thousands must die ... before the nation takes a decisive step to end the violence”

Jakarta Post editorial



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Timor

Indonesia is still smarting from the humiliation caused by the loss of East Timor last year, in which the international community played a pivotal role, sending a large contingent of troops to stop the blood shed there.

The level of violence in the Moluccas is even worse than in East Timor last year and the government seems powerless to stop it, with even the military and police taking sides in the conflict.

Even though it's finally imposed a State of Emergency across the region, the fighting is continuing.

The most recent attacks have been near the city of Ambon, where Muslim fighters have been destroying Christian villages, forcing thousands to hide in the jungle.

But so far the government has ruled out foreign intervention.

Already weakened by a series of other crisis, it could cause the collapse of president Wahid's administration.



Security forces have been unable to stop the bloodshed

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