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PAGE 01 STATE 114159 181231Z
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FOLLOWING JAKARTA 3005 DATED 18 JUNE 99, SENT ACTION
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ROME FOR VATICAN
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/04
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, PINR, MOPS, UN, ID
SUBJECT: EAST TIMOR: A SCORCHED EARTH POLICY
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 114159 181231Z

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY POLCOUNS EDMUND MCWILLIAMS; REASON 1.5(D).

SUMMARY

2. (C) SUMMARY. BASED ON REPORTS FROM UNAMET, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] AND VISITING POLOFF'S DIRECT
OBSERVATIONS, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE INDONESIAN MILITARY AND PRO-

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CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 17 JUN 2024
DATE/CASE ID: 16 JUL 2004 200300722

INTEGRATION MILITIAS, WORKING TOGETHER CLOSELY, ARE CARRYING OUT A SCORCHED EARTH POLICY IN THE DISTRICT OF LIQUICA AND ITS ENVIRONS. AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES DISPLACED AS A RESULT, THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM IS DISEASE. RESIDENTS OF THIS AREA REMAIN TOO FRIGHTENED TO SPEAK WITH FOREIGNERS. BASED ON HIS OWN DIRECT OBSERVATIONS, THE UNAMET CHIEF HAS MADE HIS MOST DIRECT ALLEGATIONS TO DATE OF TNI LINKS TO MILITIA ACTIVITIES, EVEN SPECIFYING DESIGNATIONS OF THE UNITS INVOLVED. END SUMMARY.

CLIMATE OF FEAR PERSISTS IN LIQUICA

3. (C) POLOFF VISITED LIQUICA AND MAUBARA ON JUNE 16. AT THE TOWN'S WESTERN APPROACH, SOME 40 TO 50 BESI MERAH-PUTIH MILITIA WERE IN FORMATION, SALUTING THE INDONESIAN FLAG. AT THE CHURCH COMPOUND IN LIQUICA, SITE OF THE KILLINGS IN APRIL, THE HOUSE OF THE PASTOR WAS ABANDONED (HE REMAINS IN DILI DUE TO FEARS FOR HIS SECURITY). ANOTHER PRIEST WHO WAS STILL IN THE HOUSE IN EARLY JUNE, PROTECTED BY AN ARMY OF CHILDREN, IS NO LONGER PRESENT. [REDACTED] EXPLAINED THAT THE GROUP OF MOSTLY WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OLD MEN GATHERED IN THE CHURCHYARD INCLUDED MANY DISPLACED. SHE QUICKLY MOVED AWAY, HOWEVER, OBVIOUSLY

B1

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 114159 181231Z
UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT SPEAKING TO POLOFF. AT A NEARBY CHURCH FACILITY [REDACTED] WAS SUPERVISING SOME 50 YOUNG CHILDREN. HE SAID CHURCH WORKERS HAD SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING THESE CHILDREN IN FROM "THE MILITIA PLACE," (A REFERENCE TO AN EXTENSIVE MILITIA-CONTROLLED AREA SOUTH OF LIQUICA CONTAINING THOUSANDS OF DISPLACED) FOR THE DAY TO BE PROVIDED FOOD AND MEDICAL CARE. HE IMploRED POLOFF NOT TO SPEAK WITH ANYONE IN THE LIQUICA-MAUBARA AREA. "IF YOU WANT TO FIND OUT WHAT IS GOING ON HERE PLEASE TALK TO PEOPLE IN DILI," HE URGED.

B1

DEVASTATION BETWEEN LIQUICA AND MAUBARA

4. (C) POLOFF CONTINUED A FURTHER 15 KILOMETERS TO MAUBARA THROUGH A SCENE OF UTTER DEVASTATION. ALMOST EVERY HOUSE HAD BEEN BURNED OR DISMANTLED, AND JUDGING BY THE APPEARANCE OF THE ASHES, SOME OF THE BURNINGS WERE QUITE RECENT. (POLCOUNS HAD TRAVERSED THIS AREA A FEW WEEKS BEFORE AND FOUND ABOUT 30 PERCENT OF THE HOUSES DESTROYED. NOW IT WAS MORE LIKE 90 PERCENT). GROUPS OF FORLORN PEOPLE, INCLUDING ENTIRE FAMILIES, WALKED ALONG THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. HOUSES STILL STANDING ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LIQUICA, SOME PARTIALLY DESTROYED, WERE OVERCROWDED

WITH DOZENS OF PEOPLE TAKING SHELTER IN A SINGLE DWELLING.

SCORCHED EARTH IN THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGES

5. (C) REPORTS ARE BEGINNING TO EMERGE FROM THE MOUNTAINOUS AREA SOUTH OF LIQUICA, WHICH HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY CLOSED OFF FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD SINCE APRIL. JUDGING BY THE ACCOUNTS OF
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 114159 181231Z

UNAMET, [REDACTED] WHO HAVE ENTERED THIS AREA IN THE PAST WEEK, THE MILITIAS, ACCOMPANIED BY REGULAR TNI FORCES, HAVE ENGAGED IN A SCORCHED EARTH CAMPAIGN WHICH HAS COMPLETELY EMPTIED MOST VILLAGES IN THE AREA. [REDACTED]

B1
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[REDACTED] REPORT VILLAGES ABANDONED OVER A WIDE AREA WITH MOST OF THE HOUSES BURNED. THEY REPORT THAT MOST OF THE YOUNG MEN HAVE FLED "UP THE MOUNTAIN" INTO FALINTIL CONTROLLED AREAS, WHILE THE WOMEN, ELDERLY AND CHILDREN HAVE DESCENDED TO THE LOWLANDS AROUND LIQUICA AND MAUBARA. THE USAID-SUPPORTED COFFEE PROJECT HAS BEEN COMPELLED TO CEASE OPERATIONS IN THESE HIGHLANDS DUE TO THE OVERALL SECURITY SITUATION AND THE DIFFICULTY IN PERSUADING THEIR WORKERS TO ENTER THESE AREAS. ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRESS REPORTS, SEVERAL TRUCKS CONTRACTED BY THE PROJECT WERE COMMANDEERED ON JUNE 11 AND THEIR DRIVERS WERE ABDUCTED AND BEATEN.

GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

6. (C) IN A JUNE 17 DISCUSSION WITH POLOFF, [REDACTED]

B1
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[REDACTED] WHO WAS IN EAST TIMOR JUNE 15-17, SAID [REDACTED] FOUND THAT GROUPS COMPOSED OF "THREE OR FOUR MILITIA COMBINED WITH THREE OR FOUR REGULAR MILITARY" HAD CARRIED OUT BURNINGS OF HOUSES AND BEATINGS OF VILLAGERS IN THIS AREA. [REDACTED] HAD ACCOMPANIED A UNAMET TEAM INTO THE AREA THE PREVIOUS DAY. HE STRESSED THAT EVIDENCE GATHERED FROM THIS TRIP SUGGESTED THAT MUCH OF THIS VIOLENCE IS GRATUITOUS. HE CITED THE EXAMPLE OF A 75-YEAR OLD MAN HE ENCOUNTERED, "WHO COULD NOT POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN FALINTIL ACTIVITY," BUT WHO NEVERTHELESS HAD BEEN SHOT THROUGH

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 114159 181231Z

THE ARM. HE HAD ALSO SEEN PILES OF CLOTHING AND VILLAGERS' POSSESSIONS WHICH HAD BEEN BURNED BY THE MILITIA/MILITARY PERSONNEL.

Current Class: CONFIDENTIAL
 Current Handling: n/a
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Page: 4

Channel: n/a

7. (C) ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] SOME 7-9,000 PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM THE HIGH COUNTRY SOUTH OF LIQUICA NOW WERE SEEKING REFUGE "ON THE BACK SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN," I.E., NORTH OF ERMERA (THIS IS IN ADDITION TO THE REPORTED 15,000 DISPLACED IN THE LOW COUNTRY AROUND LIQUICA AND MAUBARA. [REDACTED] SAID THAT AMONG THESE DISPLACED, MANY OF WHOM WERE SLEEPING IN THE FOREST, THE MAIN PROBLEM WAS DISEASE (MALARIA, TUBERCULOSIS, AND RESPIRATORY AILMENTS), NOT HUNGER. HE SAID PEOPLE GENERALLY WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN FOOD IN THIS RELATIVELY FERTILE AREA, BUT THERE WAS NO MEDICINE AVAILABLE TO TREAT THEIR AILMENTS.

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UNAMET VERSION

8. (C) ACCORDING TO A WESTERN JOURNALIST, UNAMET CHIEF IAN MARTIN TOLD THE PRESS ON JUNE 18 THAT A JOINT UNAMET-ICRC TEAM "ENCOUNTERED THREE SEPARATE GROUPS OF BESI MERAH PUTIH MILITIA ACCOMPANIED BY AND INDEED DIRECTED BY TNI SOLDIERS CARRYING OUT OPERATIONS IN THE AREA." HE DESCRIBED MILITIA AS "BURNING PERSONAL PROPERTY, ASSAULTING AN OLD MAN AND SEEKING TO DRIVE VILLAGERS OUT OF LEOTELA VILLAGE." A JOURNALIST AT THE BRIEFING TOLD US THAT MARTIN IDENTIFIED THE TNI UNIT WORKING WITH THE MILITIA UNIT AS BEING FROM "ARMY POST NO. 5 OF THE 143 BN AT EBENO (PHONETIC)." MARTIN TOLD THE JOURNALISTS: "THIS IS EXACTLY THE KIND OF INCIDENT OF WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED EXTENSIVE REPORTS." HE ADDED THAT THIS INCIDENT HELPED TO EXPLAIN "EXTENSIVE INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT" OF PEOPLE WHO WERE "NOT IN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 06 STATE 114159 181231Z
 CONCENTRATIONS, BUT ARE BEING DRIVEN FROM ONE VILLAGE TO ANOTHER." "BUT IT IS CLEAR," HE CONTINUED, "THAT THERE ARE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE AT THE MOMENT GIVING RISE TO VERY SERIOUS HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS AND ALSO OF COURSE A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO THE REGISTRATION EXERCISE WHICH IS THE FIRST MAJOR PRACTICAL PART OF THE CONSULTATION."
 GONG UNQUOTE COHEN

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Page: 4

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