

# Witnesses Detail Slaughter Of 118 Madurese on Borneo

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PALANGKARAYA, Indonesia, Feb. 27 -- The Indonesian government acknowledged today that 118 Madurese migrants on the Indonesian half of Borneo island were slaughtered by a mob of indigenous Dayak fighters over the weekend after police who were supposed to protect them fled.

The bodies were discovered Monday in a mass grave.

Today, security forces turned their weapons on each other in a morning-long gun battle near the port in the town of Sampit, where about 30,000 Madurese refugees were waiting to board ships to evacuate them to other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. One refugee was killed and at least 10 policemen and soldiers were injured.

Eyewitnesses interviewed by a group of reporters said the hour-long massacre began after about 390 Madurese had been lured from hiding places in the jungle near the village of Parenggean on Sunday night by government promises of safety. The Madurese, who had fled ethnic violence in the village, were told to gather at a government building in the town that was to be protected by police.

But when a group of about 60 Dayaks with homemade weapons surrounded the office a short while later, the six police officers guarding the building ran away without firing their weapons. The Dayak mob then trucked 118 of the Madurese -- including 20 children -- to a nearby soccer field, where six were beheaded and 112 were hacked to death with machetes, spears and knives.

The slaughter is believed to be the largest single burst of killing in 10 days of ethnic clashes between native Dayaks and immigrant settlers from the island of Madura.

"As they got down from the trucks they were killed right away," a Parenggean resident named Marjo, who witnessed the killings, was quoted as saying by the Associated Press. "Chop chop! There was no way they could run. They fell suddenly as they were chopped."

A police spokesman in Jakarta, the capital, said the officers fled because they felt "outnumbered" by the Dayak mob.

Officials provided no clear explanation for why the police and soldiers turned on each other today, but refugees have complained that security forces have been demanding money in exchange for permission to board the ships.

Indonesia's security forces have been criticized by human rights groups and refugees for a tardy and largely ineffectual response to the clashes, which have left at least 400 people dead, most of them Madurese. Many of the victims were beheaded and some had their hearts cut out by the Dayaks, who have reprised traditions of warfare abandoned more than a century ago.

Instead of trying to stop the Dayaks, police and soldiers have let them run amok while protecting only Madurese who sought shelter in police stations and government buildings as they waited to be evacuated. Human rights groups, as well as Dayak and Madurese leaders, say the government's hands-off approach to the Dayaks has effectively given them what they want: a large chunk of Borneo cleared of Madurese.

"They have allowed one group to succeed," said Munir, a lawyer who runs the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence. "The police should be trying to stop the violence, not just helping the Madurese to leave."

Munir, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, said the government's strategy suggests to other ethnic groups that violent campaigns like the Dayaks' can be successful. He and others have warned that the ethnic conflict could quickly spread to eastern parts of Indonesian Borneo, also known as Kalimantan.

Government officials contend that police and soldiers were outnumbered by the thousands of Dayaks who flooded into Madurese enclaves. But even though additional police and military units have been sent to the area in the past few days, they have not attempted to confront the Dayaks. Security forces have stood by as Dayak mobs have burned hundreds of buildings and set up vigilante roadblocks to search vehicles for Madurese.

Today, however, police and soldiers in Sampit, which has been the epicenter of the conflict, began to take a more active posture, setting up checkpoints and attempting to disarm some Dayak fighters. Police also raided a hotel that has served as the Dayaks' headquarters, detaining 84 people and seizing hundreds of spears and machetes.

In Palangkaraya, the provincial capital -- where hospital officials said they received the corpses of seven Madurese migrants, five of whom had been decapitated, after fighting on Monday -- police took to the streets in an attempt to confiscate weapons.

But the show of force appeared to be too late to affect the ethnic balance of the province of Central Kalimantan. Officials said they believe almost all of the Madurese residents want to leave -- or already have.

A Dayak community leader in Palangkaraya boasted that Dayaks were "now in control" of a large portion of the province.

"If all the Madurese are evacuated, the situation will go back to normal," said Kma Usop, a professor who calls himself a "facilitator of the people's aspirations."

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