

Surviving On Their Own? The Impact of the Pandemic on Vulnerable Victims of Human Rights Violations in Asia

*Survey result from Timor-Leste, Thailand
and Indonesia focusing on victims
responses.*



**WED
20.05
2020**

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TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE
ASIA NETWORK



726

RESPONDENTS

TIMOR-LESTE

174

Victims of past human rights violations.
Methods: phone call interviews and direct meetings*

THAILAND

150

Victims of human rights violations, predominantly in 'Deep South' of Thailand, bordering Malaysia.
Methods: interviews

INDONESIA

402

Victims of mass human rights violations, human trafficking, and women in Papua living in HIV/AIDS.
Methods: phone call interviews and direct meetings*

Findings: Survivors experiences under lock-down



Victims with lived experiences of mass violations are at the intersection of suffering through a cycle of impunity, and struggling to survive through the pandemic.



Victims are living in poor/poverty-like conditions due to being marginalised. Depending heavily on community groups and civilian-lead initiatives, not relying on government support.



State of emergency and complete lockdowns have severely affected, and sometimes re-traumatised victims.



Women and children are uniquely affected, as well as juvenile detainees, detainees in prisons, migrant workers, the elderly, and people with existing health conditions, specifically those with HIV/AIDS.



Confusion because of poor communication, inconsistent information, and government-enforced lockdowns is insensitive to victims and their experiences- increasing the risk or re-traumatisation.



Limited access or urgent need for food aid amongst victims and their communities.



Minimised or lack of access to remote and online education for victims' children, and therefore decreased certainty of children's future.



Increased vulnerability due to minimal health access, specifically for those living with pre-existing health and mental health conditions.



Shrinking space for human rights defenders or civilian actors to hold governments accountable.

Transitional Justice Context: The impact of impunity on society's response to Covid-19



Recognized a transitional justice perspective that is responsive to the root causes and historical contexts of victims' experiences during the pandemic.



Experiences in our own countries where the increase of state control and centralised authority can re-traumatise, or lead us down a slippery slope of human rights violations.



Under the cloak of lock-down there are existing military operations in conflict areas, from Thailand's Deep South, Indonesia's Papua, and also Myanmar's Rakhine State. At the same time, the military have taken a leading role in providing humanitarian and health services, when there are civilian agencies with the same competencies.



Recommendations: Urgent needs and critical interventions

- Recognise victims of human rights violations have unique needs during the pandemic.
- Provide immediate economic support and provision of basic needs (food, medical assistance, protective gear) for victims- especially those most vulnerable, the elderly, and those living in poverty.
- Government officials should prioritise transparency and accountability by mainstreaming human rights in all policies issued regarding COVID-19, and promote the fulfilment of human rights.
- Ensure accurate, consistent, and easy to understand information regarding COVID-19 and respective emergency responses.
- Cease military operations, unless where the community has specified otherwise (ie. provision of aid).
- Empower community-lead health and emergency response initiatives that collaborate between state, civil society, and victims and prioritise those most vulnerable.
- Work to reduce the limitations and stigma in accessing testing and health care.



CONCLUSION



The pandemic has exacerbated divisions and inequalities within our societies.



This has a great impact on enduring injustice, and can become a factor in igniting conflict.

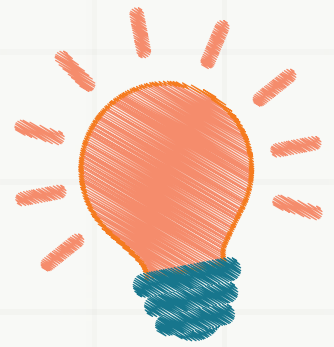


In many contexts, how emergency powers are taken up by the state to deal with the pandemic can become a point of re-traumatisation for victims with lived experiences of human rights violations.



Human rights defenders need to be creative and remain active in addressing impunity in the face of the pandemic.

Opportunities and Reflection for CSOs



- For those of us working on accountability, the pandemic can be seen as an opportunity to augment the voices of survivors.
- Think out of the box about how civil society needs to respond.
- It is important to address the urgent and practical needs for food, access to health care, and education for their children, but at the same time let us push for more information and accountability.
- It is essential to think of ways to heal the wounds of the past, restore trust, and seek the truth in new ways.
- As we forge a new way of life in a post pandemic world, the voices of survivors of mass human rights violations must be part of a sustainable solution for our common future. by distance but with heart.

