

Light and Shadow of the Fireflies

A Memory Book of Timor-Leste's Survivors of Violence (1975-1999)

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AJAR
ASIA JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

ACbit
Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita

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About Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) is a regional human rights organisation based in Jakarta, Indonesia. AJAR works to increase the capacity of local and national organisations in the fight against entrenched impunity and to contribute to building cultures based on accountability, justice and willingness to learn from the root causes of mass human rights violations in the Asia Pacific region.

About Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita (ACbit)

Since 2010, ACbit has been campaigning for the implementation of the findings and recommendations of Timor-Leste's truth commission report, *Chega!* (2005), by creating spaces for public dialogue and acknowledgement of past violations of women's rights and advocating with relevant government and non-government bodies to implement essential policies and services to support survivors and victims of violence.

About Global Survivors Fund (GSF)

The Global Survivors Fund (GSF) was launched in October 2019 by Nobel Peace Prize laureates Dr. Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad. It enhances access to reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence worldwide. The fund provides urgent interim measures, advocates for state responsibility, and guides national reparation programs using a survivor-centric approach.

About Pirilampu

Pirilampu (Fireflies) is a network of women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Timor-Leste. Established in 2022, Pirilampu creates a space for survivors to support one another, strengthen their collective voice, preserve their memories, and advocate for recognition, justice and reparations.

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Preface: A Message from *Pirilampu*

Many women across all thirteen municipalities of Timor-Leste, including the Special Administrative Region of Oecusse (RAEOA), were victims of the conflict and suffered gross human rights violations. Between 1974 and 1999, many of us experienced conflict-related sexual violence. We endured countless painful experiences and harsh realities. We were victims of war.

Some of us were political prisoners, detained without due process, subjected to arbitrary detention, sexual violence, torture and many other forms of abuse. Women and girls were taken from their homes and brought to military bases or other locations under the pretext of work or other activities, where they were subjected to severe and repeated sexual violence before eventually being abandoned. The consequences of the conflict continue to affect our lives even today, leaving many of us in situations of profound vulnerability.

Many of us are raising children conceived through conflict-related sexual violence. For many years, we have faced discrimination within our communities and even within our own families, and so have our children. The legacy of the conflict has created barriers to our participation in the development of our country. Many of our children grew up without knowing their fathers' names, without an extended family to protect them. Without this information, many found difficulties obtaining civil documents, enrolling in schools and accessing essential services.

Despite the trauma we endured, we have begun to rebuild our lives. We have become economically independent by working in agriculture, starting small businesses, raising livestock and managing our finances through savings and loan cooperatives. We have come together as survivors, working in solidarity to advocate for our right to reparations through public discussions and advocacy. We have continued our long struggle for recognition as victims of gross human rights violations.

After many years of silence, we are deeply grateful for the opportunities and support that have allowed us to share our experiences through this memory book. It gives us a space to express our voices and preserve our stories.

This memory book was made possible through the Bukae Program, a collaboration between AJAR and ACbit with support from the Global Survivors Fund. We hope this book inspire our leaders to take meaningful steps towards providing reparations for survivors of sexual violence committed during the conflict. We also hope the Government of Timor-Leste recognizes the contributions we have made to our nation.

With love and solidarity,

Maria Isabel Jesus da Silva
President, Pirilampu

Foreword from the *Bukae* team

Light and Shadow of the Fireflies brings together stories of Timorese survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Each story carries the weight of a life lived through fear, loss, silence and resilience. Together, they form a collective memory that has existed in the hearts of survivors and their communities, even without being officially recognized.

This work is part of a much longer journey. During the years of occupation, many survivors already began the difficult work of supporting one another—quietly, often invisibly—finding ways to endure, to care for their families and stay alive, while maintaining their hope and dignity. In the years following independence, survivors organized, spoke out and sought recognition, often alongside civil society groups and the truth commission or CAVR, on the long journey to truth, justice and healing. Again and again, the plight of survivors of sexual violence briefly surfaced, only to fade away in silence.

What never faded was the determination of survivors and their children. Across generations, they sustained networks of solidarity, supporting one another and insisting their experiences are part of the nation's history. Their courage inspired allies who walked alongside them, lobbying for remembrance and action.

We are privileged and honoured to have been part of this journey—to have listened, learned and worked alongside survivors over many years. These pages are part of a much larger web of trust and hope that continues to grow, carried forward by survivors, their children and those standing with them.

We hope that their voices will finally be heard in the history of this nation, strengthening their call for recognition and reparations for all victims, and to ensuring a lasting commitment to end impunity for sexual violence both in times of conflict and peace.

A note about this English-language publication: At the conclusion of the Bukae program, 455 survivors each wrote a one-page account of their lives. Together, these stories were published in a ten-volume series under the same title in Tetun. This English-language edition presents a selection of 50 stories to introduce international readers to the experiences, resilience and aspirations of the survivors. While only a small sample of the full collection, these stories reflect the diversity of voices and experiences that emerged through the Bukae program and honor the courage of all 455 survivors who chose to share their memories. We hope that, in time, all 455 stories can be translated and published in English, ensuring that every survivor voice reaches a wider international audience and becomes part of the global conversation on truth, justice, memory and reparations.

Galuh Wandita, Manuela Leong Pereira, Jose Luis de Oliveira and the *Bukae* Team

A note from the Global Survivors Fund

In the quiet strength of survivors' voices lies the power to preserve history and reclaim their sense of dignity.

This memory book collates testimonies of Timorese people who survived conflict-related sexual violence during Indonesia's occupation of Timor-Leste from 1975 to 1999. These stories, shared by survivors who participated in the *Bukae* interim reparative measures project form a collective act of remembrance and resilience.

Sexual violence was committed in various forms against men, women, and members of the LGBTQI+ community. It was widespread and systematic and has left a lasting, painful impact on he lives of survivors and children born of conflict-related sexual violence, who continue to face stigma, discrimination, and unmet needs.

For decades, survivors have consistently called for official recognition and acknowledgment of their suffering during the country's struggle for independence. They have demanded a strong reparations law that is inclusive of survivors as well as children born as a result of these violations, ensuring their right to justice is upheld. More than 25 years since the conflict ended, many survivors continue to age with unhealed wounds, new hardships, and a sense of being overlooked by the state.

The Global Survivors Fund (GSF) was founded by 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Dr Denis Mukwege and Ms Nadia Murad, answering a call for reparations by survivors of conflict-related sexual violence gathered in the Global Network of Victims and Survivors to end Wartime Sexual Violence (SEMA). With the intent to enhance access to reparation for survivors in Timor-Leste, we naturally turned to AJAR and ACBIT for their long-standing experience supporting and working with survivors.

Through the Bukae project, AJAR, Acbit, and GSF worked with survivors across all 13 municipalities from 2022 onwards. Through the project, 455 survivors were identified and their status recognised. An evaluation conducted in 2024 demonstrated that survivors felt an increased sense of recognition, justice and dignity as a result of receiving this acknowledgment, which sends a strong message on the reparative value of recognition.

Adopting the methodology of co-creation, survivors have led the way, actively shaping the project, articulating their demands, and choosing tailored interim reparative measures. They used their financial compensation as they wished, to cover home renovations, livelihood initiatives, education, and healthcare, including psychological support. They decided to create this collective memory book to document their experiences and ensure they are remembered.

As shown in these pages, survivors spoke openly – often for the first time – about suffering, survival, and the quiet dignity that helped them carry on. Supported by growing solidarity between survivors, including through *Pirilampu*, Timor-Leste's first national network of women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, they illuminate the darkness of the past.

This book is a tribute to their courage. It rejects silence and amplifies their longstanding demands for state recognition, a robust reparations framework inclusive of all survivors and their children, and an end to impunity. It is also a beacon of hope: that memory preserved can foster understanding and dialogue, reducing discrimination.

To every survivor who has shared their story here: your words carry light. You are seen, you are heard, and your strength inspires us all.

With profound respect and solidarity,

Esther Dingemans
Executive Director, Global Survivors Fund

Introduction

Today, Timor-Leste's survivors of sexual violence of the 24-year conflict are ageing and facing new struggles. Many feel they have been forgotten by the state and their communities.

It has been 50 years since the conflict began, and over 20 years since it ended. Survivors[1] range in age from their mid-20s to their 80s, with the largest number in their 40s and 50s.

During a gathering in Suai in November 2024, survivors came together to share their experiences and reflect on their struggles for recognition.

Over two decades since the referendum, followed by a truth commission that documented their stories, the survivors' message is clear: "our stories must be heard, honoured and preserved".

For survivors, recognition is about valuing sacrifices and ensuring stories are not forgotten. As one put it, "recognition is not about money, but about preserving our stories."

"We gave our bodies for liberation; why is there no recognition or honour for us?"

This sentiment reflects a common frustration, that while the state celebrates male veterans, the suffering and contributions of women during the occupation remain overlooked.

The burden of stigma weighs heavily on many women. Several spoke of the ridicule they faced in their communities. One survivor said, "In my community, they make fun of me. It's all out in the public."

Despite these challenges, many women are finding strength through collective action and leadership. "Before, I was ashamed, I couldn't speak out," one survivor reflected. "But now, I can console others and guide them to be stronger." Another woman, who testified at a truth commission hearing, described how her story became a way to advocate for others: "It was painful, but it was also a way to speak for others who couldn't speak for themselves."

These sentiments have been echoed across the country. Survivors spoke about creating a memory book to affirm their experiences. These stories are a testament to their courage and a call for justice, ensuring that their experiences are recognized and remembered for generations to come.

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1 As determined by the Steering Committee of the Bukae project, survivors of sexual violence include those who experienced rape and sexual violence, sexualized forms of torture, children born of rape and children who witnessed rape of people close to them.

What did the CAVR find on Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, including sexual slavery, was widespread during the 24 years of the Indonesian occupation. In its 2005 report, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation or CAVR, found that rape occurred often and in every municipality of the country, as well as in West Timor in Indonesia.

The CAVR report (known as Chega!) found that "members of the Indonesian security forces and their auxiliaries were involved in widespread and systematic rape, sexual torture and acts of sexual violence (other than sexual slavery) directed mainly towards vulnerable Timorese women."

The report also found that "throughout the invasion and occupation, there was a persistent practice of forcing Timorese women to become, in effect, the sexual slaves of military officers. These activities were conducted openly, without fear of reprisal, inside military installations, at official sites and in the homes of the women targeted."

In addition to rape and sexual slavery, the CAVR documented other forms of sexual violence, including public humiliation and torture. It found that, "in addition to rape, sexual torture and sexual slavery, a wide variety of other sexual violations were committed by members of the Indonesian security forces. Violations that were particularly degrading to victims or culturally repulsive were often carried out in public view. These included forcing prisoners to walk naked for long distances through communities, public rape and multiple instances of rape and torture in military posts when other prisoners could hear the screams of the victims."

Chega! Found that sexual violence increased during major military operations, linking these crimes directly to military objectives. Women and girls were often targeted because of their perceived connection to the pro-independence movement, especially if male family members were involved in the resistance. Women were often passed from one group of soldiers to the next during troop rotations, exposing them to ongoing and repeated abuse.

Chega! Highlighted the motivations behind these crimes, showing "rape as a violation of personal dignity used to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, discriminate against, punish or control the victim. In certain circumstances rape amounted to torture, for example, when rape was used to obtain information or to extract a confession. Another strategy was to inculcate fear in other prisoners who witnessed the victim being tortured. This reinforced the perpetrator's position of unregulated power and the victim's helplessness."

Throughout the occupation, there was absolute impunity for perpetrators. Chega! Noted that "the practice of capturing, raping and torturing women was conducted openly, without fear of sanction by military officers, civilian officials, police, teachers, members of auxiliary groups or militias. When victims or their families complained to authorities, they were met with denial and aggression. In some cases, family members who complained were beaten and otherwise punished."

Chega's findings in numbers

The CAVR documented 853 cases of sexual violence. The number of cases increased during periods of intense military operations by the Indonesian military and Timorese militia.

Number of reported acts of sexually-based violations, 1974-1999

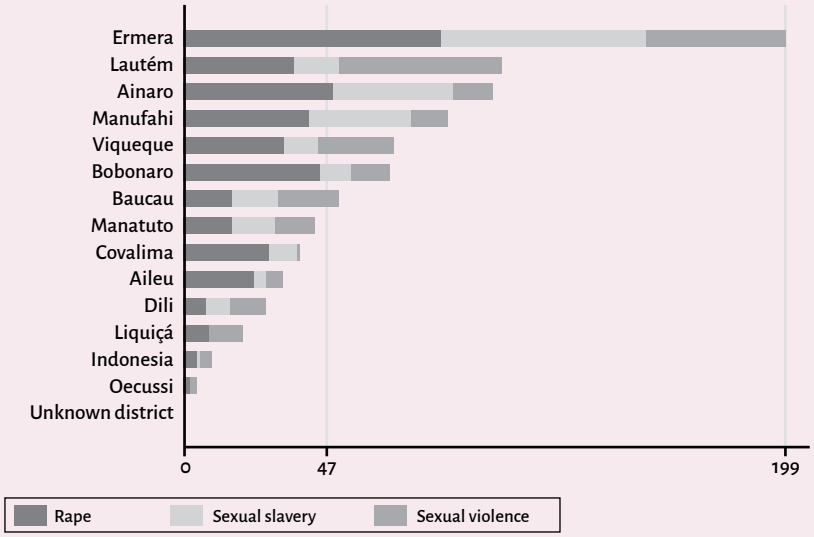


Source: Database of narrative statements given to the CAVR

Chega! Page 1914

The CAVR documented municipalities that reported the highest numbers of cases of sexual violence. Although this reflects how many people were ready to speak-up about their experience to CAVR staff, we know that many more remained silent.

Count of reported sexual violations, by district



Source: Database of narrative statements given to the CAVR

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Bukae: Two decades after independence

Bukae is a Timorese word for provisions carried in a small basket on a long journey. For survivors, Bukae represents the idea behind interim reparations, symbolizing the sharing of life-sustaining resources with others to sustain them on long journeys. Bukae reflects their understanding that reparations are part of a path towards truth, justice and healing.

Survivors are leading a three-year program, Bukae, to strengthen transformative and co-creative approaches to reparations for survivors. This work builds on the recommendations of the CAVR report, which called for a national reparations program for all victims of conflict, including women who suffered sexual violence. However, the state has not yet implemented these recommendations. Through Bukae, survivors share experiences, work together and advocate for their rights. This is a collaborative effort to empower survivors and ensure their views shape reparations processes.

The work with survivors of sexual violence began in the mid-1990s in the heat of the conflict, and has grown through decades of challenges, resilience and advocacy. Bukae commenced in 2023, in partnership with 12 NGOs: AJAR, Acbit, ALFeLa, A-UFD, CCC, SHP, F-HADEER, HDI, Luta ba Futuru, KHC, PRADET and SABEH, working together with Centro Nacional Chega! And Global Survivors Fund. This collaboration marks an important step in this ongoing journey.



Bukae addresses several key areas, including understanding the scale and nature of the violence, recognizing the lasting impact on survivors and children born of war and addressing some of their priorities. It examines actions taken by the government and civil society to support survivors and their right to reparations. Finally, Bukae offers recommendations for both interim and long-term reparations for survivors and children born of war.

Pirilampu: A light in the darkness

On 23 October, 2022, 33 women survivors from all 13 municipalities came together to establish Pirilampu – a women survivors' association. United by shared experiences of pain and resilience, they established an organization to ensure that their voices would finally be heard. Pirilampu works across the country, reaching out to other survivors and ensuring that no woman has to face her struggles alone.

For decades, the suffering of women during the conflict remained hidden in the shadows. Many endured unimaginable violations – torture, sexual violence, forced marriage and other abuses – used to intimidate and control. Yet, because of the patriarchal nature of Timorese society, their pain was often silenced, and survivors' needs overlooked in the nation's reconstruction. Pirilampu was born from this silence. The association stands as a collective voice, demanding recognition, justice and reparations.



A book to remember us by!

This memory book captures some of the experiences of 455 survivors of sexual violence during the dark days of conflict. The message from survivors is clear: "This should never happen again. We must remember the past, in order to build a new Timor-Leste that is free from sexual violence".







Chapter 1: Aileu and Manufahi

Aileu — Detention, displacement and survival

Aileu's highland communities lived through multiple phases of conflict: the upheaval after 1975, the devastating years of encirclement, surrender and forced displacement in the late 1970s and early 80s, the "consolidation" years of surveillance and sporadic violence and the 1999 crisis. In Chega, Aileu appears not only as a place of villages and gardens, but also as a *base de apoio*, where civilians lived while sheltering the resistance. Because the Indonesian military saw these communities as part of the struggle, they were targeted, leading to bombing, forced surrender, hunger and widespread abuses against women and their families. The population was targeted, and villagers, especially women and girls, became vulnerable to abuse. In the late 1970s, Aileu was referenced as a resistance base (Remexio), and as a site of repeated displacement and hunger. Lequidoe was destroyed in 1977, causing death from hunger and disease among those who fled.

Chega! documented sexual violence in Aileu as a weapon of coercion and punishment, frequently linked to detention and power exercised by officials and their networks. In a 1976 case from Liquidoe, a woman (DC) testified that she was raped by a civilian administrator (*camat*). Afterwards he threatened to kill her father and brothers if she ever refused. Months later, he sent four Indonesian soldiers to assault her again, illustrating both abuse of authority and impunity. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 86, p. 1938)

Sexual violence was tied to capture and prolonged control. In 1979, EB was captured in Seloi Malere (Aileu) and taken to the military headquarters. After the men were released, she was kept behind and moved to military housing, where she was repeatedly raped for two days, before being returned home. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 73, p. 1931)

In 1999, sexual violence in Aileu occurred in the context of displacement and militia domination. Two sisters from Namleso (Liquidoe) described being forcibly moved and then targeted by armed men and soldiers associated with the Aileu military, while sheltering at the health centre. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 141–143, pp. 1955–1956)

What *Chega!* discovered about Aileu: In numbers

Chega! identifies Aileu as one of the municipalities where sexual violence against children was disproportionately recorded. Of 127 documented sexual violations against children in five municipalities, 13 cases (10.2%) occurred in Aileu, indicating a particularly severe impact on girls and very young survivors. (Vol. III, Part 7.8, para. 307, pp. 2132–2133)

Second, the timing of violations in Aileu reflects a long pattern rather than a single peak. As with much of the country, most documented sexual violations in Aileu occurred before 1999, during the late 1970s and 80s, when detention and forced movement were widespread. This shows that sexual violence in Aileu was embedded in everyday military control, not only linked to moments of open conflict or the final violence of the Popular Consultation. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: holding life together

In Aileu, resilience was shaped by living through detention, displacement and fear, often without the possibility of protest or escape. Women survived by holding their families together, caring for their children while male relatives were detained, killed or forced into hiding. Survival depended on finding food, maintaining kinship ties and protecting young girls in conditions where authority was arbitrary and violence could return at any time.

Many survivors carried the experience of sexual violence in silence for decades, not because it was forgotten, but because speaking out carried risk. Community life continued through small acts of care: women sharing work, watching over one another's children and maintaining daily routines that allowed life to go on despite trauma. When women from Aileu testified to Chega, their words reflected not only the harm, but the strength required to endure repeated disruption and still remain part of community life. Resilience was not resistance that could be seen. It was persistence, the decision to keep living, caring and remembering in a place where survival itself required courage.

Agusta de Araujo



In 1979, we came out of the forest. A few years later, in 1982, I became engaged to a Timorese man and we had a daughter. But as the situation became more tense, he left us. I was alone with a young child and had no one to protect or support us.

The Indonesian military took advantage of my vulnerability. They intimidated and violated me, and I later gave birth to two daughters, one in 1987 and another in 1989. Instead of supporting me after what had happened, my family rejected me and my children. People called me names and accused me of being a woman with bad morals. My children were also made to feel ashamed because of the circumstances of their birth. At one point, even my own brothers tried to kill us by throwing grenades at our house, but fortunately we survived.

Later, I had three more children. As my family grew, so did our vulnerability. I had little choice but to rely on myself, finding ways to survive while enduring years of discrimination and rejection.

After the 1999 referendum, my children and I, together with my brother, were forced to flee to Kupang. About a month later, we returned to Timor-Leste. I did whatever I could to support my family, selling sweets and growing vegetables so that my children could continue their education.

For many years, I had to be both mother and father to my children. With time, patience and support from civil society, I was able to heal from some of the pain of the past. The assistance could not meet all our needs, but I was grateful that someone cared about us when my own family did not. I still have not received justice for the violations I suffered at the hands of the Indonesian military.

For decades, from 1979 until 2014, discrimination shaped our lives, and we were forced to move from one shelter to another. Things began to change in 2015, when my family saw how hard my daughters were working and slowly began to reconnect with us. Eventually, we were able to return to the family home, which now belongs to my daughter.

Life is still not easy. Recently, one of my daughters was abandoned by her husband. But with support from ACbit and its partners, we continue to look after one another. Today we live together, earning what we can by selling sweets, growing vegetables and raising animals.

Eva Maria Jofni da Luz: daughter of Luisa de Jesús



While we were living in Lequidoe, my family and I faced discrimination from both our relatives and the wider community. People called us "children of Indonesian soldiers," looked down on us and treated us as if we were inferior.

In 1993, my grandmother brought us to live in Aileu Vila. She arranged for my mother to remarry, hoping that having a husband would protect her from further discrimination. But even within our new family, we were not accepted. My stepfather refused to acknowledge me as his child and did not want me to use his name when I enrolled in school. His relatives also rejected us, making cruel comments such as, "Look at the child of that soldier—what good can come from that?"

I was determined to go to school, so I used my stepfather's name anyway to register my documents. But his treatment of us did not improve. Influenced by his relatives, he continued to treat us badly, and the discrimination remained part of our daily lives. He died in 2021, bringing an end to his mistreatment, but not to the stigma we faced. People continued to call us "children of a soldier" and remind us that our father had abandoned us.

The rejection has not only come from neighbours and the community, but also from my mother's own relatives. They know what my mother went through and how much she suffered, but they have never defended or supported her.

Today, I earn a living selling vegetables at the market. We now have a home of our own, which we built ourselves little by little with materials we saved for. After everything we have experienced, one thing is very important to me: I am determined that all my children will complete their education.

Amelia Aleixo Martins



In 1975, I was in Talibela, fleeing with my family, when we surrendered to the Indonesian forces. We were taken to Remesiu and forced to live in Besilau, where I remain to this day. During those years, we lived under constant threat and violence from the Indonesian military.

The soldiers threatened to burn our houses, and I was sexually violated by Indonesian soldiers. As a result of the violence, I gave birth to two children, a daughter and a son. The man who violated me was an officer, a commander with the rank of First Corporal in Battalion 744.

I grew up in Aileu with my father, who also suffered at the hands of the military. Soldiers interrogated and beat him, and as a form of torture, forced him to lie in the mud. My father witnessed what happened to me, and many people in the community knew that I had been a victim of sexual violence. I was not alone. Many women I knew suffered similar violations and gave birth to children fathered by Indonesian soldiers.

The violence did not end with the conflict. Even after independence, I continued to live with stigma and discrimination. When I attended meetings organised by ACbit or AJAR, some neighbours would make comments such as, “She is that woman from before, walking among us again.” Their words reminded me that people continued to judge me for what had been done to me.

Despite everything I suffered, I have continued to work hard to provide for my family and meet our daily needs.

Today, I live in a simple house that I share with three other families. My hope is very simple: that one day our house can be improved so that we can live in better conditions.

Manufahi — Time Without End

Manufahi was deeply affected by the Indonesian occupation. Throughout the 24-years documented in *Chega*, the municipality appeared as a place of large-scale military operations, mass detention, forced displacement and internment. This shaped everyday life, particularly women and girls, who were targeted during operations, consolidation of the occupation and the long years of counter-insurgency.

Patterns of violations

Chega! documented that sexual violence in Manufahi was systematic, prolonged and closely tied to military authority. Women were targeted not only as individuals, but as wives, daughters and relatives of the resistance, making sexual violence a tool to punish families and intimidate communities. In Manufahi, mountain communities living as *base de apoio* were dismantled through encirclement, internment and prolonged military control.

One of the clearest patterns recorded was long-term sexual slavery. In 1981, BB and her pregnant daughter-in-law CB from Rotutu were arrested because their husbands were in the forest with Falintil. They were taken to a military post where a commander raped BB and another soldier raped CB. The women testified that they were "continually raped for seven months", before being transferred to the Manufahi Kodim, and later exiled to Ataúro with their children. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 71, pp. 1930–1931)

Manufahi functioned as a site of internment for women captured from elsewhere. During the 1982 military operations following the Mauchiga events, women were detained at Lesuati and other military posts, before being interned in Dotik and later transferred to Ataúro. Detention sites included Koramil posts, schools, markets, tents and makeshift huts – places where women were subjected to rape, forced labour and sexual slavery. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 212–214, pp. 1982–1984)

In the 1970s and 80s, *Chega!* recorded rape in detention, rape without legal recourse and sexual violence by soldiers, auxiliaries and officials. These violations were rarely isolated acts, but formed part of a pattern of domination and impunity, leaving deep physical and psychological scars on women, their families and the wider community. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, Sections A–D)

What *Chega!* discovered about Manufahi: In numbers

Chega! shows that sexual violence in Manufahi was closely linked to long periods of detention and control, rather than short episodes of fighting. Many documented cases occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when women were held for months or years in ABRI posts, Koramil and Kodim facilities, and internment sites such as Dotik, often alongside forced labour and repeated abuse. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 71; 212–214, pp. 1930–1931; 1982–1984)

Chega! records 87 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Manufahi during the period 1974–1999. This places Manufahi among the municipalities with a substantial number of recorded sexual violations, despite its largely rural character. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 549)

Manufahi stands out for the high number of documented cases of sexual slavery. Of the 87 recorded sexual violations, 34 cases (39.1%) were recorded as sexual slavery, a proportion higher than the national average. This reflects the long-term detention and control experienced by many women in the municipality. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 549)

The timing of documented sexual violence in Manufahi shows that the majority of cases occurred before 1999, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when internment and prolonged detention were widespread. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: women protecting life and dignity

Alongside these violations, *Chega!* recorded women's remarkable resilience and quiet resistance. In detention, women supported one another, shared food, cared for children and found ways to protect themselves and others. One woman detained in Manufahi described how she avoided being taken by pretending to be menstruating, using betel nut to deceive the guards, even while other women were abused. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 69, p. 1929)

After release from internment sites such as Dotik and Ataúro, women returned to Manufahi carrying burdens of trauma, loss and, in some cases, children born of rape. Yet they rebuilt families, sustained communities and kept memories alive, often in silence. Their testimonies show that survival in Manufahi was not only about enduring violence, but holding on to humanity in conditions designed to destroy it.

Rosa Paicheco



In 1975, while my sisters were hiding in Rotutu, we stayed in Kablaki to care for my sick mother. We worked on the farm, but when planes came and sprayed chemicals, we were forced to flee. For two years, we lived in hiding, surviving on what we could find, including wild tubers and leaves.

Every Monday, we had to raise the flag and were forced to do communal work at the village headquarters, such as repairing roads. If we arrived late or did not come, the soldiers threatened us. My father and his brother were members of the resistance.

In 1983, soldiers burned down our house and forced us to leave for Dare. Some people were exiled to Atauro. I went to school in Dare, but there was very little food. We survived on wild plants and whatever we could find—ferns, taro, jungle fruits, river weeds and even leaves from chili plants. Between 1984 and 1986, the military strictly controlled food rations, giving each family only one lunchbox of corn.

From 1987 to 1989, we returned to farming, but the soldiers continued to threaten me and my friends. One night, they came to our house and sexually violated me. They also forced us to harvest crops, collect firewood and pound corn. If we did not finish the work on time, we were severely punished. Seven of us were once thrown into a pond and tortured. Some people were killed because they were suspected of having contact with the resistance.

As women, we also supported the resistance. We prepared food and coffee and grew cassava, beans, pumpkin, wild greens and tobacco to give to the resistance fighters.

In 1995, we returned to Mau-Chiga, but the violence continued. Members of the pro-Indonesia *Besi Merah* militia repeatedly raped us. If we resisted them, they threatened to tie us up and shoot the men. We were devastated by what was happening. We wrote a letter to the parish priest asking him to bring the district administrator, police commander and army commander to Mau-Chiga, hoping they would stop the violence and allow people to live in peace.

In 1997, I started my own family. Although I felt that my dignity had been taken from me, we were able to live in peace and raise six children—three daughters and three sons.

Today, I still live with the effects of what happened to me. My vision is impaired, and my heart still carries the pain and trauma of the violence I suffered at the hands of soldiers and militia members. My arms hurt and both my legs are weak because of the torture I endured.

I used to live in a thatched house, raising animals and farming to survive. Today, I live in a concrete house and continue to grow corn, cassava, beans and taro. We sell our crops and livestock to help pay for our children's education.

Deolinda Ornai



My husband and I surrendered to the Indonesian forces in 1979. Soon afterwards, they killed my husband, beating him to death. He had previously been a commander responsible for organising cannon attacks, and after his death the military came looking for me.

One afternoon, my mother argued with the soldiers because they wanted me to marry an Indonesian soldier. We tried to refuse. My older brother told the soldier that my husband had only recently been killed, but the soldier threatened to kill him too. I told my brother, "Don't worry. I will marry the soldier to save you and the family." I felt I had no choice. I did what I had to do and went with the soldier. Later that year, he left Timor.

We were relocated to Belaluhu, near the sea. The soldiers who had taken Timorese women as "wives" continued to come looking for us, and one of them came looking for me. They even threatened my mother, although she was already elderly. In 1980, the soldiers returned. That year, I gave birth to a baby boy, and my mother passed away.

Later, other military commanders came looking for me and my friends. Sometimes they brought biscuits, instant noodles and powdered milk for my son. By then, my parents and most of the men in my family had died. Five daughters and I were left on our own, and I was the only one who had married.

Between 1980 and 1982, the soldier continued to threaten my brother. Eventually, in 1983, I gave in and went with him. I later gave birth to another child, and once again the soldier left. I had to find a way to support my family on my own. I began selling goods at the market to earn enough for food and to pay for my son's education. In 1999, he finally completed high school.

Even today, I have received no recognition from the State for what happened to my family. My children have received no educational assistance or veterans' benefits, and the families of those who died have still received nothing. We continue to search for the remains of our loved ones, without acknowledgement or support from the State.

In the past, I earned a living in many ways. I had a sewing machine and did lacework and embroidery. I raised chickens and pigs and grew coconuts, mangoes, bananas and hardwood trees in my garden. I still raise animals and depend on my garden for my livelihood. My hope is to save enough from farming to build a house and help my grandchildren complete their education.

Cesaltina Torezao — daughter of Liberata da Costa Xavier



My mother was sexually violated by the Indonesian military during the occupation. She was abused and forced to marry an Indonesian soldier.

I finished secondary school in 1999, but I could not continue my education because my family could not afford it. At the time, my mother was also caring for the children of her older siblings, who had died in the mid-1980s. I was the oldest of four children.

After independence, I found work with Save the Children, but I could not stay in the job because of my responsibilities to my family. In 2001, I married and eventually had five children. My husband and I separated in 2015, when my youngest child was only four years old. My ex-husband took all of my sons and would not allow them to speak to me. It has now been ten years since I have spoken to them. My oldest son must be around 23 years old now.

I later remarried, and my second husband and I have two children, now seven and four years old.

Many members of my family knew what had happened to my mother. Despite this, we grew up hearing hurtful words such as "soldier's wife" and "soldier's children." The stigma did not disappear with the end of the occupation. Even today, we still experience discrimination and struggle to be fully accepted.

My living conditions are difficult. Our house is in poor condition, and I struggle to cover the costs of my children's education. I now work as the secretary of my village. Despite everything I have experienced, I am in good health and still have the strength to keep moving forward.





Chapter 2: Ainaro

Hunger, holding on and lives confined

Ainaro, a mountainous municipality stretching from Maubisse and Hato Builico to Ainaro town and Dare, was one of the most affected by military operations, mass detention and forced internment. In *Chega*, Ainaro emerges as a municipality where entire communities were uprooted, confined and controlled, conditions that profoundly shaped survivors' experiences of violence, survival and resistance. In Ainaro, *base de apoio* communities were forced to surrender during major military operations in the early 1980s.

Patterns of violations

In Ainaro, *Chega!* documents sexual violence primarily in the context of internment, prolonged detention and sexual slavery. Women were often captured during major operations, separated from male relatives and held in military posts, schools, markets and makeshift camps, where sexual violence occurred alongside forced labor, hunger and disease.

One of the most documented cases is the Mauchiga internment (Hato Builico, Ainaro, 1982–1987). Following military retaliation in August 1982, Indonesian forces detained large numbers of civilians, particularly women who were held in sites, including Dare, Ainaro and Maubisse, before some were transferred to Ataúro. Women testified that they were repeatedly raped, forced to cook, wash clothes and meet the "sexual needs" of soldiers. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 211–214, pp. 1982–1984)

One survivor described being detained for two years, raped in turns and forced into sexual slavery, while performing domestic tasks for soldiers. She later gave birth to a child fathered by a soldier. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 210, p. 1981) These testimonies illustrate how sexual violence was not episodic, but embedded in systems of control, where women's bodies were treated as part of the spoils of war.

Sexual violence in Ainaro intersected with forced displacement and hunger. During periods of relocation, women bore the dual burdens of violence and survival, protecting children, finding food and enduring abuse, while entire communities were cut off from their livelihoods and support networks. (Vol. III, Part 7.7; Vol. II, forced displacement sections)

What *Chega!* discovered about Ainaro: In numbers

Chega! shows that sexual violence in Ainaro was closely linked to mass detention and internment, particularly during the early 1980s, when large numbers of women were held in military posts, schools, and makeshift camps during and after the Mau Chiga operations. Many women experienced prolonged control rather than short-term detention. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 210–214, pp. 1981–1984)

Chega! records 102 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Ainaro during the period 1974–1999. This places Ainaro among the municipalities with a high number of recorded sexual violations relative to its population size. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 549)

Ainaro stands out for the high proportion of sexual slavery among documented sexual violations. Of the 102 recorded cases, 40 cases (39.2%) were recorded as sexual slavery, a proportion higher than the national average. This reflects the widespread use of prolonged detention and forced sexual control in the municipality. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 549)

The timing of documented sexual violence in Ainaro shows that the majority of cases occurred before 1999, particularly during the early 1980s, when internment, forced relocation, and extended detention were at their peak. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: survival under internment

Despite the extreme conditions of internment and sexual violence, women in Ainaro demonstrated profound resilience. Testimonies describe women supporting one another in detention, caring collectively for children, sharing food and maintaining cultural practices wherever possible. Survival often depended on cooperation – older women protecting younger ones, mothers shielding children and detainees forming bonds that helped them endure years of confinement.

Chega! notes that many women who survived Mauchiga and other internment sites returned to their villages carrying deep trauma, children born of rape and the memory of prolonged abuse. Yet they rebuilt families and community life, often in silence. Their resilience lay not in the absence of suffering, but in their capacity to continue living, nurturing and remembering in the aftermath of violence.

Amelia de Jesus



At the time, we were hiding on Mount Kablaki, but had crossed over to Mount Maulokokau. There, an elder from Ainaro Vila and others told us not to be afraid and not to run away. He asked whether we were the people who had been waiting in the sacred house, and we took his words as a sign that we should move. My father went to prepare my grandparents for the journey. We wrapped them in warm clothes and carried them to a cave on Maulokokau.

We stayed there with the elder for two days and two nights. There was almost nothing to eat, and I was so hungry that I cried. Birds flew into the cave, and we caught them and cooked them over a fire for our dinner. One morning, an elderly nurse told us that the elder from Ainaro had gone to Kablaki and that we should remain in the shelter and wait for him.

We waited, holding our grandparents close to keep them warm. Eventually, we could wait no longer and left the cave, making our way down to the foot of Maulokokau. Militia were everywhere. They ordered us to write down our names and then separated us. The women were kept together, while the men were taken away and forced on a death march towards Maubisse.

The soldiers and militia also used our children to gather information. When they tried to take my husband away, I held tightly onto his hand and begged them to let me go with him. The soldiers tried to beat me away, but I refused to let go. I shouted, "If you are going to take him away to be killed, then kill me with him." Somehow, they let us both go. When we finally reached our house, we went inside and locked the door. My parents told us how lucky we were to have made it home alive.

Today, I am recognised as a veteran and receive a few hundred dollars each month from the State. But recognition has not taken away the trauma of the past. I still experience stigma, and my family continues to face discrimination. My head often hurts and I feel a heaviness when memories of the past return. My husband, my son and my uncles all died because of the war. Indonesian soldiers lined us up against a wall and raped us. Even now, my body carries the effects of what I suffered, and I feel pain when I have to lift heavy things.

In the past, we lived on inherited land, growing food and raising animals to support our household. I am now a widow and live in my husband's house. The veterans' payment helped me set up a small kiosk, although sometimes I earn only two dollars a day. I continue to grow crops and raise animals, and over time I have been able to build a new house.

My hope is that my children can finish school. Because of the violence I experienced during the conflict, I was never able to complete my own education.

Carlota da Silva Nunes



Between 1974 and 1975, I went to school in Hatudo. When the war broke out, we fled into the forest and made our way up Mount Kablaki. We hid in a place known as *the pig's house*, where there was not even drinking water.

When the resistance in Kablaki collapsed, we fled back towards Karbalau. Many people could not make it across Mount Hilire and had to return to Kablaki, but we continued towards Rotutu. At one point, I was running alone and hiding in caves. As more people arrived, however, it became harder to remain hidden. Eventually, we were surrounded near the Aiasa River and had nowhere left to go. In 1978, the Indonesian military took us down to Rotutu Vila, where we surrendered. The following year, I returned to Hatudo so I could continue elementary school.

In 1983, Indonesian special forces arrived in Hatudo, and I worked for a unit called *Nangala 55*. The *Nangala* officers also began teaching in our schools. After about a year, one officer started asking me whether I knew anyone hiding in the mountains. I always answered, "I am from Hatudo. I don't know."

This officer had seven bodyguards. Two were based in Same Vila, while five stayed with us in Hatudo. One day, members of *Nangala 55* took us to Dausur for a meeting with the sub-village head. Afterwards, we walked home with two of our older brothers. On the way, one of the officers forced himself on me. I managed to get away from him, but a few days later the same officer came to my house looking for me, carrying a pistol.

He waited until my brothers had left, then kicked through the sheet of tin that served as our front door. He held a pistol to my neck, threatened me, tore off my clothes and violated me. After that, he came back again and again. He would wait until my brothers left in the afternoon, then break into the house and violate me.

When *Nangala 55* prepared to leave in 1984, we were forced to dance for an entire month. Yet during that time, we also found ways to help our FALINTIL fighters and friends who were imprisoned at the China house. We carried out clandestine activities and lied to the officers when we had to, helping to save some of our friends.

In 1999, we fled to Atambua, where we remained for two years before returning to Timor-Leste. My husband died in 2003, and since then my children and I have been on our own. My health is now poor. I suffer from recurring pain in my waist, stomach and hips, and my legs often hurt.

We have a small farm where we grow food and raise animals. I also make lime powder for chewing betel nut, which provides us with some income. It is work that I hope to continue for as long as I can.

Margarida Pereira



In November 1991, the militia captured us. At the time, I was eight months pregnant with my daughter. They tortured me so severely that I began to bleed, soaking my clothes and an entire woven floor mat. I managed to control the bleeding using a dressing I made from a man's sarong. I was already an experienced traditional healer and midwife, but I could not save my baby. At least my knowledge helped me save my own life. I could easily have died that day too.

The Indonesian soldiers claimed they did not understand how I could have lost my baby so suddenly. I wrote a letter to the militia asking them to stop the torture and beatings, and especially to respect pregnant women. I told them that if they wanted information from us, there was no need to torture us so brutally. The soldiers blamed people in the village for what had happened to me, but my neighbours blamed the soldiers. Everyone knew that my unborn child had died because of the torture.

I often went to kneel beside my baby's grave. I would say, "Now that you are gone, please wait for me up there. When I follow you, we can find justice for what happened to us. Your death was not in vain, my child."

Those of us who lived in Cassa and Ainaro suffered greatly. For a long time, whenever I tried to tell my story, I would feel a fever coming on and could never finish the whole account. Later, CAVR and NGOs came to ask us about our experiences. Some people were suspicious, saying that the NGOs only wanted our stories so they could profit from them.

Today, I receive a monthly veterans' payment, which has helped me a great deal. When I received my first payments, the first thing I did was repair the grave of my angel baby. We added ceramic tiles to protect the grave, and I used the remaining money to build a better house.

My children are my pride. Through all our hard work, my oldest son was able to graduate. Seeing him put on his graduation hat brought me great joy.

Silvina Barbosa



In 1975, we fled to the hills, where I became involved with OPMT. Together with our coordinator, we organised communal farms, growing and harvesting potatoes, papayas and vegetables to help sustain the FALINTIL resistance. One day, while we were out looking for food, Indonesian soldiers spotted us and launched an attack. Our group scattered, and I became separated from the coordinator and the others. I ran to take shelter in some caves. The soldiers called after us, shouting, "Come out, we won't harm you!" My father went down and gave them nine cows, and we managed to escape to another hiding place in the mountains.

We came down from Mount Kablaki in 1982, when the Indonesian military began an assault on Dare. My husband and his friends asked us to find and prepare food so they could organise a counterattack. Seven of us were cooking for the resistance when a group arrived from Rabrei, Hatu-Builico. They warned us that the situation was becoming dangerous and that we should find a better place to hide, perhaps in one of the nearby caves. They gave my husband a gun, which he and his friends quickly hid.

As Indonesian soldiers moved into the area, they set up near the river and suddenly there were people everywhere. Some soldiers came to question me, asking whether my husband was the person who had burned down the *Koramil* military post. We told them we knew nothing about it. As the situation worsened, I was forced to move to Atauro Island. Two months later, I learned that my husband had been killed. Soldiers had found him hiding in a cave. They interrogated him and violently assaulted him before killing him. Afterwards, they cut out his heart and dismembered his body. His body parts were distributed among people in Dare, who were forced to eat them. I had been waiting on Atauro for two months before I finally learned what had happened to him.

While I was on Atauro, I requested five masses for my husband. After we returned to Dare, I asked for another three, making eight masses altogether to pray for him. I approached the priest in Maubisse and brought my family together to build a grave for my husband and raise a cross in his memory. Not long afterwards, soldiers began sexually violating women in Dare. They would come at night looking for us. If women refused to submit to their demands, they risked being killed.

I still suffer physically and emotionally from what happened during those years. When I remember atrocities I endured, and what happened to my husband, the pain and bitterness affect my whole body. I feel sick when I think about it. The pain is worst when I try to do heavy work.

Things have improved a little since I began receiving a veterans' payment. I was able to use some of the money to repair my house. Later, when I received support through the Bukae program from AJAR and ACbit, we continued the renovations, and today we live more comfortably. We still raise animals and have a small farm, but as I grow older and am often unwell. I would like to regain my strength and begin farming again so I can continue supporting my household. For now, my greatest hope is that my children can finish their education.





Chapter 3: Baucau

Places of terror, roads of flight

Baucau, Timor-Leste's second-largest town and an early administrative and military center of the occupation, experienced some of the earliest, most intense and most sustained violence. Over the 24 years documented in *Chega*, Baucau stands out for the scale of violations, the centrality of urban detention and torture sites and the stark contrast between women's experience in urban centers and rural areas like Venilale, Quelicai, Baguia and Laga. It is also the municipality with one of the highest numbers of recorded survivors, including survivors of sexual violence.

Patterns of violations

In Baucau, *Chega!* documents sexual violence as part of a broader architecture of terror that emerged early in the occupation. From 1975 to 77, women were subjected to rape, sexual torture and sexual slavery during the invasion and consolidation period, when Indonesian forces used mass detention, interrogation and public punishment to crush resistance. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–44, pp. 1920–1926)

What distinguishes Baucau is the role of urban detention and torture centers, particularly the Hotel Flamboyan and Rumah Merah, which functioned as interrogation sites where women were detained, tortured and raped. *Chega!* records multiple testimonies of women held at Hotel Flamboyan in the late 1970s and early 80s, where rape occurred alongside beatings, electric shocks and other forms of torture. Women were often detained because of their suspected involvement or because male relatives were believed to be linked to the resistance. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 60–63, pp. 1930–1931). Many women detained at Hotel Flamboyan testified that they were raped repeatedly while being interrogated, illustrating how sexual violence was integrated into torture practices, not treated as incidental abuse. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, para. 62, p. 1931)

Other torture centers, such as Rumah Merah, functioned similarly, particularly during the late 1970s and early 1980s, sites of detention, interrogation and sexual abuse. Detained women described sexual violence accompanied by threats, humiliation and prolonged fear, reinforcing the use of rape as a method of domination and silencing. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 64–66, pp. 1931–1932)

Outside town, women in rural Baucau experienced sexual violence, primarily during military operations, forced displacement and arrests. In areas such as Venilale and Quelicai, women were raped during capture, while fleeing or after being forced into military-controlled settlements. These violations were closely linked to hunger, loss of land and the collapse of community protection mechanisms. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 47–55, pp. 1927–1929)

What *Chega!* discovered about Baucau: In numbers

Chega! shows that sexual violence in Baucau was closely linked to detention and interrogation, particularly during the invasion and early years of the occupation, when the municipality functioned as a major military and administrative centre. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 60–66, pp. 1930–1932)

Chega! records 142 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Baucau during the period 1974–1999, making it one of the municipalities with the highest number of recorded sexual violations. (Vol. I, Part 6, pp. 548–549)

The timing of documented sexual violence in Baucau shows that most cases occurred before 1999, particularly during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when arrests and interrogations were most intense. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: survival amid terror and surveillance

Despite violence and constant surveillance, women in Baucau developed strategies of endurance, mutual care and quiet resistance. In detention, women supported one another, shared information and protected younger detainees where possible. In urban areas, survival often meant navigating daily life under the watch of soldiers and informants, while in rural areas women rebuilt subsistence practices after repeated displacement.

Many women returned from places such as Hotel Flamboyan and Rumah Merah carrying trauma that could not be spoken about openly for decades. Yet they raised families, sustained neighbourhood and village life, and later, through *Chega!* and subsequent survivor initiatives, reclaimed their voices. In Baucau. Resilience lay not in escape from violence, but in living under its shadow and still choosing life.

Maria Fátima



I married in 1975. Indonesian soldiers repeatedly came to threaten us, and one soldier became interested in me. My husband argued with him, and one night, when I refused the soldier, he tried to shoot my husband. In September that year, my baby, only 40 days old, died. We lived in constant fear, with soldiers coming and going, shooting at and beating my husband. Eventually, his family sent him away to school for his protection, leaving me with our two daughters for 15 years until he returned. I was also beaten and repeatedly taken away for interrogation. In the end, I was forced to be with a soldier simply to keep my family safe.

One of my daughters from my husband now lives in Kupang. She later had to marry a soldier to save her father. My other daughter lives in Dili. When the Indonesian President visited Dili in 1977, I had to leave my daughters with their grandmother while we were taken by boat to perform dances for the authorities. We knew that if we refused to go, they could take our children.

The soldiers took me for interrogation at Hotel Flamboyan, where the sub-district military command post was located. After the first interrogation, I warned my husband to go and stay with his relatives because I was afraid the soldiers would kill him. Later, soldiers came to my house and threw me to the ground. There were ten of them. I screamed at them to take only me, hoping to protect my sister and niece.

Four armed men—two military police and two militiamen—then took me away in a military vehicle. A captain accused me of being FRETILIN and of providing food to the FALINTIL resistance. I remained silent, as I had been instructed. They stripped me, forced me to shower and pushed me into a small room with another young woman, my cousin. They turned off the lights and sexually violated us.

I was later forced to marry a captain known as Kasi-3. He violated me, and I became pregnant. I gave birth to a child in 1983, followed by a daughter in 1986, a son in 1988 and another daughter in 1997.

I have six children. Four—two daughters and two sons—were born as a result of rape, and two are from my first husband. Today, we live in a small house and make cakes and snacks to sell through our kiosk.

I have suffered greatly, but I feel that no one has recognised what happened to me. I have never received a pension or veterans' payment from the Government. When I prepared my documents to apply for veterans' benefits, many people did not believe me and called me a liar. I gave testimony to CAVR, but by then I had already lost much of my trust.

Our struggle was fought through the torture of our bodies and spirits. Women were also on the frontline in defending our country. Yet the Government continues to recognise mainly the men who carried guns and fought for freedom, while what women like us endured and contributed is still not valued.

Fernanda Antonio Fátima Guterres – daughter of Maria Fátima



I was born in 1997, and growing up it was just me and Mum. I didn't really know the rest of my family. Some of our neighbours helped us by giving us second-hand clothes, sometimes even a school uniform. Mum sold fried snacks, sometimes earning only a dollar a day, which she used to buy rice and bananas. I would look for dried coconut, cocoa and fruit, hiding some in my bag to eat later.

At school, I faced stigma and discrimination. Other children did not want to be my friend and called me a child of Indonesian soldiers. They would make me carry their things because they said I was not the same as them. When I went home and asked Mum about my father, she would only tell me that he had died.

In 1999, the Indonesian forces took my mother and me to West Timor. We later returned to Timor-Leste to look after my sick grandmother. It was difficult to be reunited with our family. A village leader helped organise a boat for us, and during the journey home, other passengers shared boiled eggs with us. I was only two years old. We moved into a small house that flooded whenever it rained. We used our sandals and food trays to cover the holes in the tin roof.

In 2003, I started pre-school, which cost 50 cents to register. Even then, people said that because I did not have a father, I could not continue my education. But I kept going, although I faced discrimination through pre-secondary school. I eventually reached secondary school, but we could not afford the fees. I asked Mum for money from selling cakes, but it was never enough. The school allowed me to continue through the first two semesters, but in the third semester, the school priest failed me because we could not pay. In 2011, I finally had to leave school.

The first time I learned about Mum's story was when I watched the film *Otel Flamboyen*. I asked her about what had happened, but she did not want us to be upset. My brothers also did what they could to support the family. One worked as a carpenter and helped Mum buy flour for making cakes. Another finished school and studied Korean. He now works in Korea and sends money home to support us.

I am grateful to ACbit for supporting our family, including providing a loan to help Mum's small business. When Mum travelled to Dili, I sometimes stayed at a neighbour's house, where I was abused. I found the courage to tell the perpetrator's in-laws and family what had happened, and fortunately they did not retaliate against me.

In 2022, I started my own family. Not long afterwards, ACbit invited me to join the Bukae Program, where I had the opportunity to take part in training with AJAR. There, I met other people with stories similar to mine, and this gave me strength. For the first time, I felt some relief from the pain I had carried for so long. There were others like us.

One of my brothers later went to England and sent money home to help us build a new house. I am happier now that we can live in better conditions. I can feel the shade and light that our new home provides. For many years, we survived by selling cakes and iced drinks. My identity documents still carry the name of the Indonesian soldier who is my father. Today, I am fortunate to have the support of my husband, who stays beside me no matter what I am going through.

Maria Joaquina Sarmento *Buirega*



I have six children—three daughters and three sons. Three of them started their own families after completing high school, and some were able to go to university.

In 1975, I was a young adult when our elders told us to evacuate to Mount Matebian. I had not yet joined OPMT, but I had begun supporting FALINTIL. When the planes stopped shooting and the situation became calmer, we would go out looking for sago. We prepared it by pounding and sieving it, then adding hot water. There was very little else to eat. We survived mostly on taro leaves and wild beans, as well as cassava, banyan sprouts and arrowroot to keep away the hunger.

When I came down from the mountain, I was captured by Indonesian soldiers. As punishment, I was ordered to report to the military headquarters in Baguia for six months. After the interrogations at night, they would sexually violate us. I only began to feel safer after I married.

Life was extremely difficult. Sometimes we survived by boiling tamarind seeds until they were soft enough to eat. Many members of my family died as a result of torture by the soldiers. When I think about how empty our house became, I still feel deeply sad. In the end, there were only four of us left. During the Indonesian occupation, our whole family faced discrimination because we were considered FRETILIN supporters. We rarely slept peacefully, as neighbours and militia patrolled the area and often reported us to the military command in Baguia.

Later, we received some reparations through the *Uma Naroman ba Povu, Uma Kbiit Laek* program [Housing of Light for the People, for the Powerless]. I also began receiving a disability pension of $180 a month, as well as $300 every six months.

I continue to live with the physical effects of the torture. My eyesight is poor, and I struggle to see clearly. I still suffer pain in my shoulders, chest and legs—the cruelty of the past continues through my health problems. I also suffered severe abdominal pain and had two miscarriages.

In the past, we grew candlenuts, bananas and coconuts. Today, we also grow taro and raise pigs. My children take good care of me, and my hope is to repair my house and buy some new furniture.

I still think often about the past, especially my uncle, who disappeared during the attack on Marabia Dare in 1980. I remember going to his house to bring him some things and finding that he was no longer there. To this day, we still do not know what happened to him.

Maria Juliana da Costa Boavida



I was 14 years old in 1975 when we fled to the forest. We lived there for three years while my father and brother joined the resistance as regular soldiers. We followed them, but one day, while we were looking for food, we were captured by the Indonesian military. We had come down from Birak Mountain and were crossing near the big Cross in Caisido when the soldiers cut across our path. They shot one of the resistance fighters and took my older sister and me by boat back to town. Not long afterwards, my sister died from illness.

During those years, we hid among rocks and in caves to escape Indonesian attacks. Whenever the soldiers found us, they accused us of being part of the resistance. We became walking targets, and they threatened us with rape. Soldiers from Battalion 745 were especially brutal. One of them came to our house looking for me and my cousins. As a result of the sexual violence I suffered, I gave birth to two children. Later, I had three more children with a local mechanic.

My children have now started families of their own, but we have never forgotten the discrimination we experienced. People in the community called us "the foreigners' goods" I still live in the same house, and I was never able to afford to support all my children through school. Some were only able to complete middle school.

I also contributed to the clandestine movement through my knowledge as a health worker, teaching people about medicines. I delivered food and supplies to my brothers in the resistance, who would ask us for medicines and other necessities. My father also provided resources through his role as the General Case Manager in Caibada. At the time, I was working as a trainer at the hospital, and I continued helping my friends for three years.

In 2007, I became a teacher, working mainly with adults—older men and women, as well as young people who had been forced to leave school. I also worked with Cuban doctors who came each month to teach medical students and treat patients. I continued until their mission ended in 2012.

Today, I work as a seamstress, although my eyesight is not as good as it used to be. I hope to repair my house and make it more comfortable, and to continue farming. We grow corn, bananas, potatoes and pumpkins, and raise pigs and chickens to support our household.

Bendita da Costa Soares *Buiria*



I have four children, including my sister-in-law's child, whom we are helping to raise. One is at university, while the others are still at school. The youngest is in primary school.

In 1975, we fled to the mountains and lived in a place called Bubulita, where the FALINTIL resistance chose my older sister as one of their official delegates. Every day, we sat together weaving baskets to carry *bukae*—supplies to sustain the FALINTIL forces. We also formed a cooperative to grow potatoes and other food, which we dried and sent to the frontlines.

In 1976, we moved to Mount Matebian, where we performed the traditional *tebe-tebe* dance for the Central Committee. We lived there for two years, surviving almost entirely on potatoes. In 1979, the Central Committee told us to surrender because there was no food left. We went to Quelicai-Nebere, where we lived in the barracks for three months before moving to Sikilata for another two years.

In 1980, we went down to Vila in search of food, but Indonesian soldiers intercepted us and took us to the military command in Baguia. We had almost nothing to eat except ears of corn. The soldiers forced 15 of us—ten women and five men—to strip naked and kept us that way for three days and three nights without food.

The soldiers later sent us back towards Quelicai. Along the way, they sexually violated two of my friends and slit the throats of two others. I was sexually violated for two days before they finally let me go. We were in Narkaileu when my mother took me to Maudiribu'u, where for the first time we felt some freedom. Even then, we were required to report to the Baguia military post every morning.

In 1981, while we were in Quelicai-Vila Labeni, my family was massacred. Both my parents, my brother and his four children were killed, while other relatives died from famine. I moved to Baucau-Buibau and lived with the Village Head. People in the village accused me of maintaining contact with the resistance in the mountains. I denied it and ignored their accusations, while quietly continuing to do what I could for the clandestine movement.

I still suffer from pain in my neck and chest because of the injuries I endured. Soldiers repeatedly struck and tortured me, including ramming a gun into my shoulders. Altogether, 13 members of my family were killed.

In the past, we lived in the bush, growing vegetables and raising chickens and pigs. Today, we continue to raise animals and grow corn. My hope is simply to keep farming and grow whatever we can to sustain ourselves.

Luisa do Rego



It was 1975 when we fled to Natabora. I was only 13 years old, but I had already joined OPMT. I was young and afraid. My father told me that one day all of this would become history. He said that when I grew up, I should do whatever I had to do to survive, even if it meant using my body. And that is what eventually happened, although for many years I never told anyone.

I surrendered on 5 May 1977. We were in Venilale, and my leg was badly injured and infested with worms. I was 16 years old. Fortunately, a foreign medic treated me, and my leg eventually recovered.

Later, I went to Dili looking for an elderly woman who lived with a foreigner, but the Indonesian military intercepted me in Taibesi. Both Timorese militia and Indonesian soldiers were operating in the area because FRETILIN had stolen weapons the previous day. In 1978, the military accused me of being involved in stealing the weapons, even though I was still very young. They detained me at the Becora military command for six months, from May until October.

On 2 February 1982, they took one of my friends away. I remembered the words I had heard in the resistance—that women could use their bodies to save their comrades. Between 1978 and 1999, I had four children fathered by Indonesian soldiers. I did what I felt I had to do to protect my family, carrying the shame myself so that my parents and siblings could live in peace.

When I returned to central Baucau, I faced discrimination and stigma. Even today, people still accuse me of stealing weapons. I now have a small business that helps me support myself. My hope is that one day our leaders will recognise the suffering and sacrifices women like us endured for this country.

Rosa Belo



My husband was fighting with the resistance in the jungle. One day, as I was on my way to collect milk for my baby, Indonesian soldiers intercepted me at the Caisida Cross. I was carrying one child on my back and another against my chest. They took me to the military command post, where I was beaten, slapped, burned and stamped on. My youngest child was only one month old.

The soldiers ordered me to carry a weapon into the jungle, hoping to use me to lure my husband and other resistance fighters into a trap. I recognised the son of the king of Trilolo among the militia and fell to my knees to plead with him: "My children are still so young. If I go on this mission, what will I do if they die or are killed? My brother, I beg you to change the soldiers' minds."

The soldiers raped me, and as a result I had children born of war. My eldest son and my daughters are now married and live with their own families, although they come to visit me during the holidays. My second husband understands what happened to me during the war, and my three children have always known him as their father.

When I eventually told my children my story, they understood that what happened to me was a consequence of the war. They know that I was threatened, beaten and burned, and that women also suffered greatly during the struggle that led to our independence.

But the violence did not end there. In 1999, members of my own community tied me up and beat me, calling my children "Indonesian children." They tied me to the base of a flagpole. These were not militia, but fellow Timorese from my own community. One was the king's son and a police officer. A group of them even planned to kill me.

On 9 October 1999, adults and children from the neighbourhood watched as another person and I were beaten until we could only crawl. Eventually, they let us go, and a village leader opened his door and gave me shelter. My uncle Jaime, Regina's father, helped protect me and hid me until it was safe for me to leave and seek refuge with the archbishop. He is no longer with us, but I still remember what he did for me.

For the future, I hope to renovate my house and continue farming. I want to grow corn, potatoes, cassava, bananas and coconuts so that I can support my family and help pay for my children's education.

Maria da Conceição Alves



During the Indonesian occupation, I was a member of OPMT. Almost everyone in our village supported FALINTIL. When the Indonesians attacked, we fled to Mount Matebian. Many people were killed in the attacks, while others died from hunger. We had to walk long distances just to find water, and there was almost nothing to eat. Eventually, our commanders ordered some of us to surrender.

On the way down, we were intercepted by the Indonesian military and escorted to Quelicai Vila. There was still no food, so I decided to return to the jungle and join the resistance commanders in Uaibobo. There, we prepared food such as elephant yams and cassava for the fighters.

The Indonesian military captured a friend and me and took us to a military post, where they interrogated us about the FALINTIL commanders. When we lied, they slapped us. An officer ordered me to strip and burned me with cigarettes, including on my groin. They also tortured me with electric shocks. I finally gave them the names of several commanders, but even that did not stop them from raping me.

Later, we became involved in the clandestine movement. A resistance commander told us to prepare for a counterattack, warning that the Indonesian military was advancing towards FALINTIL hideouts. My brother told us to stay behind while the fighters moved deeper into the jungle, but I told him that I would make my own decision. Early one morning, FALINTIL attacked the military post in Nahareka. I gave my knapsack to my brother, and we went our separate ways.

I was later stationed in Uailakurika. A commander asked us to inform the villagers that FALINTIL was preparing to attack Wesalabua. Our commander was killed in the attack and replaced by his second-in-command. Not long afterwards, the Indonesians captured my husband and me and took us to the Flamboyan Hotel in Baucau. My husband was forced to go into the jungle to look for his comrades, while I remained there, where I was tortured and raped over the next two years.

Until today, there has been no justice for me, my family or my community. Sometimes what I experienced makes me deeply sad, but I try not to dwell on it. I see what I endured as my contribution to my family and to a free society. My head hurts when I remember the rape and torture, and especially when I think about how my body was burned and beaten.

Today, I have my own house. I farm, raise animals, weave and embroider, and I have received some veterans' benefits. My hope for the future is that my children can live prosperous lives and find good work.


BE KIND



Chapter 4: Bobonaro, Liquisa, Oecussi

Bobonaro — A borderland in the 1999 storm, and a historic judgment

Bobonaro, stretching along the western border with Indonesian West Timor, was shaped by its location during the conflict. From the earliest days of the Indonesian invasion, the municipality experienced repeated military incursions, forced displacement along the border and intense surveillance. Over the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Bobonaro emerges as a place where women's lives were marked by cycles of flight, capture, return and renewed violence, culminating in the mass abuse of 1999.

Patterns of violations

Chega! found sexual violence to be closely linked to border militarization, forced displacement and militia activity, rather than prolonged internment. Women were raped while fleeing, during forced returns from West Timor, in detention at military posts and later by pro-autonomy militias operating with impunity.

During the early years of occupation, women in Bobonaro were raped during military operations, as Indonesian forces consolidated control along the border. Sexual violence often occurred alongside killings, village destruction and the forced movement of civilians. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, *Chega!* recorded rape and sexual abuse in detention and without legal recourse in Bobonaro, particularly affecting women whose husbands or relatives were suspected of supporting the resistance. The border context heightened women's vulnerability. Displacement to West Timor often placed women under the authority of soldiers, auxiliaries or militia, with little protection. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–55, pp. 1925–1929)

In 1999, Bobonaro became one of the municipalities where militia-perpetrated sexual violence was especially visible. *Chega!* documented rape and sexual slavery committed by Halilintar militia in Atabae, including cases where women were detained, repeatedly raped and forced to provide domestic and

sexual services. These violations occurred in the context of mass displacement, intimidation and the collapse of civilian protection. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 200–203, pp. 2000–2002)

In September 1999, in the village of Lototoe in Bobonaro, three women were raped during operations carried out by members of the Indonesian military and Dadurus Merah Putih militia, as part of the campaign of violence surrounding the Popular Consultation. The case was prosecuted before the Special Panels for Serious Crimes in Dili, and in 2002 convictions were secured for rape as a crime against humanity. It remains the only case from the Timor-Leste conflict in which rape was successfully adjudicated as a crime against humanity by a court. The three survivors who testified in the proceedings, have since passed away.

What *Chega!* discovered about Bobonaro: In numbers

Chega! records 68 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Bobonaro during the period 1974–1999. This places Bobonaro among the municipalities with a significant number of recorded sexual violations, particularly given its repeated experiences of military operations, displacement, and militia activity. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

Bobonaro stands out for the high proportion of rape among documented sexual violations. Of the 68 recorded sexual violations, 45 cases (66.2%) were recorded as rape, a proportion higher than the national average. This reflects the use of sexual violence as a direct form of coercion and punishment in the municipality. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

As with most districts, sexual violence in Bobonaro occurred both during the long years of occupation and during the intensified militia violence of 1999. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: survival across borders

Women developed forms of resilience shaped by movement and return. Many survived by navigating repeated displacement – protecting children during flight, sustaining family networks across the border and rebuilding homes after forced returns. In West Timor, women relied on kinship ties, mutual support and informal networks to survive conditions of fear, dependency, and abuse. After 1999, many women returned to Bobonaro carrying the trauma of earlier occupation-era violence and militia-era sexual abuse. Yet testimonies in *Chega!* show women re-establishing households, reclaiming land and sustaining community memory.

The three courageous women who brought their case to the Serious Crimes process did more than testify about what had happened to them in Lototoe. They ensured that rape in Timor-Leste in 1999 was recognized in law as a crime against humanity. By stepping forward, despite stigma, delay and the eventual pardon of the perpetrator, they affirmed the dignity of women whose suffering had often been hidden. Their determination reflects the strength of many survivors in Timor-Leste who endured violence, displacement and loss, yet insisted that their experiences be acknowledged in both the historical and legal record.

Elsa Ilimau Soares



In 1975, we fled to the caves in Loelako. We were captured while we were sleeping and taken to Maliana College, where we stayed for about a week before the Indonesian military moved us to Kailaku. As the war continued, we were detained and had almost nothing to eat except corn husks. My sister had fled with my father to Aitara, while I stayed with my grandmother.

In 1977, Indonesian forces intercepted us somewhere between Aitara and Kolimau and took us to the river near Kailaku. One of the commanders forced me to be with him. I had no choice. I was only 12 years old and terrified. I remained with the commander until 1993. During those years, I did what I could to support my friends in the resistance. I washed clothes and sent food, cigarettes and other supplies to those in the jungle. I maintained contact with the fighters and secretly carried documents to a priest to be blessed, doing whatever I could to strengthen the struggle.

After the commander returned to Indonesia, I married my husband and started a family. We have two children, a son born in 1996 and a daughter born in 1998.

In 1999, the situation became dangerous again and we fled across the border to Hakesak, near Atambua. Along the way, people shouted, "If you don't run now, you'll die." Those who had trucks were carrying families to safety. It was a difficult journey because my children were still very young, and one of them could not yet walk.

Today, my health is often poor and I can no longer do heavy work. Sweeping the house, washing dishes and feeding the chickens is about as much as I can manage. I used to raise cattle, pigs and goats, but they have all died.

I have never shared my story with the Government, or with anyone else. Even my husband knows only parts of my bitter past. During those years, we used our bodies to protect and support our friends in the jungle. We believed that if we did not submit to the soldiers, more people would be killed.

Now we are growing old. If the younger generation forgets us, let it be. But I want them to know that what we did, we did for the good of this country.

Bendita Buicau



After the 1999 vote, the situation became increasingly dangerous. My husband and I took our five children and fled to Memo, where we stayed with relatives in the former governor's house. At the time, militia and Indonesian forces were attacking the people of Tunubibi and Memo, burning down most of the houses.

One afternoon, the situation seemed to calm down, so my husband went back to check on our house. As it grew late and he still had not returned, I had a terrible feeling that something had happened. The next morning, 8 September, I went looking for him in Tunubibi. Militia were everywhere. Some of them told me, "We already killed your husband." I later learned that they had stabbed him, but when he did not die, they burned him alive inside our house.

Three days later, I returned to Tunubibi to look for his body. The village was almost deserted, with only a few members of the militia patrolling. I reached the place where our house had once stood, then went towards a small river nearby to lay flowers and light a cigarette in honour of my husband. When I heard a militia patrol approaching, I tried to hide behind a tree near the spring, but one of them had already seen me.

He came towards me with a sword and threatened me. He tore off my clothes as I tried to defend myself, saying, "We killed your husband. Now we can do whatever we want to his woman." I told him, "You can threaten me and do what you want. But when this war is over, you will have to face the problems you have created." He then sexually assaulted me.

Afterwards, I took my children across the border to Turiskai, near Atambua. Almost a month later, INTERFET arrived and we returned home. I began searching again for my husband's remains so that I could give him a proper burial. Some UN personnel drove me to collect his bones, which we found that same day. They wanted to take the remains for examination and identification, but at first I did not want to let them go. Eventually, they were taken to Dili, where they were identified as the remains of my husband.

In 2003, I began processing documents relating to my husband, and by the grace of God they were approved. I began receiving veterans' payments, which helped me support myself and my children.

I still want justice, but it has never come. Even now, I cry when I remember what happened. What can I do when no one wants to listen to me? I have worked hard to survive, including crushing rocks and selling them. Yet the Government has never acknowledged what I suffered.

Ana Berta dos Santos



In 1975, my husband was a guerrilla fighter with the resistance. When he came home, he worked in the fields, built houses and made knives. Our farm was near the border with Turiskai. He also made swords for young anti-Indonesian groups, which put him on the wanted list.

On 8 September 1999, militia captured my husband and killed him at the Lesu River. He had been travelling from Memo to check on our house in Tunubibi. Before leaving, he came looking for us, but we were elsewhere. He tried to convince one of our daughters to go with him but, luckily, she refused. Who knows what would have happened if she had followed her father.

They took him down to the Lesu River and slaughtered him like an animal. They cut off his head and hung it from a pole above his mutilated body in the river below.

At first, I did not know he had been killed. A few days later, I went with my daughter to look for food. Along the way, we met an older man who told us to go to the river and see if we recognised any of the bodies there. There were many bodies, already badly decomposed after days in the water, making them difficult to identify. Then I recognised my husband's trousers and the bag he had been carrying when I last saw him. Militia were still everywhere, and we were terrified.

The next day, I went to our house in Tunubibi to see what remained of our belongings. It was there that militia caught me and raped me.

I knew then that we had to flee. I took my children across the border to Turiskai in Indonesia, where we stayed for almost a month before returning to Timor-Leste. Later, I took my eldest daughter with me to search for my husband's remains, but all we could find were scattered bones. I collected what I could and buried them in the Tunubibi cemetery. The militia had also burned down our house and looted anything of value.

I continued to live with suffering and poverty, but I knew I had to keep going for my children. I tried different ways to survive, including farming, until my hands could no longer manage the work. I told my children, "Don't worry. Even though your father is no longer with us, I used my two hands and ten fingers to feed you." I sold water spinach to earn enough to buy food.

I never received justice. Until the end, I continued to demand it, believing that if justice came, things could finally be put right.

Ana Berta dos Santos passed away in 2023. She spent the last year of her life as a proud member of the Pirilampu Women Survivors group.

Liquiçá — Living where terror was seen

Liquiçá, a coastal municipality west of Dili, experienced some of the earliest and most public violence of the occupation. In the first years after 1975, the municipality was marked by open military terror, mass killings, forced displacement and intimidation carried out in highly visible spaces. Over the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Liquiçá stands out as a place where violence was meant to be seen, shaping women's lives through fear, exposure and silence.

Patterns of violations

In Liquiçá, *Chega!* documented sexual violence is closely intertwined with public violence, military domination and forced displacement, rather than long-term internment. Women were raped during military attacks, while fleeing, in detention and in contexts where communities had already been terrorized by killings and village destruction.

During the early years of occupation, women in Liquiçá were raped during military operations and arrests. These violations occurred alongside mass executions and the destruction of villages, creating an environment in which sexual violence functioned as part of a broader campaign of terror and submission. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

In later years, sexual violence in Liquiçá often took place without legal recourse, particularly affecting women whose husbands or relatives were suspected of involvement in the resistance. *Chega!* recorded rape in and around women's homes, in detention centers and during forced displacement, reinforcing women's vulnerability in both private and public spaces. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–55, pp. 1925–1929)

In 1999, Liquiçá became a site of extreme violence, including sexual violence committed in the context of mass displacement and militia attacks. Women who fled to churches and other places of safety were exposed to renewed threats, abuse and loss, compounding earlier trauma from the occupation years. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 140–150, pp. 1954–1958)

What *Chega!* discovered about Liquiçá: In Numbers

Chega! records 19 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Liquiçá during the period 1974–1999. While the absolute number is lower than in some other municipalities, these figures reflect serious harm in a municipality marked by repeated military operations, displacement, and proximity to detention sites. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

Liquiçá stands out for the high proportion of cases recorded as other forms of sexual violence, rather than rape or sexual slavery. Of the 19 documented sexual violations, 11 cases (57.9%) were recorded as other sexual violence, a proportion significantly higher than the national average. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

As with most municipalities, the timing of documented sexual violence in Liquiçá shows that the majority of cases occurred before 1999, during the years of occupation when military control, displacement, and fear limited women's ability to report violations. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: living under watch

Women's resilience in Liquiçá was shaped by the need to survive in full view of power. In a municipality where violence was public and often spectacular, women learned to protect children, maintain households and preserve social ties under constant threat. Survival meant knowing when to be silent, when to flee and how to endure loss without the possibility of justice.

Despite repeated displacement and the trauma of witnessing killings and sexual violence, women in Liquiçá rebuilt family and community life again and again. Many carried memories they could not speak of openly for decades. Through testimony to *Chega!* and later survivor initiatives, these women transformed experiences long held in fear into acts of remembrance – asserting their dignity in a place where violence had sought to erase it.

Rosa Alves



In 1999, when we went to the market in Loes, I was with my sister-in-law and three friends. We hired a vehicle to go to the market. When we arrived in Loes, we encountered members of militia. They gave us red cloth to tie around our wrists and ordered us to fly an Indonesian flag in front of our house (this was a sign that someone belonged to the militia). They instructed us not to run to the church on 5 April.

On 5 April 1999, during the incidents leading to the Liquisa massacre, in our panic and fear, we forgot to put up the flag in front of our house. We ran to the church, where I encountered the militia again. One of them beat me inside the church. The following day, the militia loaded us onto a truck. As we climbed into the truck, we thought to ourselves, "Perhaps they are taking us to throw us into the sea." But they did not. Instead, they took us to the residence of the district head. After we returned, the militia forced us, night after night, to attend dances at their celebrations, where they took advantage of the situation to touch our private parts. Sometimes we had to walk with our brothers to deceive them into believing that we had husbands.

On 25 May 1999, the militia began to give us some "freedom" to return to the market in Loes. Together with one of my cousins, I carried several grenades to deliver to the Falintil, but we were unable to hand them over because the river was in flood, so we had to bring the grenades back.

Three months later, on 28 September 1999, I accompanied my older brother to deliver information to the Falintil in the forest. But as soon as we arrived, I met a former school friend who beat me. Maybe this was because when we were children and attended school together I had bullied him.

Olimpia de Jesus Mendes



According to the story my mother told me, during the years 1974 and 1975, one of my uncles carried me as we fled from Liquiçá to a place called Lukulai in the middle of the night. Later, we moved to Darelete. In 1979, we surrendered and came down from the forest to Maubara because there was no food in the forest and we began to suffer from hunger.

In 1999, I joined a youth group that was responsible for protecting two priests. We had to deal directly with the militia, monitoring the priests' safety whenever they went to celebrate Mass. On 2 April 1999, violence began when people started attacking one another as a priest went to celebrate Mass in Eveno. The following day, we fled and hid in the church for three days. The militia attacked the church, killing many people.

Before the referendum, one militia member attempted to sexually assault me. I cannot tell anyone about what happened, only God and the angels know what he did to me. Night after night, the militia forced us to attend dances at their celebrations, where they sexually harassed us by touching our private parts. We remained silent because they threatened us with knives and guns. Three months later, in September, after the referendum results were announced, we lived on the coast for two weeks before fleeing inland to Fatukesi, where we stayed for another week.

In 1999 there was no money and conditions were very difficult. A friend and I washed the Australian troops' clothes to earn some income to support our daily lives. Later, when the troops moved to Maliana, they gave the two of us a letter of recommendation so that we could work with UNTAET as cleaners for one year.

After independence, I started a family and had two children. Throughout my married life, I have never told my husband or my children about what happened to me during those years. During the 2006 crisis, problems began within my family, and they continued until 2008, when my husband and I separated. Even now, I still feel deep pain and sadness whenever I think about what the militia did to me. Today, my hands and feet are my strength, allowing me to work in agriculture to support my family.

Oecussi — The enclave of silence

Oecussi, an isolated enclave separated from the rest of Timor-Leste by Indonesian West Timor, experienced the occupation under conditions of geographic isolation, limited oversight and deep dependency on Indonesian military and civilian authorities. Over the 24 years documented in Chega!, Oecussi emerged as a municipality where women's vulnerabilities were shaped, not only by violence, but by remoteness, restricted movement and the absence of protection.

Patterns of violations

In Oecussi, Chega! documented sexual violence primarily in the context of military control, dependency and lack of legal or social recourse. Unlike municipalities characterized by mass internment or large-scale military operations, sexual violence in Oecussi often occurred in everyday settings, like homes, villages and informal detention—where women had little possibility of seeking help.

During the early occupation period, women in Oecussi were raped during military incursions and surrender operations, as Indonesian forces consolidated control over the enclave. These violations occurred alongside killings, intimidation and forced compliance, establishing patterns of fear that persisted for decades. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the consolidation years (1980s–1990s), Chega! records rape and other forms of sexual violence committed without legal recourse, often by members of the security forces or auxiliaries who exercised near-total authority in the enclave. Women testified that reporting abuse was impossible, as perpetrators were embedded in the structures that controlled movement, food access and security. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44, pp. 1925–1927)

Oecussi's isolation heightened women's exposure to domestic sexual slavery and coercive sexual relationships, where power imbalances—rather than formal detention—enabled repeated abuse. Chega! identifies such patterns as characteristic of areas where military presence was constant and civilian oversight absent. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 197–199, pp. 1998–2000)

What *Chega!* discovered about Oecussi: In Numbers

Chega! records 4 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Oecussi during the period 1974–1999), making Oecussi one of the municipalities with the lowest number of recorded sexual violations. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548.) The very low number of recorded cases points to significant under-reporting, shaped by isolation, restricted movement, and fear of retaliation in the enclave. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548)

With only four documented acts of sexually-based violations recorded in Oecussi, the statistical record is extremely limited. Given that 94% of all reported violations in the area occurred in 1999, the small number of documented sexual violations can be understood within that broader pattern of late-period violence. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548; p. 576)

Resilience: endurance in isolation

Women's resilience in Oecussi was shaped by the need to endure without witnesses. Survival depended on maintaining family cohesion, protecting children and navigating daily life under authorities who controlled movement, supplies and safety. In the absence of external support, women relied heavily on kinship networks and mutual care, often absorbing harm in silence to keep families intact.

Many women carried their experiences alone for decades. When they later spoke to Chega!, their testimonies revealed not only violations, but the extraordinary strength required to survive in an enclave where escape was rarely possible and justice felt unreachable. In Oecussi, resilience was not visible resistance, but persistence—living, caring, and remembering in conditions of profound isolation.

Domingas Ulan



Since 1975, we worked in the clandestine resistance to defend our beloved homeland of Timor. At night we did not sleep, but instead formed security groups to protect our neighbourhood. Each village secretly organized itself according to its own plans, and others did not know that we were part of the clandestine movement. In this way, we were able to deal with the problems we faced at that time. Meanwhile, other groups, including the militia, began to hear about the clandestine network and looked for ways to take action against our neighbourhood in Oe-Fab. We continued to hide from them, and, although they questioned us about what we were doing in our community, we never revealed a single word. Eventually, they stopped asking.

That same year, however, the militia learned that our neighbourhood was involved in clandestine activities. They organized a group to burn down our community. We became frightened. They deceived our husbands into standing guard at security posts during the night. While our husbands were away on guard duty, we were afraid, so we gathered together to sleep at the homes of neighbours whose husbands were also away. One night, the militia came and threatened us, saying that if we did not come out of the house, they would burn us alive inside it. As a strong woman determined to save my family, especially my children, I went with them. They took me back to my house, accusing me of providing food to the clandestine resistance. They ate the food in my house, while my daughter, Iance Nessi, followed me there. My daughter was not afraid at all. The militia grabbed one of my arms, while my daughter held onto the other. The militia then dragged me away and raped me.

Today, I make my living through farming. I received a small house, called House of Hope, from CNC, and I also run a small business.

Iance Nessi



In 1999, while my father was on night guard duty, two militia members dragged my mother into our house, while another militia member held me back, saying, "You cannot go." I replied, "No! What are you going to do to my mother?" I stood there crying. One militia member remained outside on guard, while another was inside the house with my mother. He said to her, "Don't you know I can kill you?" He drew a machete and held it to my mother's throat. I screamed, "Leave my mother alone! What are you going to do to her?"

My mother cried and said, "I have a goat. You can take it." But instead, he dragged her inside. The militia member outside pulled me back by my hair. I saw my mother's sarong fall to the ground and heard her cry out, "Don't sexually violate me. My husband is here." The militia member outside grabbed me and covered my mouth. I was still a child and could do nothing. When it was over, I went inside. My mother embraced me, and we cried together. Afterwards, the perpetrator came back and threatened us, saying, "Do not tell anyone what happened."

Early the next morning, my father returned from the guard post. Crying, my mother said, "We have to flee." We escaped to a place called Alpal, in Indonesia, where we slept under a large tree. My mother did not tell my father what had happened; she simply cried whenever she looked at him. We stayed there for three years. We remained at home and did not go to school, while my parents bought and sold goats and buffaloes to survive. After independence, Caritas helped bring us back to Oecusse. When we arrived, our house had already been burned down. We lived temporarily in a shelter covered only with tarpaulin, and after a month my father cut timber to build a new house. The perpetrator came again and warned my mother not to tell anyone about what had happened. But my mother eventually told my father, who gathered the perpetrator's family to confront him. As compensation under customary practice, they were required to provide one horse.

At that time, I was still a child and did not understand what sexual violence was. As I grew up and started my own family, I became deeply saddened whenever I remembered what had happened. I also feel sad because, if I had been older at that time, they might have done the same thing to me. Some neighbours accused my mother of crying and making up the story just to receive money, saying that she had done nothing during the war. Even today she continues to face stigma from the community, including because Centro Chega! built her a house.

Sometimes my heart aches deeply because the perpetrator is still alive. It is even harder when we encounter him and he mocks my mother again, showing her no respect. But that is the reality we continue to live with. At the same time, I also find strength in continuing to care for my mother. My two hands give me the strength to improve our lives, support my family, and buy medicine for my mother when she is ill. My two feet give me the strength to keep going in search of information and assistance to help her.

Helena Tae



In 1999, the militia arrested me together with seven other people and took us to the Makelab market. There, they killed two people and threw their bodies into a pit. Then they lined up another four people and shot them dead on the spot. The militia loaded their bodies onto a vehicle and dumped them into a school well. Afterwards, they took us to Indonesia, to a place called Nain, where we stayed for one week in an open area sheltered only by tarpaulins.

When the militia arrested us, my husband was carrying our baby daughter when he was shot. I ran to pick up my daughter, but a militia member grabbed me by my shoulder and seized me by the throat in front of everyone. I cried, and the militia member said, "If you keep crying, we'll drag you away and rape you." After these events, we returned to Oecusse and helped recover the bodies that had been thrown into the school well, burying them together in a place near the school. After my husband was killed, his family asked me to marry his younger brother so that he could continue to care for the children. I agreed and married my late husband's younger brother.

These experiences left me afraid to tell anyone what had happened. If I spoke about it, I feared I would face stigma and hurtful gossip from the community. My family knows this painful story, and my two eldest daughters also know. My other three children do not know because I have never told them. Since 2002, I have received a martyrs' pension.

Today my health is not good. I suffer from constant headaches because I worry about our difficult economic situation. My neck and hands also hurt because the militia beat and dragged me. When I spend a long time weaving *tais*, my neck and hands become painful. My heart also carries deep sorrow because the militia killed my husband and violated my dignity by assaulting me. Even so, I remain grateful. Although my body is in pain, I continue to find strength and determination to earn a living and support my family.




JUST
ENJOY
THE
RIDE

Chapter 5: Covalima

Survival after every return

Covalima, the southern border municipality centred on Suai, was shaped throughout the conflict by its proximity to Indonesian West Timor, repeated military operations and large-scale civilian displacement. Across the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Covalima appears as a municipality where violence unfolded in cycles of flight, forced return, and renewed terror, with women carrying the heaviest burden of survival in conditions of insecurity and loss.

Patterns of violations

In Covalima, *Chega!* documents sexual violence as closely linked to military operations, forced displacement and border militarization, rather than prolonged urban detention. Women were raped while fleeing, during capture and surrender, in detention at ABRI posts, and later during militia attacks—particularly in 1999.

During the early occupation period (1975–1979), women in Covalima were subjected to rape during invasion-related operations and forced surrender. These violations occurred alongside village destruction, killings, and mass displacement toward the border, embedding sexual violence within a broader strategy of terror and control. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, *Chega!* records rape and other forms of sexual violence committed in contexts where women had no legal or social protection, including during forced returns from West Timor and in militarized villages. Sexual violence was often used to punish families suspected of Resistance links and to assert dominance over communities already weakened by hunger and displacement. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–55, pp. 1925–1929)

In 1999, Covalima became one of the municipalities most severely affected by militia-perpetrated sexual violence. *Chega!* documents rape and sexual slavery committed by pro-integration militias in Suai and surrounding areas, including women detained, repeatedly raped, and forced into domestic and sexual servitude. These violations occurred in parallel with mass displacement and attacks on places of refuge, such as the Suai church, deepening women's trauma at the very moment communities sought protection. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 200–205, pp. 2000–2003)

What *Chega!* discovered about Covalima: In Numbers

In the CAVR statistical profile of sexually-based violations (1974–1999), Covalima is identified as a municipality with high numbers of documented cases, particularly during periods of displacement and in 1999. Rape constitutes the majority of recorded sexual violations, with perpetrators including Indonesian security forces, auxiliaries, and militias. *Chega!* emphasises that widespread fear, displacement, and stigma mean that many violations—especially those committed during flight or in West Timor—were never reported. (Vol. I, Part 6; Vol. III, Part 7.7)

Resilience: survival through displacement and refuge

Women's resilience in Covalima was forged through movement and loss. Many survivors fled—protecting children during flight, seeking refuge in churches and community spaces, and enduring prolonged uncertainty in displacement. Survival depended on collective care, the sharing of food and shelter, and the maintenance of social bonds even as violence dismantled normal life.

After 1999, survivors returned to Covalima carrying layered trauma from decades of occupation and the final wave of militia violence. Yet testimonies in *Chega!* show survivors rebuilding families, reclaiming land, and sustaining community memory. In Covalima, resilience was not marked by stability, but by the capacity to begin again after repeated destruction.

Maria Carvalho Amaral



While I was still at school, I joined a vocational group and accompanied a priest to different places for worship services. The priest also met people from the resistance in the jungle, although I was too young to understand what was happening. In 1995, I met and married my husband. Through him, I began to understand the struggle for Timor-Leste's independence and became involved in the clandestine movement. FALINTIL members, young people and members of different organisations often came to our house, where my mother and I prepared food for them. From 1995 to 1997, I also served as the first vice of the Timorese Women's Organization (OMT) in Casabauk.

On 26 February 1999, militia and soldiers attacked our home while we were watching the news about President Habibie's offer of autonomy or a referendum. People fled, and I took my son to hide. When we returned the next morning, the house had been destroyed and there were pools of blood everywhere. Fortunately, they had not found our documents, FALINTIL photographs or funds. From then on, houses were burned and people were beaten, kidnapped and killed. We moved constantly, never feeling safe.

Before the referendum, we took shelter at the church. When we heard that independence had won, we cheered, cried and hugged one another, believing the violence was finally over. But on 6 September, militia surrounded and attacked the church. Gunfire sounded like corn bursting around us. We fled to the nuns' quarters, and later the militia took us to the *Kodim*. My husband managed to hide in a gutter. I only learned two days later that he was alive and had escaped to the jungle. We were held at the *Kodim* for eight nights, where people cursed and humiliated us.

After 14 September, we were taken to Indonesia and forced to live near militia leaders. One day, they came looking for me, saying I needed to sign a letter. They drove me and several other women to an isolated area. I was carrying my child. They ordered another woman to hold my child, and a militia leader dragged me into the forest and sexually assaulted me. He was someone I had always called "uncle." I screamed, but I knew no one could hear me. Afterwards, I was sexually assaulted by others, and I bled for more than a month.

I could not endure it any longer and began looking for a way home. My older brother came to negotiate for the release of my mother, my son, my sibling and me, as the militia would not allow us to leave. Finally, on 11 November, we escaped by boat, arriving at Suai the following morning.

I have still not received justice for what happened to me, my family or my community. Today, I feel free, although some people still talk about me behind my back. What gives me strength is that my family continues to stand by me.

Esmeralda dos Santos



When tensions began to rise in 1999, people attacked me at SMP 2 and violated me in various ways, resulting in my getting pregnant with a child. The perpetrator began hitting and kicking me, saying, "I'm doing this so I can rid of the baby!" But I took care of my child until she grew up.

After giving birth, my daughter was healthy, but for me as a mother, things began to feel abnormal from that moment on; I felt like someone suffering from a mental disorder because I kept reliving what people had done to me. My daughter, with the help of a priest and a nun, provided assistance such as milk and clothing. One day, a UN representative came to visit Suai, and I brought my daughter along to introduce her to the representative. The woman chose a name for my daughter that was the same as her own.

My body still hurts. My mind is still racing, and my heart is still broken and hurting because of what happened in the past. My heart is also shattered because we suffered a lot, yet for some reason I didn't get veterans' subsidy, but those who didn't suffer like us somehow received it.

I own land and a house. I also plant bananas, coconuts, cassava and corn, and farm animals, like chickens and pigs. After independence, the CAVR—which was a great source of support for me—along with the priests and nuns associated with the CAVR, provided some assistance to my child, such as medicine and financial support for my child's needs. My husband's efforts also helped provide for our needs. Given my unstable mental condition, the parish priest provided counseling so that I could receive the sacrament of marriage; therefore, my husband and I were married in 2003. Because I also gave testimony to the CAVR, in 2007 they took us to attend a large hearing in Jakarta, Indonesia. In the future, I would like support to help pay for my children's schooling.

Ermelinda Fereira



In March 1999, I was still in the second year of junior high school when militia came to Fatumea to arrest my father and take him to their post, where he was beaten. They beat him until he was battered and bruised, and his whole body turned black. People took my father to the hospital for treatment. By the time my father recovered, he was suffering from mental illness. In July, my older brother was killed by militia upstream on the Fatumea river. We hadn't heard that he had died; it wasn't until after the election was over that my nephew came and told us. We fled to the Fohorem post. We stayed in the nuns' dormitory and couldn't go out because the militia were waiting for us. They took us from the church to the Fohorem community centre. Later, they took four of us from Fatumea to the Fohorem militia post. Then, the militia took us back to Fatumea militia post. He then took us by motorcycle to a place called Cabang Aldeia Belulik; when we arrived there, he began touching my body and said, "Don't be afraid, I'm going to make you my wife." At that time, I was only 14 years old. After that, we were taken to the militia post in Bubur Fehan.

On the evening of September 3, they began arresting my father; some people forced me to take off my clothes to humiliate and violate me. The next morning, I saw my father and cried, but he didn't seem to react at all. On the morning of September 4, my mother and uncle came to visit us there; my mother and sister came into the room, then hugged me while crying over what had happened to me. Then they went to meet the militia, handed over 600 rupiah, and said, "Let my daughter and my husband go." The militia replied, "You can take the girl, but leave the men here." On the morning of September 5, we heard the news that my father had died. That night, they were killed, and their bodies were dumped into a cave in a place called Nanaek, Indonesia. The situation began to escalate, and we were terrified because my father and two brothers had been killed on the night of the 4th. Our relatives were also reluctant to take us in because we were labeled "red cards," and they feared the militia would kill them all if they sheltered us. Some relatives said, "Your fate is the same; since all the men are dead, who will take care of you?" After hearing that the roads had been opened for refugees to return to Timor, we registered and returned to Timor in October 1999. I felt very sad because so many family members had lost their lives in the conflict. I'm still young, but I've already faced so many struggles.

I got married in 2011. I told my husband everything, and he understood, he said, "It's all because of the war, and today we have our freedom." He accepted the reality of my life; we now have four children, though two of them have passed away. As a survivor, I feel unappreciated by the state. During the verification process for veteran status, they said that because I was so young at the time, I didn't meet the legal requirements. I want to share my story so that our stories aren't forgotten. I feel relieved after sharing this story. Currently, I live in a small house and work as an employee at Administration post office. My hopes for the future are to receive good healthcare and to see my children succeed in their education so that one day they can carry on my legacy.

Graciana de Araujo Cardoso



In 1992, we were on our way to attend Mass in Tilomar when the Indonesian military arrived, arrested us, and took us to Gunung Bua; there, we were forced to kneel near the flagpole for two hours finally being released. In April 1999, the Indonesian military arrested my husband and tortured him at their headquarters for three months. On July 17, 1999, my husband escaped and ran to the church, so my children and I followed him we stayed there together until the election results were announced. The priests advised us to find a place to save ourselves, so the men fled, some of them into the jungle. My children and family still stayed at the church.

I witnessed first-hand as the militia hacked at the priest during the incident on 6 September. My two-month-old godson also nearly died, but his condition improved after I anointed his body with holy water. I was stabbed by the militia in the back and right hand; despite my injuries, I kept fighting to find a place to hide. The militia took me and my child—along with other children whose parents had been killed in the massacre—onto a bus and brought us to a military post for interrogation. That's when they raped me. My older sister was also killed inside the church. While there, a man asked about my sister's children; I raised my hand and said that they were all my children. Then, they took us to Atambua, Indonesia.

My children and I became refugees in Atambua, Betun. Now we live with family in Maudemu-Salele. I have eight children: four of my own biological children, and the rest are the children of my husband's late first wife. My husband and I received veteran benefits. My right arm, which was slashed by the militia, still hurts to this day, and I also feel sad when I think back on the past.

I am a homemaker; I also farm, raise livestock and run a kiosk to help support my family. I own my own home and, in the future, I want to find a solution to the land issues we face. I also want to pay for my children's education. I ask the government to recognize the suffering I endured during the war by upgrading my veteran status; because I was brutally tortured and raped, I implore that my struggles be given the respect they deserve.

Juliana dos Santos



On September 4, 1999, we ran toward the church. At the time, I was only 14 years old. On September 6, the militia surrounded the church. My brother was shot dead. We ran out the door, where a militia leader grabbed my hand and said, "I'm going to make you, my wife." He dragged me into a car, drove to the command post and locked the doors. I was all alone in that car. I cried by myself. That afternoon, around seven o'clock, we went straight to the *Koramil* Salele; we stayed there for four days. That night, he forced me to take off my clothes and tried to sleep with me, but I refused, so he tore all my clothes off. I could only cry and didn't know what to do.

On 10 September, he took me to Betun. He had two wives, and I was his third wife. At the time, his wives did not accept me; they were angry with me and treated me badly. If it weren't for the war, I would never have married a man who was already married. My eldest son was born on 27 November, 2000. Four months later, he married a fourth woman.

My second child was born in 2004, and my youngest son was born in 2007. After my husband married his fourth wife, his attitude toward me turned very bad; he often beat and abused me. He didn't give me any money; instead, he handed it over to his new wife. Since I lived with his fourth wife, whenever I needed to buy something for myself, I had to ask her, but she never gave me anything. So, I decided it would be better to return to my family than to suffer here.

On 9 January 9, 2022, I fled to Timor; my husband and his nephews—who are in the Indonesian military—chased me all the way to the border, but they didn't make it past the big river. Once I had returned, my family welcomed me warmly, and I felt happy. I live a free life here; my children live over there, but their father takes care of them. They've come to visit me here.

Now, I have been provided with a house of 'Uma Memória Esperansa' [Hope House] and my mother and siblings also receive veterans' pension. My hope for the future is that I will be able to see my children finish school. I often find strength in talking with the other women who visit me regularly.





Chapter 6: Dili

Riding the tiger, living under watch

As the capital of occupied East Timor, Dili experienced multiple tides of violence over the full 24 years of conflict—from the invasion on 7 December 1975 to the final wave of terror as Indonesian forces and pro-autonomy militias withdrew toward West Timor in 1999. The testimonies of survivors of sexual violence reflect how these shifting tides repeatedly engulfed the city and its surrounding areas, making Dili a place of continuous surveillance, detention, and fear, rather than episodic violence alone.

Among the thousands killed during and immediately after the invasion were prominent women in the liberation movement, including Isabel Lobato and Rosa "Muki" Bonaparte, killed on 8 December 1975 at the Dili harbour as Indonesian forces consolidated control, before moving eastward to Baucau and inland to other municipalities. (Vol. II, para. 244, p. 209) By early 1976, Indonesian troops had extended military operations to Aileu, Ainaro, Manufahi, Bobonaro, and Ermera. In Dili itself, however, the Indonesian military established what *Chega!* describes as a pattern of detention and torture, aimed at controlling a civilian population suspected of links to the Resistance in the mountains. (Vol. III, Part 7.4)

Patterns of violations

In Dili, *Chega!* documents sexual violence primarily in the context of urban detention, interrogation, and constant military surveillance. Unlike rural municipalities shaped by mass displacement or internment, survivors in Dili were exposed to everyday vulnerability—arrested from homes, streets, schools, or workplaces, and taken to detention centres where sexual violence occurred alongside torture and intimidation.

Women detained in military posts, police facilities, and unofficial interrogation sites testified to rape, sexual torture, and humiliation during questioning. Sexual violence was used both to extract information and to terrorize survivors into silence, reinforcing control over families and neighbourhoods believed to be connected to Falintil or the clandestine network. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44, pp. 1925–1927)

Throughout the late-1970s and 1980s, sexual violence in Dili often occurred without legal recourse, reflecting the collapse of civilian protection in an environment dominated by military authority. Women

described being raped by soldiers or auxiliaries with no possibility of complaint, particularly when perpetrators were embedded in the very structures responsible for security and justice. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 42–44, pp. 1926–1927)

In 1999, Dili again became a focal point of violence, as militia groups operated openly alongside Indonesian forces. Women experienced renewed sexual violence in the context of intimidation, forced displacement, and attacks on civilians perceived as supporting independence, compounding earlier trauma from decades of occupation. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 140–150, pp. 1954–1958)

What *Chega!* discovered about Dili: In Numbers

Chega! only records 27 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Dili during the period 1974–1999. This represents one of the lowest recorded proportions of sexual violations among all municipalities. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548.) The lower number of documented cases in Dili reflects patterns of under-reporting, shaped by fear, proximity to perpetrators, and the concentration of military and intelligence forces in the capital. In an urban setting where communities live in close quarters and social networks are tightly interwoven, survivors have often been more reluctant to speak publicly or participate in community activities, concerned about stigma and the need to protect their dignity. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548)

As with most municipalities, the timing of documented sexual violence in Dili shows that the majority of recorded cases occurred before 1999, during the years of occupation, rather than only during the final violence. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: surviving under constant watch

Women's resilience in Dili was shaped by the need to live under permanent observation. Survival required navigating daily life—work, schooling, family care—under conditions of surveillance, checkpoints, and arbitrary arrest. Women protected children, sustained households, and maintained clandestine support networks while absorbing violence that could not be spoken about openly.

Many survivors carried their experiences of detention and sexual violence in silence for decades. Through testimony to *Chega!* and later survivor-led initiatives, survivors in Dili transformed private suffering into public memory. In a city designed to enforce control, resilience lay in endurance, quiet solidarity, and the eventual reclaiming of voice.

Maria Isabel Jesus da Silva



When Indonesian troops invaded, I was only 14 years old. Early that morning, around 5 a.m., paratroopers landed in Dili and shooting began. We were too afraid to leave our house, and the troops set up camp directly in front of us for five months. Three months later, Commander Armet raped me. By 1976, I was married, but my husband was so afraid of the military *bapa* that he fled, leaving me alone while I was heavily pregnant.

At the time, I was helping the NUREP secretariat distribute information, raise funds and prepare supplies for the resistance in the forest. I was also involved in OPMT. In 1977, *bapa* arrested me and two other women and detained us at *Mes Tomodok*. My children were left with my mother. We were interrogated, separated and held for almost three weeks. During that time, I was repeatedly raped by different men. I could do nothing but remain silent.

One night, a *bapa* drove me home. When I saw my mother sitting on the porch, I ran to her and cried in her arms. But I was still not free. The military ordered me to remain at home and report to SGI Kolmera every week. Whenever they wanted me, they would come and take me away, while my mother could do nothing.

In 1977–1978, when guerrillas came down from the jungle to surrender, I was arrested again and taken to Kartika Sari because the military suspected I had connections with them. They made me cook and serve them and treated me as a "wife." I later gave birth to a daughter. Although I was eventually allowed to move around again, the military continued to monitor me closely and arrested me whenever tensions arose.

In 1981, when I was eight months pregnant, *Nanggala* forces took me to their headquarters in Kolmera for interrogation. Around this time, my husband was preparing to leave for Australia, abandoning me and my child. Another *bapa* repeatedly forced himself on me, beat me and eventually forced me to live as his wife. I had five children by him—two daughters and three sons.

People looked down on me and rejected me because I lived with a *bapa*. We were constantly moved from place to place, and he often beat me. Even my own brothers rejected me, while my parents could only cry. When I was 22, he forced me to move with him to Kupang, leaving three of my children behind with my mother in Timor. Even while living with him, I continued secretly supporting friends in the resistance.

After independence, I worked as a restaurant cook and did laundry. I have received no Government assistance. I was offered a veterans' pension under category 4a7, but I refused because I believe my contribution was more than that of a former prisoner.

Later, I found a new life partner, an Australian man. I told him my entire story and hid nothing from him. He accepted me and all that I had experienced, and we married in Australia in 2003. He treats my children as his own. Today, I work at the Ministry of Education.

Olga Quintão Amaral



In 1990, when I was still a teenager, I lived in a convent. There, I began to witness sexual violence against young women. Because of what I saw, I became involved with organisations such as *Sagrada Familia*, working with others to resist the abuses committed by *Bapa*.

On 4 March 1997, we joined a demonstration at Hotel Timor. I carried a flag and shouted, "*Viva Timor-Leste!*" Soon, armed Indonesian soldiers surrounded us. They struck me on the head until I bled and fell to the ground. I lost consciousness twice. When I woke, the police had stripped off my clothes, leaving me with only a small piece of cloth to cover myself.

They took us to the police station, saying, "The fresh meat has arrived." They sprayed us with tear gas, beat us and stripped us naked. During interrogation, they sexually assaulted us, touching and groping our bodies. When they asked why I had joined the demonstration, I told them, "I am the leader," and, "It was women who started the war, and it will be women who end it."

For a week, we were tortured and sexually violated. They burned my hands and feet with cigarettes, placed a chair across my legs and sat on it, kicked me in the waist and stamped on my lower abdomen. They repeatedly raped us, even while we were menstruating, often covering our eyes so we could not see who was attacking us. Our male friends were also stripped and beaten, and some who were taken away at night never returned. When members of the *Koramil* came to see us, we were threatened and told to say that we had not been beaten.

We were later transferred to Becora Prison, still wearing the same clothes from the demonstration. Our male colleagues gave us some of their clothes and prepared pillows for us. Priests and nuns also came regularly to visit and support me.

I was released on 24 March 1998 and returned to my studies, but Dili was no longer safe for me. I went to *Region1, Ponta Leste*, where I accompanied a senior resistance commander through the jungle for a month. In 1999, I returned to Dili to vote in the referendum, although I continued to receive threats.

Around this time, I reunited with a former school friend who helped me escape from *Bapa*. We later had a daughter, but his family often brought up my past, creating difficulties in our relationship. In 2001, I worked with Fokupers for a year before eventually leaving.

My message to other survivors is that we must remain strong. We sacrificed our youth for this country's independence, yet many senior veterans have forgotten what women contributed. We are not simply asking for money—we want recognition for what we did and what we endured. What the Government and CNC have done for women survivors is still not enough. If survivors are not supported, how can we give our children a better future? That is what I want most: a better life for my children.

Maria da Silva Benfica



In 1974, I studied at the Canto Resende 30 Technical Teacher Training School. The following year, after the coup, I began working for the FRETILIN Central Committee (CCF), but only until December 6, 1975. On December 7, Indonesian paratroopers landed in our neighbourhood, at my house in Akadiru-hun. We heard gunfire. The Indonesian army was searching for some FALINTIL troops hiding in our neighbourhood, and we were no longer safe.

In January 1976, I received a letter from the jungle relay, asking to help my friends in the resistance. We began going in and out of the homes of Chinese-Timorese residents asking for their help. At that time, I hadn't found a job, so I baked cakes to sell and used the proceeds to buy supplies to send into the jungle. In March, I got a job at the General Administration Bureau, but continued working underground with other friends, some of whom unfortunately disappeared in 1976 and have not been found until now.

In January 1977, at around 11 p.m., Indonesian troops arrested me at home, accusing us of harboring FALINTIL troops. The military picked me up along with 23 other young men in a military jeep and took us to the Kulu-Hun Military District Command (Koramil) for interrogation. Then we were taken back to Sang Tai Ho. They forced us to reveal our names, hiding places, and information about FRETILIN. They beat me, stripped me naked, and took my photo. They burned me with Gudang Garam cigarettes. At Sang Tai Ho, I was joined by four female friends and twenty-four men. In February 1977, I was taken to Balide prison. There, the military police beat me, kicked me in the bladder, punched me until my eyes were black, and pulled my hair until I fell to the ground. I just lay on the floor, and they doused me with water.

After my release from prison, I returned to work at the Civil Service Bureau. There, we continued to carry out secret work, such as delivering items to the jungle, such as typewriters, duplicating machines, pencils, and erasers. When an attack occurs, we former political prisoners and the military have to be summoned again by the military to the Koramil (Military Command) for a re-investigation. In 1980, they took me to Balide prison for three days, then my office chief released me. In 1981, the military was still pursuing me. Then a soldier bought me an emergency ticket and sent me to Kupang and Denpasar. I stayed there for about a month, and I also married an Indonesian man. This saved my life and my family's. In 1990, when I was five months pregnant, two pro-autonomy men attacked me. They beat me with a steel cable. His wife picked up a large rock to throw at me. Ultimately, I miscarried a baby boy.

Now I work as a teacher, and my husband is a nurse. We work to support our children's education and meet our daily needs. I urge other survivors not to dwell on past suffering. We must develop ourselves to move forward.

Josefa Adão da Silva



In 1975, I was only 12 years old when the Indonesian invasion occurred. My family fled to the forest, and there I became involved in the OPMT. At night, my friends and I patrolled, holding pieces of wood in our hands. During the day, I was a teacher, using bark and black charcoal to teach students in the forest. When the enemy attacked, we stopped teaching, moved to another safe place, and continued teaching. Shortly afterwards, my mother died, followed by my father. At that young age, I had to care for my younger siblings, but then they all died too, leaving me alone.

In 1979, the Indonesians arrested me at the Remexio border. They accused me of being a teacher in the forest, and I answered honestly, "I did teach. I'm not lying. " They beat and kicked me—but they couldn't break my spirit. Later, they forced me to teach, but I continued to suffer. The Red Cross found me in Remexio and brought me back to Dili. I was reunited with my immediate family. I also participated in the preparations. They came to drag me from my house to be killed. I asked them to pray before shooting me, but they didn't kill me. They took me to be tortured at the Dare Military District Command (Koramil), then took me back to the Military District Command (Korem), and accused me of being a member of the GPK (Gerakan Rakyat). At that time, I didn't even know what the GPK was.

Then, they transferred me to Kartika Sari, where I and the other women suffered the most. They stripped us naked, raped us, and forced us into a tank filled with crocodiles. They also beat us and took our photos. Then they transferred me again to Balide prison. Finally, I returned to my family, but life was still tense. The militia continued to pursue me and threaten my family. To protect my family, I married a militia, not for love, but so I could survive, and we have a child. Life with him was very difficult. Then, I got a job as a clerk in the department that handles ID cards, and I helped many clandestine members obtain their ID cards. And then I began to have the courage to ask for a divorce. After the divorce, I worked hard to support my child and also carried out clandestine activities. Now, my oldest son is in his late twenties and works for the IOM. But my suffering continues. I have no money to pay for my child's school fees or for daily food. My current husband and I are unemployed, working in the fields growing vegetables like corn and maize.

We need justice, because without it, everything will be in vain, and our suffering will be in vain. I feel that what I and others have done has not been recognized by the government. I hope the government will pay attention to my child and me and at least provide some support. I also ask for an award to recognize our suffering so that in the future my children can continue to tell my story.

Ermelinda Soares — daughter of Orsi Bilou



My mother died in 2002. My father married another woman, but they had no children, so I was their only child. My stepfather was also a TBO; at that time, he was also tortured by the militias.

In 1986, when I came home from school, my classmates told each other not to play with me as I was the daughter of a soldier. I felt so bad that I cried. I went home; I told my mother, and she said, "It's a long story." She recounted the story: "We surrendered in 1979; the soldiers arrested us and hid us in cells. Then, a battalion took out 2 people to sleep with them. If the women do not want to, then they have to kill our brothers or some family, because the family is the guarantee." After hearing this story, I began to want to get involved in the clandestine one because I also wanted to meet my father.

In 1991, when I was in 6th grade, I started getting involved in the Clandestine. When the November 12 demonstration happened, we ran up to Mount Faturmera, Laclo; we also did clandestine activities there, and we did not go to school. I did clandestine work with other friends; our zones are Mambae Zone and Remis Zone. I also work for the Timorese Women's Organization (OMT). I attended the *12-12* Ritual Arts at Akanunu. From 1992 to 1995, I served as an *Estafeta*. When we went to Manatutu, the soldiers made a checkpoint, they detained us and groped our bodies, punishment for carrying letters of appeal. With this, the nuns went to the church in Metinaro and read our names out in the church—we were "bad women."

My mother and I were discriminated against by our family and community as "army children" or "Javanese wives". My mother also suffered the same torture—she was beaten by soldiers on her sides, so her wounds didn't heal properly, and she didn't receive proper care until she died.

From 1993 to 1998, I began supporting food collection for the resistance in the jungle. In 1998, I started a family, and on July 30, my partner and I decided to get married in Manatuto.

In 1999, we separated. My mother went to Kupang. My stepfather, along with the "Malae" (foreigners), stayed at the Turismo Hotel. I fled to Mount Faturmera, and we stayed there for a month. There was no food, so we only had unripe mangoes, and no medicine. When we heard that the UN had arrived, we also went to Dili. We arrived without food, and foreigners distributed food and household supplies to us. Now we have a house with a corrugated iron roof, but it hasn't been plastered yet. We plant trees. We raise pigs and chickens, selling them to earn money to support ourselves. But sometimes the animals get sick and die, and we can't sell them. I want to open a kiosk to earn money to support my family.

Domingas da Silva Dukai



I was young when the Indonesian military arrived. A man from Luru, Lospalos, came to propose to me, but we hardly met. We only exchanged letters. In 1973, he was still in school. I never knew if he had died. When the Indonesian military arrived in 1975, our lives changed completely. We were just ordinary people, but they treated us like enemies.

We didn't know their names. We didn't know if they were members of the *Rajawali* or *Kopassus*. All we knew was that they had weapons. They marched into our village and terrified us all. At night, we hid out of fear. They came again and again, and we couldn't escape. I wasn't the only one who suffered. They came to take many women. Many were injured. War leaves no one unscathed.

The priests told us, "This war is not your fault. One day, your children will have a better life." "But how can I believe that when we live in fear?" I have five children to protect. Every day, I fear they will be taken from me. Now, I am old. I survived a situation no one should ever have to experience. People say we must punish those who hurt us, but "what good is that?" – the war is over, but there is no justice. Government officials talk about justice, but no one listens to us. They let us bear these wounds in silence. Now I receive a pension. It helps me, but it can't erase the past. I want to register as a veteran, but without the support of good people, I don't know the process and the system. No one tells us how to claim what we deserve. Even after all this time, our story remains unfinished. We are free now, we have independence, but I will still wait for justice.

I hope people can see and hear us. The war changed my life, but I continue to live my life. My daily activities are working and helping at church, I sell small items in front of my house to students, and I live freely now. I prefer working at the church. My children's fathers are all Indonesian soldiers. Now that my children are grown, I tell them those stories, and I ask them to listen to each other and love each other. I have told my story. This is what I can do. I may never get justice, but I remain steadfast in my faith. I forgive because I must. I live because I survived. And that is enough.

My message to other survivors is that we need to look out for each other. We need to unite so we can challenge the government to support survivors. I hope institutions can help us all.

Felismina da C. dos Santos Nunes



On the night of 13 October, 1991, I felt unwell and had nightmares, and so did all my younger siblings. Estafeta messengers came to the house that next morning to tell me and my siblings we needed to run into the forest. But I didn't want to because I have responsibilities towards my sisters, who are still in their teens. The next morning, I went to work in Korem as a secretariat staff member in Korem (Military Command). When I got to work, I saw the faces of the soldiers and my colleagues suspiciously. Then my Divisional Chief came and said, "Now you don't have to work; you just have to sit still and wait for them to call you." Around 8:30, two Timor officers came to arrest me; they tried to handcuff me, but I refused because, "I am not a thief. " So, another officer ordered me to walk without handcuffs.

At the intelligence office, at 3pm they took me to search my house in Bidau Mota Klaran. Fortunately, my brothers burned the documents, and some of the letters have been destroyed. The soldiers still found a small telegram under my bed, and they brought it to the office. At the moment I can't stand it anymore, because I'm on my period, I don't change my clothes, I smell so bad, and my period comes and dries on my body. A lieutenant and two Timorese interrogated me. They tried to get me to confess, "Better to confess to us Timorese than to the Army." But I remained silent and replied, "I don't know anything." During the interrogation, they always carried a black snake in their pocket along with a gun. They wanted to remove my blouse, and I replied, "I'd rather die than have you think badly of me." On the third night, they told me to sleep in a warehouse full of weapons and other supplies. I was so tired and fell asleep; a man came in and raped me. Many people knew about my arrest; the Red Cross also came to meet me, but I still faced harsh treatment. An Indonesian Commander accused me of being a traitor. But I answered them with a smile, "Rice has become porridge." They kept torturing and moving me around.

On the night of 28th October, 5 intelligence officers came to my place; they immediately put their pants on the door and entered. Fortunately, one of the soldiers on duty was also kind; he told us to hide the key and not tell the intelligence. Intelligence came and said, "Hey woman, do you want to die or live?" and hit me on the head with an iron. They searched for the key but could not find it, so the five men left. Finally, they transferred me back to Becora Prison. There, I felt comfortable, because I knew many people, and at Becora they called me in for only a brief interrogation.

After independence, my life was very difficult; I lived with my sister and brother. I went to work, at least just to support myself. Many of my female friends have suffered greatly and yearned for justice, but the government did not appreciate it, and the government people never showed much concern to the women victims. But I believe that we women are tough. And this still gives me hope that one day our suffering will be acknowledged, and our stories will be honoured.

Micaela do Carmo



I used to work in the clandestine with a female friend who also lived in Bekora, helping a relative who has since passed away. On September 4, 1999, when we heard the results of independence, I was nine months pregnant—I was married at the time. Because the soldiers were beating people indiscriminately, I told all the men in the house to leave, and I stayed home alone. I slept at home, thinking I wouldn't be beaten because I was pregnant.

Our house was covered in grass, and there was a poster of a resistance leader on the wall. Shortly after, several soldiers and Timorese militia came in. They saw the poster and the flag and immediately beat me. They ripped off all my clothes, raped me even though I was pregnant, and threatened, "Who is the father of this baby?" Then they continued, "Liar, hiding the people from the jungle." They beat me, kicked me, and dragged me to the front of the house. I ran to an uncle's house, but they followed and continued beating us. I ran to the priest for help. I ran with all my clothes torn. On September 13, a doctor from abroad who assisted in the delivery at Guido Valadares Hospital, used a vacuum to pull the baby out of my womb because the baby had died because my stomach was trampled until it was crushed.

Today, we have independence, everyone is happy, but we were the targets of the military. People burn us with cigarettes because they say we are hiding photos of our leaders. This is the first time I'm telling my story. When the officials came to inaugurate the monument, my heart ached because my baby son died for this country, but my son and I weren't included in the list. Those whose husbands died were called to cut the cake in public during the ceremony, but the rest of us were left behind. This land is sacred. I gave myself for this country, dedicated myself to this country, but why don't people mention us? I feel so sad, my children and my husband are also sad because they know my story.

Before telling my story, I felt like it was a pain and a wound I was keeping inside, but after telling my story, I feel a little better. I'm still sad and hurt, sometimes I cry alone in my room, because we have independence, but people choose against each other, not including us. At least, I don't ask for much, other than recognition of our existence. I have three children, two girls and a boy. One of my children is studying at UNTL and recently began an internship, while my husband and I borrowed money to pay for our children's schooling. My future may be uncertain, but I want to ensure my children have a brighter future.

This recognition is important to us victims. Many people often say that we are lying, even though we live with this disease in our hearts. Nobody gave us any recognition. Now I sell second-hand clothes, plant flowers, and my husband works for SAS (*Serviços de Água e Saneamento* - Water Supply and Sanitation Department). I have a small business that helps support my children's school.

Agusta Soriano da Silva



Before June 10, 1980, we farmed, growing corn, to feed our families. We also met with our resistance friends three times a month. We shared food, fruit, and whatever else we could support them. The spies learned about our support for resistance and reported it to the *Koramil* (District Military Command). Shortly thereafter, the *Koramil* came to arrest us and take us for interrogation. They asked us, "Why did you go to meet them in the jungle?" We answered honestly, "They are our family, we couldn't just leave them." After the rebellion, they came to arrest my brothers. My parents were sentenced to prison. Because my father had poor eyesight, I would not let him go. At night, soldiers from Battalion 744, along with Hansip (Civil Defense) and TBO (Operational Assistance Forces), came to arrest me and took me to Dare Seminary for interrogation. I was sad about it, and they also asked, "Why did you go to the jungle?" Then I answered, "We went to see them, because they are our brothers, and we cannot let them die."

The soldiers came and took my mother, sister, and cousin to prison. I was left to care for my blind father. They kept me in Dare, because if I left, who would care for my father? The soldiers of Battalion 744 brought TBOs and destroyed our house, kicking our door open. The soldiers wouldn't let us go alone. They kept coming to our house every night, and we were afraid to report it. So, every night it was like that, the militia came to raid our house. I couldn't stand it anymore, so I went to report to the military captain, "Sir Commander, we Timorese don't like being treated like prostitutes. It's embarrassing for us, and my older brothers don't like the soldiers doing this to us." But they kept taking me, and it made me depressed. I said to myself, "Really, how did I become this bad?" They took us, talked, and then there was a dance, and we had to dance with them. At 1:00 a.m., they sent us back to our homes. Finally, my brother was imprisoned, and after he was released, they came to arrest me and took me to Ataúro. I was sent to Ataúro for three years of forced labour. On Ataúro, we built roads and farmed to grow food so we could eat.

My life now is farming. I grow crops, raise animals, and sell whatever I can to pay for my children's school fees. As survivors, we must be strong. As women, we must work for ourselves. When I don't work, I feel sick. Working gives me strength. I want my children to have jobs—not just any jobs, but good jobs.





Chapter 7: Ermera

Hunger and survival in the fields, reaching for justice

Ermera, a mountainous municipality dominated by coffee plantations, was deeply affected by the Indonesian occupation through a combination of military operations, forced displacement, labour control, and chronic hunger. Across the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Ermera emerges as a municipality where violence was often less spectacular than in urban centres, but persistent and structural, shaping women's lives through dependency, fear, and deprivation. In Ermera's mountainous and plantation areas, *base de apoio* communities were targeted and later absorbed into systems of surveillance and control.

Patterns of violations

In Ermera, *Chega!* documents sexual violence primarily in the context of surrender operations, military presence in rural villages, and systems of economic and social control. Women were raped during capture, in detention at local ABRI or Koramil posts, and in situations where their families' survival depended on compliance with military and civilian authorities.

During the early occupation period (1975–1979), women in Ermera were subjected to rape during military attacks and surrender processes as Indonesian forces consolidated control over coffee-producing areas. These violations occurred alongside village destruction, forced relocation, and mass hunger, placing women in situations of extreme vulnerability. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sexual violence in Ermera often took place without legal recourse, particularly affecting women whose husbands or relatives were suspected of Resistance involvement or who were dependent on plantation labour controlled by the military or its allies. *Chega!* records rape in and around women's homes and villages, reinforcing women's subordination within systems of surveillance and economic dependency. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44, pp. 1925–1927)

Sexual violence in Ermera also intersected with forced labour and food insecurity. Women carried the burden of sustaining families during periods of famine, while facing abuse by those who controlled access to land, food, and movement. (Vol. II; Vol. III, Part 7.7)

A rare attempt at accountability: Alianca's case

Chega! records the first conflict-related sexual violence ever brought before an Indonesian military tribunal during the occupation as the case of Alianca, a young woman from Ermera who was raped by an Indonesian soldier in the mid-1990s. The case was pursued through the extraordinary efforts of Indonesian and Timorese lawyers in 1998, and is documented as an exceptional moment in which sexual violence against a Timorese woman briefly entered a formal legal process. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 118–121, pp. 1946–1948.) The case was ultimately dismissed on procedural grounds, with the court declining to proceed against the accused despite the evidence presented.

What *Chega!* Discovered about Ermera: In Numbers

Chega! records 199 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Ermera during the period 1974–1999. This places Ermera among the municipalities with a high number of recorded sexual violations, reflecting the scale of harm experienced by women in the municipality. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548)

Ermera stands out for the concentration of sexual violence within broader systems of detention, forced labour, and military control, particularly in plantation and rural areas. The number of recorded cases reflects how prolonged control over civilian populations increased women's vulnerability to sexual abuse. (Vol. I, Part 6, para. 129, p. 548)

As with most municipalities, the timing of documented sexual violence in Ermera shows that the majority of cases occurred before 1999, during the long years of occupation, rather than only during the final violence. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: survival amid hunger and control

Survivor's resilience in Ermera was forged through daily survival under conditions of scarcity. Women worked the land, cared for children, and maintained households during years of hunger and displacement, often while male relatives were detained, killed, or forced into hiding. Survival depended on cooperation—sharing food, caring collectively for children, and maintaining community ties despite surveillance and fear.

Many survivors carried memories of sexual violence and loss in silence for decades. Through testimony to *Chega!* and later survivor-led processes, survivors in Ermera transformed private endurance into collective memory. In a municipality shaped by labour exploitation and deprivation, resilience lay in sustaining life and dignity under conditions designed to exhaust both.

Deliana Martins — daughter of Rosa Martins



I was born in 1992. I began school and started helping my mother with household chores in 1996. My mother passed away when I was still young, around 10 or 12 years old, I heard stories about the past from her—that there were five of us siblings and that our father was *bapa* (an Indonesian soldier). Hearing this left me heartbroken and brought me to tears. I felt somewhat resentful toward my mother for not telling us while she was still alive. She was gone, and it was only then that we learned from family and neighbours about our father.

Between 1997 and 1999, I continued my life with my older sister, and we lived together in Gleno. There, I resumed my schooling and completed my junior high education in 1999. However, that period was extremely difficult due to the war and food shortages. It was very hard for us to obtain food, so I had to earn a living and become self-reliant. Whenever we saw others happy with their parents, we could only remain silent, as both our mother and father had passed away. Back when we were children in Ermera, we often faced discrimination from the community; people would say we had no father and label our mother a "bad woman" for having given birth to us.

Between 2001 and 2005, I worked on sorting out my documentation because there were issues with my school records from my primary and secondary education. Previously, my grandmother had handled my school paperwork, but the process had been very difficult because I did not know who my father was or whose name should be correctly listed; consequently, the information on my educational documents—such as my primary and secondary school diplomas—was inconsistent.

I used to live in a house with walls made of logs in Ermera Village. We raised livestock, and I helped my sister run small businesses—such as making satay and selling clothes—while also tending her shop and selling sweet snacks at the market to cover school fees and daily living expenses. Now, I live in my own home and have two children. My husband works as well, while I currently volunteer with an NGO and the Public Works Department in Gleno. In the future, I want to build a house, own a car, and continue running a business, such as opening a shop of my own.

Alcina Brites dos Santos



In 1975, we fled into the forest. I was 18 years old at the time. While in the forest, I joined the OPMT to support FALINTIL, serving as a liaison who carried letters to the Rainaur company. It was an incredibly difficult time. For three years, we lived without proper food or clothing, constantly moving between hiding spots—in rock crevices, tree hollows or amidst the tall grass—and subsisting solely on what nature provided. The best food we had was dried cassava kept in our bag; we would run down toward the sea and then climb the mountains to hide in caves. The situation became extremely perilous due to sudden gunfire, occurring both day and night.

In 1979, the Indonesian army arrested and tortured me. It was then that I was subjected to sexual violence; they abused me in turns, day and night. I was imprisoned for six months. While in custody, I was also forced into sexual servitude whenever they pleased, eventually giving birth to a son fathered by a member of the military.

Amidst our suffering—even when we had neither food nor drink—God heard our cries; He gave me the strength to keep fighting for a way out, even though we were hemmed in on all sides. Starvation also claimed the lives of my entire family.

After independence was achieved, I reflected on the suffering we endured. I was raped in front of my own husband; I was tortured, coerced, and imprisoned for a year. I even gave birth to a son fathered by my tormentor—a fate I had to accept simply because I had carried the FRETILIN flag. The torture was gruelling; they removed my toenails which causes me constant foot pain, and because of my sacrifices I was given the code name "*Lori Lia*." That suffering left a piercing pain whenever I performed heavy labor, and to soothe it, I would drink a traditional herbal concoction made from bark. Although I now live alone—having lost my family—my life experiences and God's grace give me the strength to keep speaking out and sharing this story with the nation and future generations.

Seeking a better life, I remarried in 1998 and we raised three children—two daughters and a son. To support the family and meet our household needs, my husband and I cultivated coffee, taro, and legumes while running a small business. I actively participate in various church and community ceremonies, performing dances such as "*bidu*" and "*tebe-tebe*" alongside fellow community members in Ermera. My message to the next generation is this: "We have stepped forward, guiding your ears to our stories. In time, other stories will find their way out of shame and into the hands of the next generation."

Belandina de Araújo *Cobra*



I am from Ermera and live in Atsabe Village. In 1975, when I was 10 years old, the Indonesian military killed my parents, siblings, and relatives. Members of the Indonesian military had raped my mother to death. In 1994, SGI personnel arrested and detained me at their headquarters, where they tortured and raped me, too. At the time, I was five or six months pregnant, yet I was subjected to torture and rape until I fell critically ill and nearly died; I struggled to find help to save my life.

I have not yet obtained justice because I do not know how to go about it. My life feels unsettled and full of hardship. I have not received any support; I submitted the paperwork for a veteran's subsidy back in 2009, but the process has not moved forward. I rely on my husband's income to meet daily needs. We have six children—three boys and three girls; the eldest son is in college, while the eldest daughter just graduated from high school. The rest are all still in school. I run a small-scale business involving activities like making *kripik* chips, raising livestock, and farming.

My hope for the future is that the state recognizes me as a victim. I want my children to have the same employment opportunities as others. I have suffered and became a victim for this country; my son passed the F-FDTL entrance exam in 2023, and his name was entered into the system, but it was subsequently removed. As a mother, I suffered as a victim—now my children, too.

Filomena de Jesus Araújo *Bikiak*



In the 1990s, I was actively involved in the resistance movement and underground activities. In 1993, I collaborated with the OPMT and activists linked to FALINTIL in the jungle. We organized ourselves to support those in the jungle. Our work was clandestine, and our movements were constantly under surveillance. By 1994, the situation was intensifying; Indonesian intelligence and military personnel were everywhere. Despite hearing reports that my relatives had been beaten, I was not afraid to continue my underground activities in support of those in the jungle.

In 1996, I continued to secretly deliver food to FALINTIL in the forest. One day, when I was delivering food to a commander, he asked me to taste it first to prove that I had not poisoned it. In 1997, one of my uncles was accused of an offense, and the military attempted to arrest him, but he managed to escape. Consequently, the Indonesian military returned to our home, where they tortured us and raped me. They also demanded information regarding my uncle's whereabouts, but we replied that we did not know. My uncle had fled and was hiding at the sub-district head's house, but the official asked him to go to the church because his own home was being surrounded; ultimately, I led him out toward the forest, carrying a grenade and ammunition.

In 1997, I was married to a member of FALINTIL. When I attended Mass, the soldiers recognized me and referred to me as the wife of the resistance. I was interrogated, made to regularly self-report to the soldiers until 1998. When the situation was escalating in 1999, I was pregnant with my husband's child. The soldiers came asking about his whereabouts, and I told them he had gone to Hatolia—really, he had returned to the jungle. My husband was killed in an attack by the military.

Now, I work as a farmer and raise livestock. It still hurts me deeply when members of my own family call me a traitor. I work alongside other survivors because we can connect with and strengthen one another. My message to our leaders is this: please pay attention to us—the female survivors—and those of us who have been forgotten.

Saturnina Martins



We used to work alongside FALINTIL in the forest; [the soldiers] came to our home in Galema Village, captured my two brothers, and tied them up at a coffee shop, but the ropes snapped and they managed to escape. They recaptured one of my brothers. The soldiers beat my father, and I screamed at them, so they shot me. We fled into the forest; the *Rajawali* troops came to our place looking for evidence. They threw everything onto the ground, and soldiers burnt it to the ground.

On October 14, 1996, my father rounded up me and a sister, then ordered us to find our two brothers. We were subjected to rape and paraded around Leorema by soldiers. After the incident in Leorema, we returned to the forest. FALINTIL forces hurled threats and taunts at the two of us, calling us "bad eggs". Afterward, I fled to Dili—we were being accused as spies after the Leorema events.

Then, in 1999, as we were close to casting our votes, a man threatened us, I said "don't shoot them [my sisters], marry me instead and we can resolve the issue that way"—I then became the guarantee for safety. I married this man in 1999. It was not a church wedding. He carried a firearm and a knife to threaten and intimidate my father into letting him marry me.

I joined a farmers' group, and with a little money, buying a sack of rice wasn't difficult anymore. When my husband was still alive, I became a victim all over again. With him, I had no freedom. I couldn't gather with family or even say hello to others; I simply stayed in hiding. Meanwhile, he didn't work to earn a living, and I didn't do any housework either. Sometimes I would say to him, "During the war, you terrified me into." After everything that has happened—from the past until now—my family and the community have continued to speak ill of me; they say I married a man from the *Kemak* tribe who is childless, doesn't know how to slaughter cattle, is irresponsible, and has made life even harder. They claim that with this husband—who came to live here in Gleno—I am merely scraping by and taking advantage of state-owned land.

My husband received a veteran's benefit. The amount is $230 per month, but it is split in two between my eldest daughter and my husband's brother, and the rest of us have managed to get by so far. We recently built this small house for us to live in—along with six children.



Chapter 8: Lautém

Violence without reckoning

Lautém, the easternmost municipality of Timor-Leste, was among the first areas to experience the full force of the Indonesian invasion and among the last to see meaningful restraint on military violence. Across the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Lautém emerges as a municipality marked by extreme early violence, persistent military operations, and near-total impunity for killings and torture—conditions that created an environment in which sexual violence against women and girls became widespread and largely uncontested. In Lautém's eastern highlands, *base de apoio* communities were subjected to repeated military offensives and forced relocation.

Patterns of violations

In Lautém, *Chega!* documents sexual violence as inseparable from broader patterns of lethal violence and torture. During the early invasion and consolidation period (1975–1979), Indonesian forces carried out mass killings, arbitrary detention, and torture in towns and rural areas including Lospalos, Iliomar, Tutuala, and Mehara. In this context, rape occurred during capture, interrogation, and military operations, as soldiers acted with the assurance that no accountability would follow. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Sexual violence in Lautém frequently occurred in detention settings, where women were held alongside men who were being tortured or killed. *Chega!* records rape and sexual torture used to terrorise women during interrogation, often accompanied by beatings, threats, and public humiliation. The same sites that became known for torture also became sites of sexual abuse, reinforcing women's vulnerability in a municipality where violence was both brutal and routine. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 47–50, pp. 1927–1928)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sexual violence continued in rural Lautém during military patrols, forced displacement, and in villages under surveillance. Women whose families were suspected of Resistance links faced heightened risk, particularly in areas where killings and torture had already demonstrated the military's unchecked power. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44, pp. 1925–1927)

What *Chega!* Discovered about Lautém: In Numbers

Chega! records 105 documented acts of sexually-based violations in Lautém during the period 1974–1999. This places Lautém among the municipalities with a high number of recorded sexual violations, reflecting the intensity of violence experienced in the municipality during the occupation. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

Lautém stands out for the high proportion of cases recorded as other forms of sexual violence, rather than rape or sexual slavery. Of the 105 documented sexual violations, 54 cases (51.4%) were recorded as other sexual violence, a proportion higher than the national average. This reflects patterns of sexual abuse linked to intimidation, coercion, and torture in the municipality. (Vol. I, Part 6, p. 548)

As with most municipalities, the timing of documented sexual violence in Lautém shows that the majority of cases occurred before 1999, during the long years of occupation, rather than only during the final period of violence. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, pp. 1914–1915)

Resilience: survival under impunity

Survivors' resilience in Lautém was forged in a landscape where violence was final and visible. Survival meant learning how to live alongside fear—protecting children, maintaining daily life, and sustaining community bonds even as neighbours disappeared or were killed. Survivors supported one another quietly, sharing food, shelter, and information, and shielding younger girls where possible.

Many survivors carried experiences of sexual violence in silence for decades, shaped by the understanding that perpetrators were never punished for even the most serious crimes. When women from Lautém later testified to *Chega!*, their words reflected not only harm, but the strength required to survive in a municipality where impunity itself was a weapon. Resilience here lay in endurance, memory, and the eventual decision to speak despite long-standing fear.

Alcina dos Santos *Peikara*



My husband and I have three children, and I also have three daughters fathered by an Indonesian commander (from *Kopassus*).

I suffered greatly while my husband was in the jungle. It was just me and our children; we resided alone in the village. I was forced to sacrifice myself as a woman to save my life; that is how my three daughters—born from an Indonesian commander—came into the world. At that time, the military would summon me to their headquarters, day or night. My husband was still alive and waging a guerrilla war in the jungle. When we would meet, he would say, "I regard all these children as my own, the most important thing is that you are able to go on living."

To survive and support my children, I had to sell vegetables, make and sell sweet snacks in front of our home, and weave *tais* cloth for sale. My son, a bit younger than 10 years of age, was forced to work as *TBO* military helpers—washing clothes and dishes to earn some money. I continued working alongside people in jungle. I came down to surrender with the mindset that my left hand was with Indonesia, while my right hand continued to fight for our independence. My children were still young when I heard news of shooting between FRETILIN and Indonesian forces that killed three FRETILIN members—one of whom was my husband. It was a day after the fighting, when my neighbour, an Indonesian military member, told me my husband's fate.

I was in Lore when the soldiers captured me and had me sent to Atauro in 1981. I lived on Atauro for two and a half years. Conditions there were very difficult. When we returned, I maintained work with the resistence and I was detained for a week at Meskula. I was taken to the Baucau District Military Command *Kodim* for three days, then transferred to Balide Prison in Dili.

Upon arrival at Balide Prison, we were ordered to strip down to our underwear. There were 15 of us in a single cell; many of the others were from Ainaro, Same, and Lospalos. After a year, I was transferred to the Becora Sub-district Military Command *Koramil*, where I was held for six years. After my release from the *Koramil*, I returned to Lospalos to live in Lore Dua.

I am a single parent who has raised my daughter and her siblings. They have now grown into resilient women, despite the absence of a father figure. I make a living by sewing *tais* and selling vegetables; additionally, I received assistance from ACbit to open a small shop to help cover my children's school expenses.



Chapter 9: Manatuto

Along the Road, Under Watch

Manatuto, a coastal municipality linking Dili to the eastern municipalities, was shaped during the occupation by its role as a corridor of control—a place of transit, labour extraction, and close military oversight. Across the 24 years documented in *Chega!*, Manatuto emerges as a municipality where violence against women was often quiet, routine, and embedded in dependency, rather than marked by spectacular detention sites or mass internment.

Patterns of violations

In Manatuto, *Chega!* documents sexual violence primarily in contexts of military presence, labour control, and dependence on authorities for food, movement, and security. Women were raped in and around their homes, in villages under surveillance, and in situations where refusal could threaten a family's survival.

During the early occupation period (1975–1979), women in Manatuto were raped during military incursions and surrender operations as Indonesian forces consolidated control along the north coast. These violations occurred alongside village destruction, forced relocation, and hunger, placing women at risk during moments of capture and compliance. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sexual violence in Manatuto frequently took place without legal recourse, often perpetrated by soldiers or auxiliaries who controlled access to work, food, or protection. *Chega!* records rape occurring in domestic spaces and community settings, illustrating how women's vulnerability was shaped by everyday proximity to power rather than formal detention alone. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44, pp. 1925–1927)

Sexual violence in Manatuto also intersected with forced labour and economic exploitation. Women carried the burden of sustaining households during periods of scarcity while facing abuse by those who exercised authority over plantations, transport routes, and local administration. (Vol. II; Vol. III, Part 7.7)

What *Chega!* Discovered about Manatuto: In Numbers

In the CAVR statistical profile of sexually-based violations (1974–1999), Manatuto is recorded as having documented cases across multiple periods, though *Chega!* stresses that municipalities characterised by routine, domestic, or authority-based abuse experienced systematic under-reporting. Fear, stigma, and dependency discouraged women from reporting violations, meaning the documented figures reflect only a fraction of lived experience. (Vol. I, Part 6; Vol. III, Part 7.7)

Resilience: sustaining life under dependency

Women's resilience in Manatuto was forged through daily endurance. Survival depended on managing scarcity, protecting children, and maintaining social relations in villages where military authority was constant and unavoidable. Women shared food, cared collectively for children, and quietly warned one another of risks posed by particular officials or patrols.

Many survivors carried experiences of sexual violence in silence for decades, shaped by the understanding that perpetrators controlled the very resources families needed to survive. Through testimony to *Chega!* and later survivor-led initiatives, women from Manatuto transformed private endurance into public memory. Survivors showed their resilience in sustaining life, dignity, and community under conditions of continual constraint, and later in rebuilding their lives in a free Timor-Leste with determination and quiet strength.

Maria Antonia dos Santos de Sousa



At that time, I fled to the jungle and accepted a position as an OPMT delegate; however, I never knew happiness, as the Indonesian military detained, tortured, and raped me due to my involvement with the political party. During the Indonesian occupation, our home was damaged, and our livestock went missing or were killed.

My health is currently poor; during the occupation, I suffered a blow to the head that caused intense headaches whenever I touched the area—though I no longer experience that severe pain. I was also struck on both shoulders; now, they ache in cold weather or when I engage in heavy work. It is painful to look back on those dark times. Currently, I hold a minor position with the veterans' recognition committee, while my husband works as a teacher.

The land where we live doesn't belong to us, though I do earn a modest supplementary income from my work as a teacher. In addition, I run a small business—renting out chairs and selling various sweet snacks, bread, fried bananas, cakes, and dumplings—to build a home for my children and provide for their needs, creating a story for them to look back on in the future.

At present, I feel that truth and justice have not yet sided with me; while I am free from the violence I once endured, I still feel constrained within my family and community due to stigma and discrimination.




RICH
KIDS

Chapter 10: Viqueque

Forced Lives, Unspoken Years

Viqueque, a largely rural municipality in the southeast, was shaped during the occupation by prolonged military presence, isolation, and deep entanglement between violence and family life. Parts of Viqueque functioned as base de apoio in the early years, before mass surrender, displacement, and later violence reshaped the area. Across the 24 years documented in Chega!, Viqueque emerges as a place where sexual violence against women was often absorbed into everyday social relations—through forced marriage, coercive "relationships," and long-term detention—making harm both pervasive and difficult to name.

Patterns of violations

In Viqueque, Chega! documents sexual violence most clearly in the forms of forced marriage, sexual slavery, and rape without legal recourse, frequently occurring in rural settings under sustained military surveillance. Women and girls were coerced into marriages or sexual relationships with soldiers or auxiliaries, often under threat to themselves or their families. These arrangements, sometimes framed as "marriage," functioned as ongoing sexual captivity, with no possibility of consent or exit. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 197–199, pp. 1998–2000)

During the early occupation and consolidation periods (1975–1984), women in Viqueque were also raped during capture, surrender operations, and detention. Sexual violence occurred alongside forced relocation and hunger, as communities were moved into military-controlled settlements where women's bodies became sites of control within tightly monitored social spaces. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 26–35, pp. 1920–1924)

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sexual violence in Viqueque was marked by duration rather than spectacle. Chega! records women held for months or years in situations of sexual slavery—cooking, cleaning, and providing sexual access to soldiers—often giving birth to children fathered by perpetrators. These violations were rarely reported, as they were embedded in family arrangements and enforced by power structures that offered no protection. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 196–199, pp. 1997–2000)

Craras and displacement as enabling conditions for sexual violence

In Viqueque, the Craras massacre (1983) marked a critical turning point that reshaped women's vulnerability to sexual violence. Following Falintil operations in the area, Indonesian forces carried out mass killings in Craras village, killing large numbers of men and boys and forcibly displacing women, children, and the elderly. Chega! documents how survivors were relocated to military-controlled settlements, where communities were broken apart and placed under constant surveillance. (Vol. II; Vol. III, Part 7.2)

In the aftermath of Craras, women's exposure to sexual violence intensified. With male relatives killed, detained, or in hiding, displaced women were left without protection or autonomy, dependent on soldiers and local authorities for food, movement, and survival. In these conditions of displacement and fear, Chega! records rape, sexual slavery, and coerced relationships occurring alongside forced labour and prolonged control. Sexual violence was thus not incidental, but enabled by the destruction of community structures and the permanent threat established through mass killing and displacement. (Vol. III, Part 7.7, paras. 40–44; 197–199, pp. 1925–1927; 1998–2000)

What *Chega!* Discovered about Viqueque: In Numbers

In the CAVR statistical profile of sexually-based violations (1974–1999), Viqueque is identified as a municipality with significant documented cases, particularly relating to sexual slavery and forced marriage. Chega! stresses that these forms of violence are among the most under-reported, as they were frequently normalised or hidden within households and communities under occupation. (Vol. I, Part 6; Vol. III, Part 7.7)

Resilience: living with silence, raising the next generation

Women's resilience in Viqueque was shaped by the need to survive within families marked by coercion. Many women raised children born of rape or forced relationships while maintaining social bonds in communities, where speaking out could bring further harm. Survival required endurance, discretion, and the ability to protect children in circumstances where violence had become intimate and ongoing.

For decades, many women in Viqueque remained silent—not because the harm was small, but because it was woven into daily life. The legacy of displacement has continued to shape their lives, affecting access to land, land rights, and food security in communities still recovering from forced movement and loss. When women later testified to Chega!, their words revealed both the depth of suffering and the strength required to endure it. In Viqueque, resilience lay not in resistance that could be seen, but in continuing to live, care, rebuild, and remember despite the long shadow of coerced intimacy, displacement, and impunity.

Beatriz Miranda



The Kraras incident took place on August 8, 1983, when the Indonesian military killed many people. The military killed all our husbands, then rounded us up—the widows and children—and dumped us in Bibileo; there, we were forced to cut timber, farm, and cultivate the land, as well as build our own homes.

Every night, we were ordered to stand guard at the Indonesian military post; if we fell asleep, we were punished by being thrown into a pond. We women were also ordered to go into the forest to meet the men who were waiting for the military at the post. The military kept watch over the places where women frequently gathered. It was during those nights that they violated so many young women.

One afternoon, as I was returning from the fields, the commanders sent three soldiers to wait at the house and summon me. I told them I hadn't bathed yet, so they left; but when they returned a third time, they were in tears, saying, "Please don't make things difficult for us—our lives could be at stake."

I grabbed a worn scarf and walked over to the man standing by the flagpole in front of the office. I greeted him, but he didn't respond; instead, he stepped on my foot. He ordered the three soldiers, "You three, keep an eye on this woman." He set down his weapon, turned on some music, grabbed my hand, and forced me to dance until the morning. Whenever he sat down, he would deliberately prop his legs up toward me so that no one else could approach and ask me to dance.

One morning, I returned home to wait for my niece. Since I had stayed up late, my niece woke me up when she saw a *Nanggala* officer arriving—accusing me of being together with a FALINTIL commander. As I spoke, denying the allegations, he punched me in the chest—his *batu aki* ring hitting me so hard I fell to the ground. He continued to beat me until I was unconscious. I woke up in a daze, thinking about running away to save myself, but didn't get the chance as a few of the village men came begging. They said if I ran away, then a second Kraras massacre would surely happen and we'd all die. It was night already, and the soldier returned wishing me a good evening. That night he raped me, leaving me three months pregnant before I had a miscarriage. That's when our names were plastered at the Sub-district post. The father of my eldest daughter was a criminal; he kept the house under constant surveillance every day to ensure that we couldn't go anywhere.

People always blame me and look at me with scorn; they mocked me—wearing big shirts and acting pregnant, hurling insults, and gossiping when they gather. My two children were born without a single soul to witness their lives. I have had to endure this suffering, just like other women who share the same fate. To this day, I must work hard to care for my two children, farming to sustain us.

Ijolina Guterres — daughter of Maria Gomes



I feel deeply saddened because our we grew up without a father. When we were young, our mother passed away without leaving a single piece of information about what happened; it was only through the stories of others that we learned who our father was. By then, we were left without parents and had to move from place to place—staying with one uncle after another—until we grew up.

At times, we took the initiative to go to school simply to enrol ourselves. I actually wanted to pursue higher education, but there was no one to look after us, and there were insufficient funds to cover the cost of my studies. Consequently, I decided to get married.

Yes, there are witnesses who know that we are the children of an Indonesian; we have faced stigma and discrimination from my maternal uncles and other uncles who still speak about us negatively. However, that stigma and discrimination are now beginning to fade and disappear. The man who raped my mother was the first Governor of Viqueque.

What matters most to me is that my children gain access to education and scholarships, as we have also felt abandonment and are out of school. Despite this, our circumstances are otherwise good.

Olinda da Costa Tilman



Before Indonesia invaded Timor-Leste, I was still in preschool. When war broke out, people fleeing from Vemase, Manatuto, Ossu and Waimori came to our village, and we shared what food we had. The women helped carry grain and roasted beans to support FALINTIL. When Indonesian troops arrived, we fled to the mountains, moving from place to place and often surviving with almost nothing to eat.

Eventually, we surrendered and later settled in the Bibileo area, where we began farming and I returned to school. During the 1983 Kraras incident, my father joined FALINTIL and was killed. In 1987, while attending junior high school, I collected stones from the river to earn money for notebooks, pencils and shoes, and carried firewood to sell for food. I started a family in 1989 and had my first child, but my husband later abandoned us.

In 1995, while working on a tree-planting project, a member of the *Hansip* militia threatened me because I had rejected him. The following year, I was sexually assaulted by a member of the Indonesian military and became pregnant. When my baby was two months old, soldiers tried to violate me again, but I managed to protect myself and my child. The military refused to take responsibility, offering only 300,000 rupiah for the baby's care. I never received the money because my uncle used it to rebuild his house.

I also faced stigma from my community and my own family. One of my brothers blamed me, saying, "You were still in school, yet you did something like this." I remained silent, knowing that what had happened was not my choice. My child was born in 1997.

Later, my younger sibling helped care for my child while I moved to Trans SP4, where I started a new family and had three more children. We survived by farming and selling vegetables. During the violence of 1999, we were displaced again, but after the Indonesian military withdrew and the situation became calmer, we returned to farming to meet our daily needs.

Independence has still not brought true justice. It hurts when people continue to speak badly about us, but I try not to dwell too much on the past because the sadness affects my health. My children need me to remain strong. Today, we continue to farm, grow vegetables and raise animals to support our household.

I hope there will be fair recognition and support for everyone who suffered. I am especially concerned about children born as a result of the war, who are often rejected because they do not have a recognised father or are seen as Indonesian. Some face difficulties even being baptised, which can then create problems when they need formal documents. They should not continue to suffer because of what happened during the war.

Epilogue

Fireflies Shine in the Darkness: A Reflection from Centro Chega!

Centro Chega!'s[1] mission is to establish a post-conflict institution that preserves the memory of the past, promotes human rights and human dignity and builds national and international partnerships. Through these partnerships, it seeks to strengthen networks working to implement recommendations of the Final Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation or CAVR.

Decree-Law No. 48/2016 gives Centro Chega! specific responsibilities to promote solidarity among the most vulnerable survivors of human rights violations committed between 1974 and 1999; collaborate with survivors who experienced trauma and involve the most vulnerable survivors in the activities of Centro Chega!.

Guided by this legal framework, and grounded in the constitution of Timor-Leste, Centro Chega! provides special protection to those disabled as a result of war, as well as to the children, orphans and other dependents of those who dedicated their lives to the struggle for national independence. In 2020, Centro Chega! developed a framework for implementing programs and activities related to reparations for victims of human rights violations committed during the conflict.

The framework set out objectives for reparations, including restoring dignity to those who gave their lives or suffered and were made vulnerable by the conflict, preserving memory and creating hope by learning lessons from the conflict, promoting education that honors the struggle for independence, recognizing and improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable and reaffirming that such suffering must never happen again.

This memory book demonstrates how victims of human rights violations should be honored. Their dignity can be restored by preserving their memories, teaching future generations about the values that inspired the struggle and calling upon the State to recognize their strength, courage and suffering.

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1 Centro Nacional Chega! I.P.—*From Memory to Hope* (Centro Chega!)—was established as a public institution under Decree-Law No. 48/2016. Its vision is to build an inclusive society that does not repeat the history of the past, lives in peace and respects human rights.

"When we endure suffering like this, other people may think it is easy for us to speak about it—
but that is not true. Even now, it is difficult for me to find the words. During the interrogations,
they beat us, gave us electric shocks and burned our faces with cigarettes.
But we endured and survived all these things."

"What hurts me most is that my father never returned to us.
My mother worked alone to take care of us. This is a sadness that has never left me.
Every day, we saw and experienced violence in many different forms. They wanted to destroy us.
They blindfolded us and beat us until our bodies were wounded and filled with pain.

Even though I have shared my story many times, this burden has never left me. Even today,
many people continue to spread rumors about me and repeatedly remind me of my suffering.
I still do not feel free. My physical health is not good. My heart still aches, and my head hurts
when I think about my father and the others who died, whose remains have still not been found."

The memories shared by Amá Maria Araujo Alves deserve our attention. They call upon us to reflect on what we have done—and what we must still do—to recognize the courageous mothers and women who speak to us through this book. These memories are painful. Yet we must give them meaning and recognize their importance.

At Centro Chega!, we understand memory as the way people construct meaning from the past and connect that past to their present lives through the act of remembering. The testimonies in this book give substance and significance to what we understand as memory.

This book is also a monument. As an act of memorialization, it ensures these memories endure. To memorialize is to honor, recognize and remember the people, places and events that shaped human lives. It reflects life and society's values.

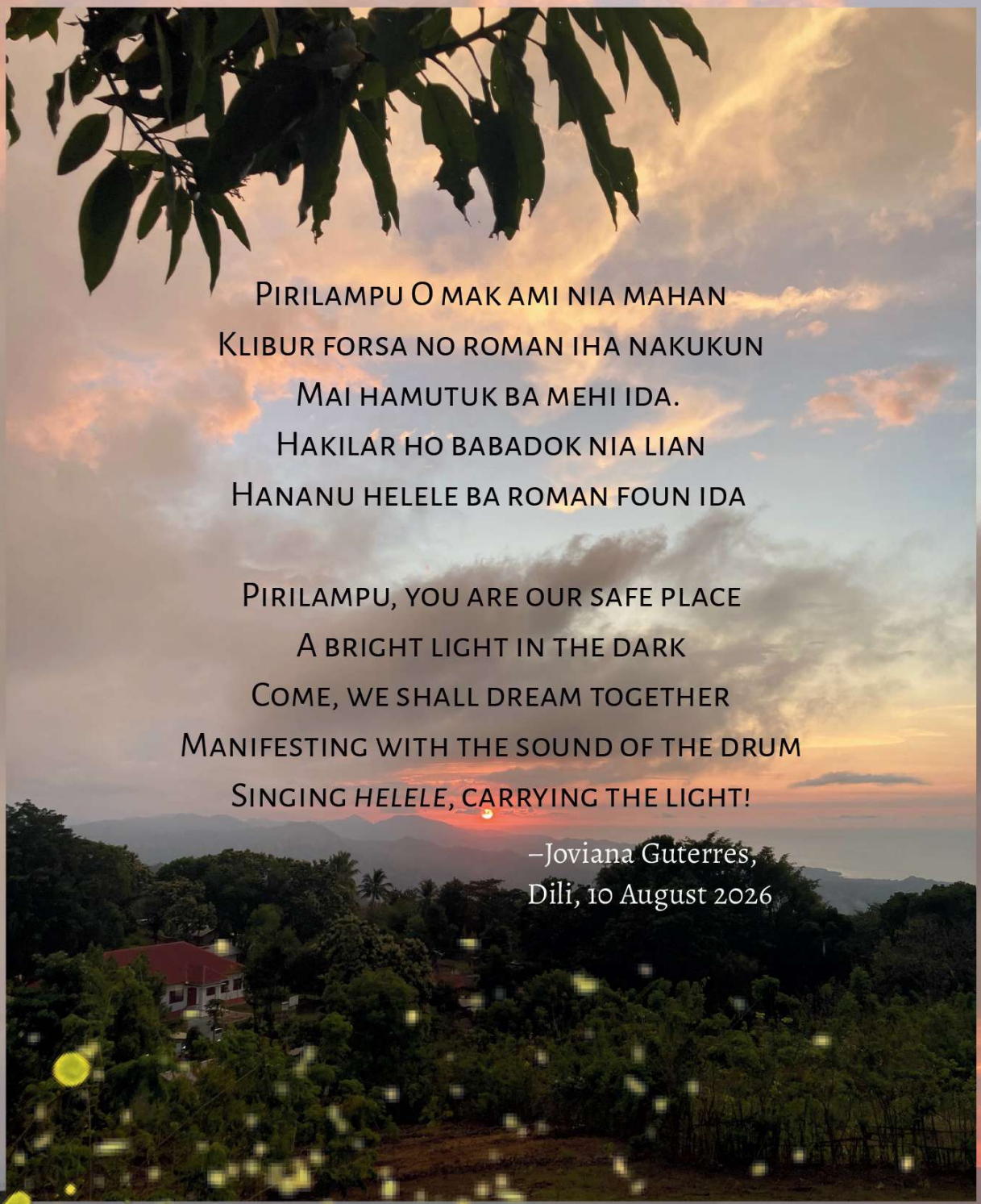
Martdhensen L. Y. da S. N. Chatulessy speaks of his mother in words that carry an important message for us all:

"All of us who are children of war have our own stories. My message to everyone is this:
we know that discrimination and the words people use against us can be a heavy burden,
but we should not define ourselves through what others say. Our value lies in our own experiences
and in the experiences of our mothers. I am not ashamed to be my mother's son.
I am proud to be her son. I am who I am, and I have value."

Fireflies will continue to shine, even when darkness surrounds them.

Former Balide Prison, Chega! Museum
Dili, 12 March 2026

Hugo Maria Fernandes
Executive Director, Centro Nacional Chega! I.P.



Pirilampu O mak ami nia mahan
Klibur forsa no roman iha nakukun
Mai hamutuk ba mehi ida.
Hakilar ho babadok nia lian
Hananu helele ba roman foun ida

Pirilampu, you are our safe place
A bright light in the dark
Come, we shall dream together
Manifesting with the sound of the drum
Singing *helele*, carrying the light!

–Joviana Guterres,
Dili, 10 August 2026

GLOBAL SURVIVORS FUND
FOR AND WITH SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

AJAR
ASIA JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

ACbit Asosiasaun Chega! Ba Ita

KLIBUR SOBREVIVENTE FETO PIRILAMPU
1974-1999