

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

1. Please provide details of the 1998 riots, particularly in Jakarta, involving the Chinese.
2. Have there been any similar racially motivated attacks/riots/demonstrations in Indonesia since then, particularly in Jakarta?
3. What groups target and/or scapegoat the Chinese?
4. Do the Indonesian authorities protect the Chinese from harm?

RESPONSE

1. Please provide details of the 1998 riots, particularly in Jakarta, involving the Chinese.

The Indonesian riots of 1998 were set within the complex milieu created by the Asian Financial Crisis of the preceding year. Of all countries in the region affected by the crisis, Indonesia was reported to have been hardest hit: the value of the *rupiah* fell by 75%, inflation rose by 39%, business was almost totally destroyed, and millions of workers lost their jobs. The crisis was exacerbated by the government's "half-hearted" implementation of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) recovery plan, and quickly turned political with mass student demonstrations calling for President Suharto's resignation. To this was added the "unopposed 're-selection' of President Suharto by Indonesia's version of an electoral college" in March 1998 (Budiman, A. 1998, 'The May Riots in Indonesia', Paper for a Seminar of the Refugee Review Tribunal, Sydney, 29 May – Attachment 1; Beeson, M. and Rosser, A., 1998, *The East Asian Economic Crisis: A brief overview of the facts, the issues and the future*, Asia Research Centre, Working Paper No. 86, Murdoch University website, June – <http://www.warc.murdoch.edu.au/wp/wp86.pdf> – Accessed 21 June 2006 – Attachment 2; Ching, F. 1999, 'Social Impact of the Regional Financial Crisis', Asia Society, Working Paper, Columbia International Affairs website, February http://www.ciaonet.org/conf/ass07/ass07_b.html – Accessed 15 June 2006 – Attachment 3; Human Rights Watch 1999, *World Report 1999: Indonesia and East Timor*, Human Rights Watch website <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/asia/indonesia.html> – Accessed 14 June

2006 – Attachment 4; UNHCR [Undated], ‘Crisis and Transition, Catastrophe and Progress. Update to “Indonesia: Economic, Social and Political Dimensions of the Current Crisis”’, UNHCR website <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=research&id=3ae6a6b810> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 5).

Notwithstanding their occurrence in this milieu, a clear picture of the motivations which fed into the ensuing riots is illusive; precisely, because it would appear that the riots gave vent to a variety of entangled resentments. Some were clearly rooted in criticism of the government and of the business interests of “President Suharto’s family and friends”. Others were rooted in economic desperation and impoverishment of large sections of the population. And intermingled with these was anti-Chinese feeling among the indigenous *pribumi*. Jacques Bertrand explains that in the immediate context of the financial crisis:

Hundreds of people were laid off by Chinese-owned businesses and many blamed the conglomerates for the severity of the crisis. Hundreds of Chinese-owned shops were looted in various parts of Indonesia, partly in fear at rising prices for basic necessities and partly because rumors abounded of a conspiracy by the Chinese behind the rise in prices. In early 1998, members of the armed forces and Suharto himself even accused some Chinese businessmen of triggering the crisis.

When riots broke out in Jakarta and across several cities in mid-May 1998, Chinese Indonesians were again targeted. Hundreds were killed. Dozens of Chinese women were raped. The violence was more extensive and involved many more targets than the Chinese, but these particular incidents were the most brutal. In addition, there was mass destruction of Chinese property.

More than other instances of violence, the targeting of Chinese in May 1998 was orchestrated by provocateurs. A report by a special investigating team revealed that these actions were largely provoked and undertaken by members of Indonesia’s armed forces, including Suharto’s son-in-law Prabowo Subianto. Of all the instances of ethnic violence in Indonesia, the May 1998 riots showed the most convincing evidence of provocation (Bertrand, J. 2004, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 42, 67-68 – Attachment 6).

The riots which swept across Indonesia in the wake of the financial crisis began towards the end of 1997 and reached their high point in Jakarta in mid-May 1998. Rioting was widespread throughout the country throughout the period, with reported incidents in all major islands – Central, East and West Java, Sulawesi, and Sumatra among them. While not explicitly targeted, in most instances reports indicate that the Chinese minority was nonetheless singled out for attack (‘Data: Chronology for Chinese in Indonesia’ 2004, Minorities at Risk Project, Center for International Development and Conflict Management website, 24 June <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/chronology.asp?groupId=85003> – Accessed 14 June 2006 – Attachment 7; Symonds, P. 1998, ‘Behind Indonesia’s anti-Chinese riots’, World Socialist Web Site, 14 February <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/feb1998/indones.shtml> – Accessed 14 June 2006 – Attachment 8).

The riots which occurred in Jakarta, and elsewhere in Indonesia, in mid-May precipitated the fall of President Suharto’s “New Order” regime. Indonesia’s economic and political situation worsened during the month, and was exacerbated by the government’s implementation of reform measures; among these, “a gasoline price hike” which caused severe rioting in Medan

at the beginning of the month (Human Rights Watch 1999, World Report 1999: Indonesia and East Timor, Human Rights Watch website

<http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/asia/indonesia.html> – Accessed 14 June 2006 –

Attachment 4; ‘The May riots’ 1998, *Inside Indonesia* online edition, 29 May

<http://www.serve.com/inside/digest/dig63.htm> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 9).

Throughout May, “student protests continued to grow, and confrontations with police and military authorities became more frequent and more heated”. The riots which finally erupted in Jakarta on 13 May were immediately precipitated by the shooting deaths of six student demonstrators by Indonesian security forces at Trisakti University on 12 May. As described by a UNHCR report:

These killings, suspected by many analysts to be the premeditated handiwork of certain adventurist elements in the Armed Forces, generated widespread outrage. On 13 May, thousands of Jakartans joined a burial ceremony for the victims. Scattered rioting ensued in a number of locations in Jakarta and elsewhere, continuing and spreading on 14 May, and finally petering out two days later.

Subsequent reports estimated that more than one thousand people had lost their lives in the riots, many others had suffered beatings, rapes, and other indignities, and countless shops, homes, and other forms of private property had been lost to burning, looting and wanton wreckage. Unsurprisingly, the victims were overwhelmingly Indonesians of Chinese ancestry, who, as noted in the previous report, have in recent years been the targets of increasingly frequent urban disturbances. The rioting in Jakarta led some 150,000 residents – mostly ethnic Chinese and Western expatriates – to flee the country, mostly by air to nearby Singapore or Hong Kong. Together with simultaneous disturbances in Solo and several other Indonesian cities, the Jakarta riots constituted the single worst episode of anti-Chinese violence in the country since the so-called “Malari” incident in January 1974. (UNHCR [Undated], ‘Crisis and Transition, Catastrophe and Progress. Update to “Indonesia: Economic, Social and Political Dimensions of the Current Crisis”’, UNHCR website <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssldoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=research&id=3ae6a6b810> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 5).

Detailed reports of the May riots indicate that violence affected many, if not all, parts of Jakarta, with a death total of over 1,000 and a damage bill of around US\$ 250 million. As in other instances, the Chinese minority bore the brunt of attacks. As recounted in a report appearing in *Indonesia Today*:

Jakarta’s death toll was initially put at 499 (army spokesperson, 17 May), then at 293 (police spokesperson, 23 May). A team led by the well-known Jesuit Sandiawan Sumardi said on 18 May that 1188 had died in Jakarta and Tangerang, including deaths by shooting and beating. The same report also mentioned Chinese being stripped and raped by rioters. Most deaths were of looters trapped in burning supermarkets.

Coordinating Minister for Finance and Economy Ginjar Kartasasmita on about 18 May put the damage in Jakarta at Rp 2.5 trillion (about US\$ 250 million at prevailing rates). He said 2479 shop-houses had been damaged or destroyed mostly by fire. (The shop-house is the typical, small, almost invariably Chinese, retail business upon which urban society depends). In addition he listed 1026 ordinary houses, 1604 shops, 383 private offices, 65 bank offices, 45 workshops, 40 shopping malls, 13 markets, 12 hotels, 24 restaurants, 11 parks, 9 petrol stations, 11 police posts. Then there were 1119 cars, 821 motorcycles, 8 buses, 486 traffic signs and lights. The police later (22/5) gave considerably lower figures: 1344 buildings of all kinds, 1009 cars, 205 motorcycles....

Let's look at a map of Jakarta and see what happened. Immediate trigger for the Jakarta riot was the shooting of four students at the elite Trisakti University in Grogol, West Jakarta, on 12 May. The shootings shocked democracy activists around the country. They had been demonstrating persistently and entirely peacefully (with Medan as the only exception) for weeks against the Suharto government. After a commemorative ceremony at the campus ending late in the morning of Wednesday 12 May, rioting broke out around the campus. Some reports mention lots of angry shouts against the armed forces.

Rioters – the young urban poor, not students – spread out in several directions and start setting fire to car showrooms, hotels, shops, a hospital. The following important roads are mentioned: Kyai Tapi, Gajah Mada, Hayam Wuruk, Daan Mogot, Latumeten, Pesing, Cengkareng, Kedoya arterial, Kebon Jeruk, the Grogol-Kali Deres road, also Jalan Juanda behind the presidential palace, and the Cawang-Grogol flyover. Electronics shops in Glodok, the Chinatown of Jakarta, are looted. All shops in nearby Senen close down, and pretty soon all business and traffic in the entire city close down. There is also an angry demonstration in the elite business district of Jl Sudirman, a long way to the south of Grogol.

Rioting mostly spreads westward toward and into Tangerang – past the international airport. A hospital is attacked, as are two churches in Tangerang. Cars are stopped on tollways and checked for Chinese – many cars are put to the torch on the tollway, whose operators are soon told to abandon their post. Even though no one is collecting fees, the toll roads are soon deserted. Tens of thousands of rioters far outnumber the security forces, who mostly stay away from trouble rather than risk defeat or a bloody massacre.

The rich flee to luxury hotels at the airport, Jalan Thamrin in the city heart, in Jalan Sudirman and at Ancol.

Tangerang to Jakarta's west, like Bekasi to its east (where rioting breaks out the next day) is Jakarta's industrial belt. Hundreds of labour-intensive, temporary factories erected by foreign capital looking for cheap labour and a quick return on investment have become magnets for an urban proletariat. These are the people worst affected by the economic crisis – bearing the brunt of the huge increase in unemployment (an additional 13 million this year alone?).

Rioting goes on right throughout the night. The next day, Thursday 14 May, it continues in Hayam Wuruk and Gajah Mada, Jalan Samanhudi, Suryopranoto ('Krekot'), but spreads to many other areas of Jakarta than just West Jakarta where it had started. On this day the large malls seem to become particular targets – this is where many looters die when fires are lit and they are unable to escape. The worst is Yogya Plaza in Klender, East Jakarta, with 174 charred bodies recovered.

Places mentioned in the reports now range all over Jakarta: Kebayoran Lama-Cipulir-Cileduk, Jalan Kosambi Raya, Cengkareng Ring Road, Jalan Salemba, Jalan Sahari (including tycoon Liem Sioe Liong's house), Jalan Matraman, to the east of Freedom Square, up to Pluit and the Tanjung Priok harbour area, down to Tanah Abang, Senen, Cikini, and east to Kalimalang, Kranji, and Bekasi. There is even some in Depok in the south.

By Friday 15 May the city is exhausted but rioting continues in a new area: Cinere, near the elite Blok M area of South Jakarta. Actions on some toll roads continue – Kampung Rambutan- Cawang, Grogol-Kampung Rambutan. Mostly, Jakarta is counting its dead. Scavengers are having a field day with the rubble. Thousands mill around to observe the damage, leaving police edgy about the potential for more trouble. Over a thousand looters have been arrested in the later stages of the riots ('The May riots' 1998, *Inside Indonesia* online edition, 29 May <http://www.serve.com/inside/digest/dig63.htm> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 9).

A comparable report by Professor Dadan Umar Daihani, Director of Trisakti Research Institute, and Angus Budi Purnomo, notes that “the damage to buildings during the May 1998 riot was concentrated in [ethnic Chinese] villages with dominant commercial activity” (‘The May 1998 Riot in Jakarta, Indonesia, Analyzed with GIS’ 1998, ARC News online, May <http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/fall01/articles/may1998riot.html> – Accessed 14 June 2006 – Attachment 10).

2. Have there been any similar racially motivated attacks/riots/demonstrations in Indonesia since then, particularly in Jakarta?

Most sources agree that while instances of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia have dropped sharply since 1998 they have not ceased. Reports by the International Crisis Group, various media sources, and Indonesian experts, concur on this point; they note that ethnic Chinese continue to face harassment, intimidation and instances of physical violence, particularly in small towns. Specific instances from around Indonesia are provided in past RRT Research Responses (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response IDN17690*, 5 December – Attachment 11; RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response IDN15918*, 27 May – Attachment 12; RRT Country Research 2002, *Research Response IDN15511*, 12 November – Attachment 13).

In the most recent incident, *The Jakarta Post* reported the occurrence of “yet another anti-Chinese riot” in Makassar, South Sulawesi, on 12 May 2006. The “riot”, which occurred on the eighth anniversary of the 1998 riots, “was sparked by the alleged torture of two maids, one who latter died, by a Chinese-Indonesian man” (‘Riot prone nation’ 2006, *The Jakarta Post*, 12 May – Attachment 14; Hajramurni, A. 2006, ‘Makassar violence highlights ethnic tension in city’, *The Jakarta Post* online edition, 16 May Google cache of <http://www.thejakartapost.com/detailnational.asp?fileid=20060504.D04&irec=7> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 15).

Jakarta itself has not been host to widespread instances of anti-Chinese violence since 1998. Resident Chinese in the city do however continue to face harassment and intimidation; a perhaps characteristic instance was reported in November 2005, when the city’s Chinese residents “received anonymous text messages threatening them with brutal murders and rapes” and accusing them “of being ‘robbers of Indonesians’ money’ and ‘the number one enemies of Muslims’” (‘Chinese Indonesians get hate text messages’ 2005, *The Straits Times*, 3 November – Attachment 16). In other reports, however, there appears to have been some improvement in the situation of ethnic Chinese residents in city. As expressed by one resident:

“In big cities like Jakarta, I feel that my life as a Chinese-Indonesian has improved in recent years. I feel more freedom now, I can go anywhere without worrying about my Chinese look” (‘A timid walk to a place free from discrimination’ 2005, *The Jakarta Post*, 6 February – Attachment 17).

Marginal improvements in the situation of Chinese residents in Jakarta, and elsewhere, have also occurred on some socio-cultural and political fronts. Examples include evidence of wider political participation, the scrapping of discriminatory legislation, and an increasingly ability to engage in cultural practices. In 2003, for instance, Chinese in the city were for the first time permitted to publicly celebrate the Chinese Lunar Year which was declared a public

holiday. In the same year, Chinese residents were also afforded hitherto prohibited language rights (Murphy, D. 2003, 'For ethnic Chinese, the freedom to dance returns; For the first time in 32 years, the Chinese Lunar Year is a legal holiday in Indonesia', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 4 February – Attachment 18; Moore, M. 2003, 'Jakarta eases the pressure on Chinese', *The Age*, 8 February – Attachment 19; 'Chinese-Indonesians rising to political stage', *Xinhua News Agency*, 15 March – Attachment 20; Purdey, J. 2001, 'Update for Refugee Review Tribunal on the Situation of Ethnic Chinese and Christians in Indonesia', University of Melbourne, June – Attachment 21; 'Indonesia: The happy Chinese: At last, Indonesia is coming to terms with its Chinese community' 2006, *The Economist*, 2 February – Attachment 22).

Improvements such as these must be seen in the context of continuing discrimination and instances of violence against Chinese interests. A 2003 report by the US Citizenship and Immigration Service provides the following information on anti-Chinese violence in Jakarta in particular:

In regard to Jakarta in particular, the Indonesia desk at the U.S. Department of State reported that in 2002, "religious extremists, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)...physically attacked a number of nightclubs, bars, and billiard clubs in the name of religion, claiming that the establishments were immoral. The most high-profile attacks occurred in Jakarta on October 5, 2002" (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003). According to an AP article, the Government of Indonesia charged the FPI leader, Habib Rizieq, with "inciting violence," and he is currently on trial in Jakarta. "[In justifying the attacks, Rizieq]...claimed to be destroying immoral establishments that were allowed to operate with the support of the police. But detractors claimed he was only doing the bidding of the police, who were angry at establishments that refused to pay protection money" (Casey 8 May 2003).

According to the Boston University professor, the establishments in Jakarta that were attacked by the FPI were typically Chinese-owned [Chinese Indonesians tend to be Christian], but the attacks were largely economically motivated (Professor 30 Oct 2003) (US Citizenship and Immigration Service 2003, *Indonesia: Information on Attacks by Muslims Against a Chinese Christian Neighborhood in Jakarta in September 2002, and Police Protection of Chinese Christians in Jakarta*, 14 November.
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/asylum/ric/documentation/IDN04001.htm> – Accessed 2 December 2005 – Attachment 23).

Anton, a Chinese Indonesian quoted in a 2002 *Jakarta Post* report stated that:

young Chinese-Indonesians avoided being out late at night or catching public transport [in Jakarta] for fear of attack.

"It happened to my younger brother," Anton said, "he was driving his car when eight indigenous Indonesian surrounded the car with a sword and cracked his windshield. My brother managed to escape but he was so shocked this had happened to him, apparently for no reason other than that he was Chinese" (Goldner, V. 2002, 'Chinese-Indonesians continue to suffer from discrimination', *The Jakarta Post*, 19 February – Attachment 24).

RRT *Research Response IDN15918*, dated 27 May 2003, provides further information on racially-motivated attacks against ethnic Chinese in Jakarta (RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response IDN15918*, 27 May – Attachment 12)

3. What groups target and/or scapegoat the Chinese?

Chinese Indonesians have long been targeted by wide sections of the Indonesian population, and held responsible for the ills, economic or otherwise, which plague the country. Analyses of anti-Chinese prejudice locate anti-Sinicism in virtually all sections of the Indonesian population: the majority indigenous *pribumi*; political elites; the military; Islamic religious teachers and Muslim organisations. The sources note, in particular, that ethnic Chinese Indonesians have been targeted as “scapegoats” in times of crisis, and that that “anti-Chinese sentiment has long been a key ingredient of Indonesian nationalism”(Coppel, C. A. 2002. *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia*, Asian Studies Monograph Series No. 7, Singapore Society of Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 18-21 – Attachment 25; ‘The Anti-Chinese Element – Excerpts from: Human Rights Watch Report – Indonesia: The Medan Demonstration and Beyond’ 1994, Human Rights Watch website, Volume 16, No. 4, 16 May <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/indonesia/anti-chn.htm> – Accessed 23 June 2006 – Attachment 26; Symonds, P. 1998, ‘Behind Indonesia’s anti-Chinese riots’, World Socialist Web Site, 14 February <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/feb1998/indones.shtml> – Accessed 14 June 2006 – Attachment 8).

In the context of the 1998 riots, reports indicate that anti-Chinese violence was fuelled by President Suharto himself and other high ranking members of government; conservative Islamic scholars who “called for a jihad against financial speculators and commodity hoarders”; senior “military officials”, including President Suharto’s son-in-law, who made “veiled references to rats and traitors”; and local police and government authorities (Data: *Chronology for Chinese in Indonesia*’ 2004, Minorities at Risk Project, Centre for International Development and Conflict Management website, 24 June <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/chronology.asp?groupId=85003> – Accessed 14 June 2006 – Attachment 7; UNHCR [Undated] ‘Indonesia: Economic, Social and Political Dimensions of the Current Crisis’, UNHCR website <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/openssl.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&id=3ae6a6c50&page=publ> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 5).

A UNHCR report, focusing on the anti-Chinese campaign in the context of the 1998 riots, observes as follows:

In January and February [1998]... ranking Indonesian government officials, including President Suharto, began actively stoking popular resentments against ethnic Chinese businessmen. Spokesmen for the Armed Forces, for example, issued statements revealing that the then Armed Forces Chief General Feisal Tanjung had contacted thirteen of the nation’s wealthiest ethnic-Chinese businessmen to demand that they join the “Love the Rupiah” campaign and exchange their U.S. dollars for Indonesian rupiah. Subsequent weeks saw mounting official attacks against unnamed currency speculators, described by the military’s chief delegate to the national assembly as “traitors” and by President Suharto himself as part of a “conspiracy” to reduce the value of the rupiah to 20,000 to the U.S. dollar. From the language used, it was clear that the President and his supporters were referring to ethnic Chinese businesspersons.

In addition, top government officials, both civilian and military, actively encouraged Islamic groups to amplify and act upon these anti-Chinese sentiments....

Meanwhile, both national and local government officials made clear that the definition of “treason” to the Indonesian nation would be understood in much broader, if religiously and ethnically coloured, terms... In early February 1998, moreover, following a meeting with

Suharto, the government-created Indonesian Religious Scholars' Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia – MUI) called for a jihad (holy war) against “speculators and hoarders”, defined broadly enough to cover the thousands of – mostly ethnic Chinese – shopkeepers, merchants, and businesspersons scattered across the archipelago.

In cities and towns in Java and various other parts of the country, newspapers were soon awash with reports of local police and military officials investigating and punishing suspected “hoarders”. However this new crime was defined, it was clear, shopkeepers and merchants were now burdened with new “protection expenses” on top of previous exactions and the rapidly rising cost of goods...

Thus, a wide variety of government statements and more concrete actions in the course of January and early February worked to create an atmosphere of public, officially-sanctioned suspicion and resentment not only towards national konglomerat such as led by Sofyan Wanandi but also the thousands of ethnic Chinese shopkeepers, merchants and businesspersons scattered throughout the Indonesian archipelago. These steps could only fall on fertile ground in a country where the Government and the majority population had long stigmatized the ethnic Chinese minority as foreign and predatory, and shown considerable sympathy for heavy restraints on the unfettered operation of the free market. Moreover, such steps were taken at a time when the most dramatic and broadly felt effects of the crisis – rapidly rising prices – were first experienced directly via Chinese-owned shops and stores throughout the country. Many Indonesians thus simply saw local ethnic-Chinese shopkeepers as profiting, rather than suffering, from the crisis, as perpetrators rather than victims of the conspiracies and crimes referred to by Suharto and his followers.

Indeed, against this inauspicious backdrop, the months of January and February 1998 saw a series of riots take place in a number of towns and cities around Indonesia, including Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Lombok, Sumbawa, and Flores. In virtually all cases, the riots took the form of attacks on Chinese-owned shops or department stores, with looting and destruction of goods. In many cases, Catholic or Protestant churches were also targeted by the rioting crowds, leaving dozens of Christian houses of worship burned down, damaged, or entirely destroyed by mid-February according to one estimate at the time. (UNHCR [Undated] ‘Indonesia: Economic, Social and Political Dimensions of the Current Crisis’, UNHCR website <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/openssl.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&id=3ae6a6c50&page=publ> – Accessed 22 June 2006 – Attachment 5).

4. Do the Indonesian authorities protect the Chinese from harm?

Country information indicates that the Indonesian authorities have taken some steps towards protecting ethnic Chinese from harm since 1998; but sometimes casts doubt on the effectiveness of that protection. Recent reports from the Indonesian press are indicative of this uncertainty: a 2005 report from the *Jakarta Post*, for instance, plainly states that “government security forces” were “often indifferent to attacks on minorities [including the ethnic Chinese] – ostensibly because the officers fear inflaming the situation further” (Siboro, Tiarna 2005, ‘Freedom Guard to protect minority groups from terror’, *The Jakarta Post*, 1 October – Attachment 27).

A 2003 research response by the US Citizenship and Immigration Service provides the following information on whether the Indonesian authorities protect the Chinese and Christians from harm:

In regard to whether police and/or other government authorities in Indonesia have improved their efforts to protect Chinese Christians in Jakarta, Indonesia specialists at the U.S. Department of State and at Boston University both told the RIC in telephone interviews that the police in Jakarta have made a significant attempt over the past two years to improve protection of Chinese Christians in Jakarta. Both referenced past incidents in Jakarta involving Chinese Christians but stated that Chinese Christians in Jakarta are not affected necessarily by current violence against Christians elsewhere in Indonesia (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003, Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The Boston University expert, who is a professor of anthropology, said that in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings, the police in Jakarta have been improving efforts to protect all citizens of Jakarta (Professor 30 Oct 2003). He also stated that many Chinese Christians in Indonesia “are ethnically distinguishable from non-Chinese and the subject of some popular resentments by non-Chinese, ‘native’ (pribumi) Indonesians” (Professor 14 Nov 2003). He noted that “Chinese Indonesians as a group also tend to be better off economically, and as such are the target of some discriminatory practices” but said that he does not feel that this discrimination in general would “justify blanket asylum requests” (Professor 14 Nov 2003). He did say, however, that “there have been Chinese individuals who have been the subject of special discrimination whose cases might require individual attention” (Professor 14 Nov 2003).

The Indonesia specialist at the U.S. Department of State told the RIC that there has been a recent up-take in violence against Christians in the Moluccas and in Sulawesi but that instead of “mob violence” involving average Muslims against Christians, these incidents are linked to activity by extremist groups. He said there have been reports that in some of these instances of violence, Muslim bystanders have provided or attempted to provide assistance to the Christian victims (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003).

According to the May 2002 US Commission on International Religious Freedom report on Indonesia, conflict between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia’s Moluccan islands starting in May 1999 has resulted in the death of “approximately 9,000 people” (USCIRF 3 May 2002). According to the State Department’s INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT 2002: “During late 2001, the Government worked to end Muslim-Christian violence in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas by dispatching thousands of soldiers and police officers to the area and by brokering peace agreements between the two communities in December 2001 and February 2002. The agreements reduced but did not end the violence” (U.S. DOS 7 Oct 2002).

The JAKARTA POST reported on December 27, 2002, that police continued to guard churches throughout the country during the Christmas holiday season, in response to bomb blasts that occurred in 2000 and 2001 (Siboro 27 Dec 2002). In contrast, the World Evangelical Alliance reported May 21, 2003, that in Bekasi, 20 kilometers southeast of Jakarta, “churches are being threatened and intimidated by local radical Muslim groups, and local authorities are doing nothing to protect the Christian minority or rein in the Islamist militants” (World Evangelical Alliance 21 May 2003).

On October 14, 2003, Agence France Press reported that the Government of Indonesia was deploying police and troops to avert Muslim-Christian violence in Central Sulawesi province (AFP 14 Oct 2003).

On September 22, 2003, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, on a visit to New York, stated that her government pays attention to the interests of all parties, including the minority. This was stated in response to a question on how the government protects Indonesian minorities, especially Christians (INNA 23 Sep 2003).

In regard to Jakarta in particular, the Indonesia desk at the U.S. Department of State reported that in 2002, “religious extremists, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)...physically attacked a number of nightclubs, bars, and billiard clubs in the name of religion, claiming that the

establishments were immoral. The most high-profile attacks occurred in Jakarta on October 5, 2002” (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003). According to an AP article, the Government of Indonesia charged the FPI leader, Habib Rizieq, with “inciting violence,” and he is currently on trial in Jakarta. “[In justifying the attacks, Rizieq]...claimed to be destroying immoral establishments that were allowed to operate with the support of the police. But detractors claimed he was only doing the bidding of the police, who were angry at establishments that refused to pay protection money” (Casey 8 May 2003).

According to the Boston University professor, the establishments in Jakarta that were attacked by the FPI were typically Chinese-owned [Chinese Indonesians tend to be Christian], but the attacks were largely economically motivated.

The professor said that there were always police who were very unhappy with “freelance deal-making” between high-ranking police command officers and extortionist groups such as FPI, and that serious physical confrontations between some police officers and the FPI made this tension clear. He also said that the police were not engaged in these extortion schemes for religious but for economic reasons, and that the schemes were not sponsored at the institutional level of the police force (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The professor also said that, in a couple of instances, the FPI have attacked Christian churches in Jakarta, though not under the name “FPI”. The FPI also burned down an evangelical Christian school in Jakarta in late 2000 or early 2001. The professor’s impression is that the FPI are less active today because while they once enjoyed the blessing of high ranking members of the Indonesian armed forces, this backing has diminished (but not disappeared) (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The professor said that the Indonesian police have greatly improved their efforts to protect ordinary citizens and have become more assertive in their efforts to curb activities of criminal gangs who operated under the garb of Islamist activists. He feels there is “discrimination” against Christians in Jakarta, but not “systematic persecution” and that the situation has “significantly improved” over the last year partly due to improvements in the Indonesian police force. The professor indicated that the situation in the Moluccas and Sulawesi, where there has been real ethno-religious violence involving Muslims and Christians (although not typically Chinese Christians), is very different from the situation in Jakarta, and that he is not seeing systematized mistreatment of Chinese Christians in Jakarta (Professor 30 Oct 2003). (US Citizenship and Immigration Service 2003, *Indonesia: Information on Attacks by Muslims Against a Chinese Christian Neighborhood in Jakarta in September 2002, and Police Protection of Chinese Christians in Jakarta*, 14 November. <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/asylum/ric/documentation/IDN04001.htm> – Accessed 2 December 2005 – Attachment 23).

Additional advice on whether the Indonesian authorities protect Chinese from harm is provided the three previous RRT research responses (RRT Country Research 2005, *Research Response IDN17459*, 17 August – Attachment 11; RRT Country Research 2003, *Research Response IDN15918*, 27 May – Attachment 12; RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response IDN30158*, 16 May – Attachment 28).

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REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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