



## Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor

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The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, known by its Portuguese initials, CAVR (A Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação) was established as an independent statutory authority in July 2001 by the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET). Article 162 of the Constitution of East Timor recognizes the establishment of the CAVR, which had a mandate to seek the truth, promote reconciliation, and restore the dignity of victims.

The CAVR's truth-seeking mandate required it to inquire into human rights abuses committed by all sides in the political conflicts between 25 April 1974 and 25 October 1999. Its official report, *Chega!* (Portuguese for 'enough'), was written by national and international staff working under the direction and supervision of the CAVR's seven East Timorese Commissioners. *Chega!* benefited from scientifically-defensible estimates of the number of East Timorese killed during the occupation. The CAVR received the assistance of Benetech, a California-based nonprofit organization devoted to using technology in the service of humanity. Its Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG) developed a database of three independent sources: narrative statements, a retrospective mortality survey, and a census of public graveyards. It found that, at the very least, 84,200 people died as a result of the conflict, and that the figure may be as high as 183,000. Most of these deaths occurred in the years 1977-1979. The CAVR concluded that there was widespread evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. It found that the specific crimes committed by Indonesian forces included sexual violence, torture, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer, arbitrary imprisonment, murder and extermination. Among other things, it recommended the formation of an international tribunal.

The CAVR promoted reconciliation by initiating a Community Reconciliation Process – a new mechanism at the community level that sought to

reintegrate people who had committed politically-related crimes that were less serious than murder, rape and torture. These “serious crimes” would be subject to the conventional process of prosecution and sentencing. By contrast, the CRP involved public hearings conducted in affected communities by panels of local leaders. Perpetrators were required to admit their actions, and victims and members of the public were able to ask questions and make comments. An agreement would be reached whereby perpetrators agreed to undertake community service or pay reparations to victims. Perpetrators were then accepted back into the community.

The CAVR also attempted to heal social divisions and restore the dignity of victims after a 24-year long conflict. Indeed, the UNTAET regulation establishing the CAVR specifically required it to “help restore the dignity of victims of human rights violations.” Its Urgent Reparations Programme was an emergency measure to help some of the most disadvantaged victims of human rights violations. It was unable to attract financial support from national and international sources for a general reparations scheme. After the CAVR was dissolved in December 2005, a Post-CAVR Technical Secretariat was established to complete unfinished CAVR projects. Based in the same heritage site as the CAVR (a prison where many East Timorese had been detained), the Secretariat was charged with disseminating *Chega!* and related products, completing the CAVR's publishing program, safeguarding its archives and caring for the prison site.

### Further reading:

Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste. *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste*. Dili, 2005.