

Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update

1st October – 30th November 2008

World Bank

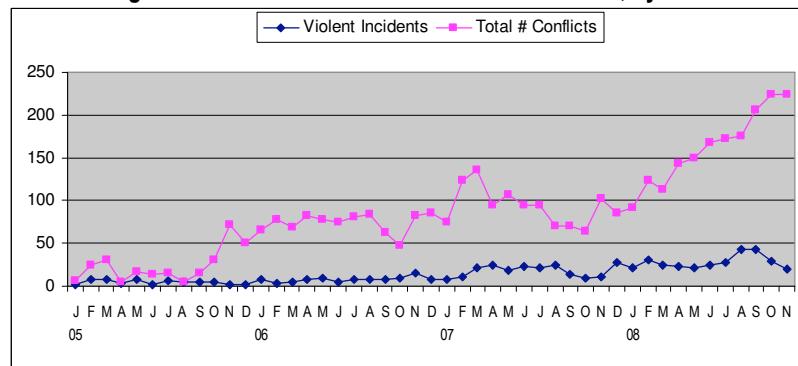


The number of violent incidents dropped sharply in October, with 29 reported cases, and continued to decrease in November to hit a record low this year, with 21 cases.¹ However, the series of grenade and arson attacks against KPA and Partai Aceh (PA) continued.² Disputes over land, employment and construction projects also led to violence. The homecoming of GAM's exiled leader Hasan Tiro in October led to relatively few incidents, but brought a number of political issues and tensions to the forefront. With next year's local legislative elections as a backdrop, Tiro's visit turned into a massive - and arguably illegal- show of force for Partai Aceh. The visit also took place as a controversial local law is being drafted to re-establish the Acehnese institution of Wali Nanggroe ("Guardian of the State"), a position which may be held by Hasan Tiro in the future. Displays of separatist material by the KPA/PA crowd during the visit exacerbated tensions with security forces. These tensions were reflected in a number of non-violent altercations between the military and KPA/PA. The campaign and preparation for the 2009 elections continued to generate disputes and incidents, mostly over the defection of political figures to new parties and acts of intimidation. There is a risk that elections might also contribute to the resumption of protracted political conflict in districts with a history of unhealthy competition between elites, as illustrated by renewed contestation against Bupati Akmal Ibrahim in Aceh Barat Daya. The upcoming closure of BRR and the handover of the supervision of the reconstruction effort to a new transitional body also generated concerns and controversy.

Violence dropped but conflicts remained high; grenade and arson attacks continued

In October and November, the number of new conflicts remained high at 224 each month. The number of violent incidents dropped sharply, with 29 reported cases in October and 21 in November—the lowest figure recorded in 2008 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Violent incidents and total # of conflicts, by month



While overall levels of violent incidents dropped, some serious incidents did occur. The row of violent attacks against KPA/Partai Aceh (PA) that started in September continued with the arson of a PA office in Langsa on October 11th and the explosion of a grenade in front of the KPA provincial headquarters in Banda Aceh on October 23rd. The Head of PA Sabang was also the victim of two incidents: his house was vandalized on October 29th, and a car showroom that he owns was arsonsed on the 31st. The incidents involving the PA of Sabang seemed rooted in local disputes and unrelated to the wider attacks against PA. By contrast, the Langsa and Banda Aceh attacks, which took place respectively on the day of Hasan Tiro's arrival and immediately before his departure (see section on Hasan Tiro's visit below), further aggravated KPA/PA's already tense relationships with security forces. Ibrahim KBS, KPA's spokesperson, questioned the police's failure to arrest any of the perpetrators of previous attacks. He declared that attackers were "no ordinary criminals" and "may belong to a group that is beyond the reach of regular authorities," hinting at possible involvement of the military or intelligence services.³

A grenade was also thrown at a car traveling from Lhokseumawe to Bireuen on October 10th, injuring two, and another grenade exploded in front of the house of the Lhokseumawe district parliament's Secretary on November 16th without resulting in any casualties. There is little indication so far as to the motives behind these attacks.

Conflicts over land cases, employment and construction projects led to violence

A striking feature of conflicts in October and November was the relatively large number of disputes over land cases, access to employment and construction projects that led to violence. Such incidents have increased dramatically in 2008 as compared to last year (see Figure 2 below). Only six cases were reported in 2007 (one case every two months), while 36 occurred over the first ten months of this year (almost one case per week). Resources-related violent incidents represented nearly 20% of all of October and November's violent incidents. Table 1 below shows that half were related to extortion and intimidation perpetrated by police on commercial road traffic and by thugs (*preman*) or contractors on construction projects.

Figure 2: Number of resources-related violent incidents, per month in 2007 and 2008

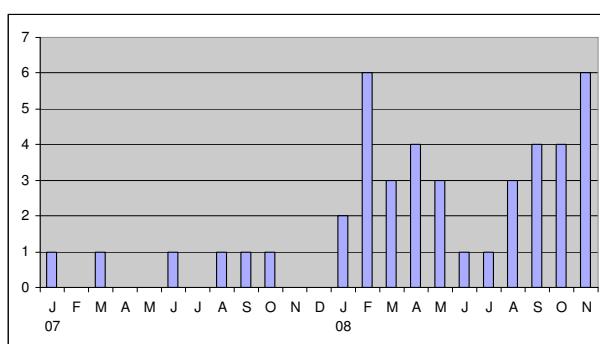


Table 1: Resources-related violent incidents in October and November 2008

Type of issue	#	Description	Damage
Land issues	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community vs private companies: two cases. Community vs illegal loggers. 	Land and facilities arsonsed Logging equipment arsonsed
Access to employment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community vs gvt project (no locals employed). 	Govt building arsonsed
Extortion / tenders	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extortion with violence by thugs: two cases. Extortion with violence by police (commercial road traffic). Beatings of govt officials by contractors (lost tenders): two cases, one attributed to KPA members. 	One building arsonsed One person injured Two person injured
Others	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brawl over parking fee. 	One person injured

³ "Kantor KPA Pusat Digranat," Serambi October 24th.

In response to increasing concerns about extortion, the police launched a high-profile campaign against “thugs” (*razzia preman*) that led to dozens of arrests in November. Police declarations reflected a measure of prejudice against KPA.⁴ There is evidence suggesting that members of KPA are indeed involved in extortion, and KPA leadership has been famously reluctant to discipline rogue elements and hold perpetrators accountable. However, the stigmatization of the organization risks aggravating tensions with security forces and is unlikely to help induce KPA to better cooperate on law-enforcement matters. Incidents involving police show that security forces themselves have yet to improve internal discipline and accountability.

Hasan Tiro’s homecoming was met by cheerful crowds but raised controversies

On October 11th, Hasan Tiro, the founder of GAM, returned to Aceh for his first visit after 29 years of exile in Sweden. Massive crowds, including thousands of KPA members from across the province, gathered to celebrate the homecoming of the 83 year-old at the Baiturrahman mosque in Banda Aceh. Thousands also attended his public appearances during a two-week tour through the GAM strongholds of Pidie, Bireuen, Aceh Utara and Aceh Timur before he flew back to Sweden on October 26th.⁵

Despite the security challenges presented by crowd gatherings of this size, and the usually poor record of KPA, the “sponsor” of the event, in enforcing discipline among its followers, there were relatively few incidents. Security forces deplored displays of separatist ideology by the KPA crowd, who pulled down an Indonesian flag and allegedly circulated pro-independence stickers (see Box 1). KPA blamed such actions on the actions of “provocateurs”. However, the belief that a PA landslide victory may eventually lead to the organization of a referendum on independence is far from uncommon among the party’s rank-and-file.⁶ Findings from recent Ausaid / World Bank field visits showed that this perception is widely shared by communities and is likely to affect voter behavior, although not necessarily in favor of PA. It is also exacerbating tensions between KPA/PA and former anti-separatist militias in the field (see September Update).

Box 1: Hasan Tiro’s visit – related incidents

- *October 10th.* Oil is spread by unknown people on parts of the Medan-Banda Aceh road to hinder crowds traveling to Banda Aceh for the celebrations.
- *October 11th, Banda Aceh.* During the celebrations at the Baiturrahman mosque, a national *merah-putih* flag is pulled down. Journalists also complain about the rough manners of the KPA security detail.
- *October 14th, Pidie and Aceh Utara.* Police reports that stickers are being circulated bearing PA’s symbol and Hasan Tiro’s picture, with separatist slogans such as: “Partai Aceh wins, only one step further to independence, Wali Nanggroe will be happy”.
- *October 20th,* FKK accuses Partai Aceh of taking advantage of Hasan Tiro’s visit to circumvent restrictions on political campaigning.
- *October 23rd, Meulaboh.* Hasan Tiro’s entourage is greeted by a hostile banner.

KPA’s interest in organizing the visit was also questioned. The Coordination and Communication Forum for Peace in Aceh (FKK) openly criticized KPA for taking advantage of Tiro’s popularity to promote Partai Aceh. Indeed, PA banners and campaign materials were omnipresent among the massive processions of supporters who escorted the Wali Nanggroe, turning his journey across the province into a major show of force for GAM’s political party. The Independent Elections Commission (KIP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) deplored this infraction of elections regulations: during the period referred to as the “closed campaign” (*kampanye tertutup*), the law forbids

⁴ See, for example, statements by the Aceh Police Chief in Serambi, November 18th, where he used the expression “*pajak nanggroe*” (the “State Tax” imposed by GAM during conflict years) to refer to extortion in general.

⁵ The audience was less enthusiastic during Tiro’s visit to Meulaboh, where a significant share of the population supports the formation of a separate ABAS province. KPA is opposed to the partition.

⁶ This was indirectly acknowledged by Adnan Beuransyah, PA’s spokesman, when he publicly called on the KPA/PA crowd, a few days before Tiro’s visit, to refrain from yelling “*Merdeka*” (Independence) in public. See “*Jangan Teriakkan Kata Merdeka*”, Serambi October 10th.

political rallies of more than 500 people; mass rallies are only authorized during the “open campaign”, which will not begin until March of next year.

Finally, Hasan Tiro’s triumphal visit could not fail to be seen as a plebiscite in favor of the role some want to see him playing in Aceh’s government. Provision 1.1.7 of the Helsinki MoU mandated the re-establishment of the traditional institution of Wali Nanggroe (“Guardian of the State”). Most Acehnese see Tiro as the legitimate heir to the position. His visit took place as a *Qanun* (local law) is being drafted to determine the extent of the Wali Nanggroe’s powers, an issue over which Jakarta and GAM have radically differing interpretations.⁷ The LoGA defines its role as mostly honorific. To GAM, it is meant to become the uppermost executive position in Aceh’s government, with considerable prerogatives such as the right to dissolve the parliament, free prisoners and take command of organic armed forces in “emergency situations.” KPA has been pushing for delaying finalization of the *Qanun* until after the elections, when they will have more leverage in the parliament. The issue could well become a major area of contention between the new legislature and the central government in the future.

Brushes between the military and KPA/PA

Tensions between security forces in general, and the military in particular, and KPA/PA have markedly increased since the beginning of the campaign for next year’s elections. With Hasan Tiro’s visit as a backdrop, a number of incidents pitted the military against KPA/PA in October, mostly over symbols and alleged anti-MoU propaganda (see Box 2). None were violent and all retained the appearance of legitimate law-enforcement operations. However, even seemingly benign altercations remain worrying, given the potential for these to turn violent. The abduction of two Aceh Timur PA figures by the military in September (see last Update) seems to have set a dangerous precedent. In October, the Aceh Tamiang military followed a similar pattern by “picking-up” the local PA Head “to help in the investigation” of a kidnapping case. Resulting tensions were quickly defused, and no further altercation between TNI and KPA/PA was recorded in November. Nonetheless, as elections approach, both sides should show restraint and avoid unnecessary provocations. The tendency of the military to overstep its mandate by getting involved in law-enforcement, a task that belongs to the police, is of particular concern.

Box 2: Brushes between security forces and KPA/PA in October

- *October 6th, Nisam, Aceh Utara.* Military personnel takes down a PA sign regarded as too similar to the GAM logo. KPA complains.
- *October 14th, Meulaboh.* The military seizes VCDs regarded as anti-MoU propaganda (presumably old pro-GAM material).
- *October 19th, Aceh Tamiang.* Following the kidnapping for ransom of two civil servants by armed men, the military “picks up” the head of PA Aceh Tamiang. Alarmed by the news, a PA mob gather in front of the military compound, but disperses after the PA Head clarifies that he was not coerced into cooperating.
- *October 28th, Aceh Barat.* The military arrests a PA supporter accused of displaying a GAM banner in front of his warung.

Political conflicts: “lompat pagar”, intimidation and the resumption of regional conflicts

The campaign and preparation for next year’s elections continued to generate disputes and incidents, although relatively fewer than before (29 cases in October and November as compared to 24 in September alone). These are broken down in Table 2 below.

⁷ See Crisis Group Asia Briefing No. 81, *Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh*, 9 September 2008 for a detailed analysis of the Wali Nanggroe dispute.

Table 2: Violent and non-violent Incidents related to the 2009 elections in October and November 2008

Type of issue		# of cases	% of total
Intimidation / Unhealthy campaign practices	Arson / grenade attacks against PA	2	34.5%
	Other intimidation / violence	3	
	Banner issues	4	
	Others	1	
Registration of candidates (caleg)	Koran reading test	1	20.5%
	Wrongdoings, corruption	3	
	Others	2	
Political parties internal issues	Rank on party list	1	41.5%
	Defections to other parties	10	
	Others	1	
Others	Complaints over KIP's performance	1	3.5%
Total		29	100%

A third of elections-related conflicts were political parties internal disputes about members of parliament defecting to other parties, a move referred to as “fence jumping” (*lompat pagar*). Over 25 provincial and district-level legislators were recalled by their former leadership since September. “Fence-jumpers” are typically members of dominant national parties who defect to smaller national or local parties. This spate of defections is explained both by the hope of securing a higher rank on a smaller party’s list, and also by the fact that traditional parties, widely associated with the poor governance and the lack of socio-economic progress during the conflict era, are expected to suffer heavy losses next year. While the old elite hopes to stay in power by adopting new colors, smaller parties welcome them for reasons of self-interest: “fence-jumpers” bring with them valuable political connections, funds and name-recognition. Such opportunistic behavior amongst the political elite, including those in newly formed local political parties, reflects a real weakness in Acehnese politics. If the same political elite maintain power, albeit under different party banners, trust in the benefits of the peace process may be undermined as high expectations for change will go unmet.

Intimidation also remained a concern. Besides continued violent attacks on PA, a number of lower-profile incidents were reported. One such incident underlined the risk for isolated cases to escalate into wider violent confrontation between rival mobs. Following reports of physical intimidation of a female supporter of the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) by KPA members in Bireuen on October 27th, a group of PKS youth front staged a demonstration in front of PA’s district office. The demonstration led to the beating of PKS members by PA supporters. Intimidation is likely to continue, and possibly intensify, as elections draw closer. The formation of the Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu) has been delayed for months due to a legal dispute between the provincial parliament and Jakarta authorities. In the absence of proper channels to report and prosecute cases, the risk will increase that supporters take the matter into their own hands, thereby possibly leading to violent clashes. Another concern is that intimidation is not only attributable to undisciplined rank-and-file party members, but is also perpetrated in some instances by the government apparatus. This was illustrated by two cases in Nagan Raya, where communities complained about coordinated pressures from village and sub-district authorities to vote for the dominant national party in the area.

Intimidation also marred the first round of the direct executive elections for the Head and Vice-Head of Pidie Jaya district government. Three were injured in two reported cases. KPA was the main target of complaints and accusations and acknowledged the misbehavior of its members by apologizing to communities. One of the two tickets that will compete in the run-off, to be held in December, is endorsed by KPA/PA.

Finally, power plays ahead of next year’s elections might also impact on long-standing regional conflicts. Last year in Aceh Barat Daya (Abdy), Bupati Akmal Ibrahim and hostile elites waged battle via massive demonstrations and counter-demonstrations that lasted three

months (see September to November 2007 Updates). After de-escalating over the past year, opposition to Akmal recently regained momentum following the circulation via sms of pornographic material showing Akmal in female company. The case led to renewed calls for Akmal to quit. It is suspected that Akmal's enemies orchestrated the leak. With next year's elections opening a fresh window of opportunity for rival elites to pursue their ambitions, new waves of political unrest are possible in districts with a history of tensions such as Abdyah, Nagan Raya, Aceh Tengah and Aceh Tenggara. Political competition is healthy when properly channeled through democratic mechanisms. In the above districts, however, competition has shown a tendency to take confrontational and often violent forms.⁸

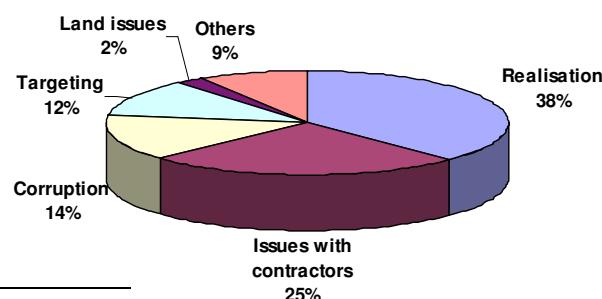
Worries about the future of the reconstruction effort, as BRR is on its way out

The Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency for Aceh and Nias (BRR), the government ad-hoc body formed in 2005 to oversee the post-tsunami reconstruction effort, will end its activities on April 16, 2009. As it is already scaling down staff, handing over assets and closing down branches, concerns have been increasing as to how to ensure a smooth continuation of reconstruction programs. A draft presidential decree envisions the formation of a new body, the Aceh Reconstruction Sustainability Agency (BKRA), placed under the authority of the provincial government. On November 26th, Governor Irwandi Yusuf rejected the draft, on the basis that it defines BKRA's mandate as only valid up to the end of 2009, and limits its role to coordination, with most budget allocations spread across government line agencies. Irwandi argued in favor of a more integrated body, with dual roles as coordinator and implementing agency, and a mandate running through 2012.

Another controversy was related to the assessment of BRR's overall performance. In November, the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) gave its highest performance ranking to BRR for the management of its 2007 budget (Rp. 10 trillion; approximately US\$ 1 billion). The ranking sparked protests by civil society, which has been very critical of BRR's achievements. Indeed, our dataset shows that since October 2006,⁹ BRR has been the recipient of over 200 complaints, with misuse of funds and corruption as the third biggest source of protests (see Figure 3). An agency in charge of a mission as challenging as the Aceh post-tsunami reconstruction could hardly avoid criticism, and our count of complaints is in no way a reliable indicator of its actual performance. However, it underlines the poor level of satisfaction of beneficiaries.

Whether BKRA will have the capacity to properly address these challenges is questionable. Despite Irwandi's efforts to turn the new reconstruction authority into a "BRR bis", it will likely suffer from a much weaker mandate, and presumably lower capacity. The replacement of BRR by another ad-hoc body will also arguably slow down the inevitable normalization process that should see, sooner or later, the devolution of development functions to provincial and district-level line agencies (Dinas). In that respect, whether the formation of BKRA will facilitate or hinder an already difficult process of transition remains to be seen.

Figure 3: Breakdown of BRR-related complaints, per type of issue, since Oct 06



⁸ In Aceh Tenggara for example, a protracted dispute over the result of the 2006 elections escalated into a row of violent incidents in August of last year (see August 2007 Update).

⁹ Figure 3 presents data beginning in October 2006 only, since that is when we began tracking these particular issues in aid-related conflicts.