

Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update

1st – 30th September 2008

World Bank



Three months into the campaign for the 2009 legislative elections, the usually quiet atmosphere of the fasting month was disrupted by 43 violent incidents. Political tensions were a driving factor in September's foremost cases, which included a series of arsons and grenade explosions targeting GAM's Partai Aceh (PA).¹ These attacks occurred at a frequency of nearly one a day at their peak and took place throughout the GAM strongholds of the east coast. They occurred against a backdrop of clashes between KPA,² anti-separatist fronts, and security forces. Widespread electoral intimidation remained a concern. Aceh continues to lack the proper institutional channels to report and act upon such cases due to further delays in the formation of the Elections Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu). Issues over the registration of candidates and internal party disputes also exacerbated pre-electoral tensions. The Bupati of Aceh Besar's announcement of his intention to resign underlined the challenges of governance in Aceh's current transition period. Finally, the kidnapping of a World Bank consultant by a group of rogue ex-combatants in Sawang, Aceh Utara, strikingly illustrated how poverty, poor governance and the uneven distribution of the dividends of peace continue to impact on security and undermine the peace process in some of the most conflict-affected and poorest regions of the province.

The fasting month marred by a peak in the intensity of violence

In previous years, the fasting month of Ramadhan was characterized by a drop in conflict and violence. In contrast, this year conflict reached a new peak with 206 new disputes reported. Violence continued at the high levels recorded in August with 43 violent cases, an average of nearly 1.5 incidents per day (see Figure 1).

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

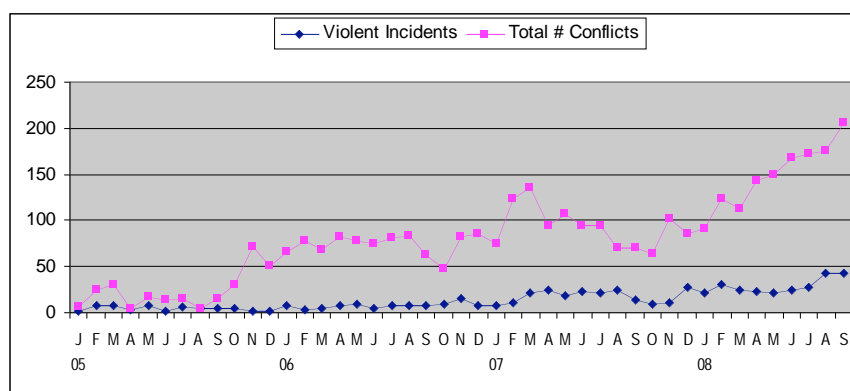


Table 1 below breaks down September's incidents. As in August, this month's high rate of violence was strongly related to increased political tensions in the run-up to next year's elections (23% of all incidents). However, while August's election-related cases consisted

¹ As part of an analytical support program to the peace process, the Conflict and Development Program, within the World Bank Office Indonesia and with funding from the UK's Department for International Development and the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands, is using a newspaper conflict mapping methodology to record and categorize all incidents of conflict in Aceh as reported in two provincial newspapers (Serambi and Aceh Kita). The Program publishes updates available online at www.conflictanddevelopment.org. The dataset is available for those interested; contact Adrian Morel at amorel1@worldbank.org. There are limitations to using newspapers to map conflict; see Barron and Sharpe (2005) available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org/page.php?id=412.

² The Aceh Transition Committee (*Komite Peralihan Aceh – KPA*) is the civil organization formed to represent former combatants from GAM's military wing (TNA).

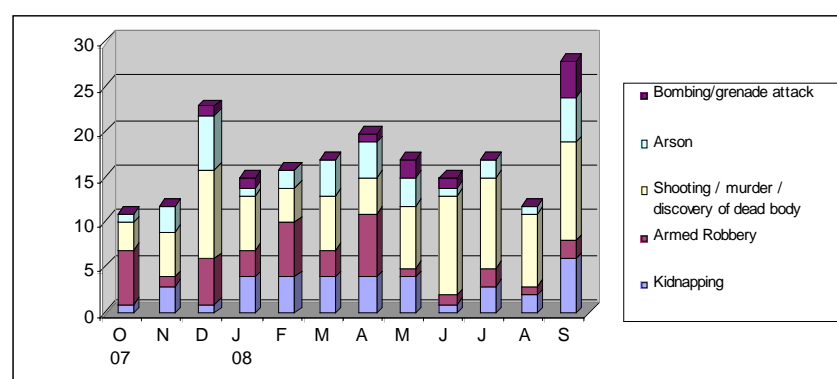
largely of vandalism of campaign material (see August's Update), political violence escalated in September with a number of arsons and grenade attacks, almost all of them targeting Partai Aceh (see next section on elections). Also closely related to the climate of heightened political competition, September was marked by a number of clashes between KPA, anti-separatist militia elements, and security forces.

Table 1: September's violent incidents, by type of issue

Issue		# of cases	%	Toll
Incidents involving ex-combatant groups	<i>KPA vs. militias</i>	2	9.5%	3 injured
	<i>KPA vs. security forces</i>	2		3 kidnapped
"Armed group" vs. security forces		1	2.5%	2 injured
Elections-related	<i>Intimidation of KIP officials</i>	3	23%	-
	<i>Attacks against political parties</i>	7		6 buildings damaged
Dispute over resources	<i>Land issues</i>	2	16%	1 dead, 3 injured
	<i>Community vs. private company or government line agency</i>	3		5 buildings damaged
	<i>Contracts / tenders</i>	2		-
Aid-related		1	2.5%	-
Vigilantism	<i>Moral vigilantism</i>	2	16%	2 injured
	<i>Punitive actions against thieves</i>	5		6 injured
Personal issues (revenge)		5	11.5%	1 dead, 6 injured
Others (Including one discovery of dead body, motive of murder unclear)		8	19%	1 dead, 2 kidnapped, 2 injured
Total		43	100%	3 dead, 24 injured, 5 abducted, 11 buildings damaged

A relatively low number of fatalities (three) were reported in September.³ Nonetheless, Figure 2 below, which combines figures on conflict incidents and armed crime,⁴ shows that this month was characterized by a sharp rise in cases involving serious forms of violence. These more than doubled compared to August. In particular the number of kidnappings, low from June to August, leapt in September with a record high of six cases, one of which targeted a member of the international aid community (see section on the abduction of a World Bank consultant).

Figure 2: Cases involving serious forms of violence, October 07-September 08



³ Eleven deaths were recorded in July and seven in August. The average for 2008 so far is five per month.

⁴ Purely criminal cases (such as armed robberies, kidnappings for ransom, theft with murder, etc.) are not included in our monthly count of conflict incidents as per Figure 1 and Table 1. Figure 2 includes both conflict incidents and criminal cases. For example, Table 1 counts four cases of kidnappings (involving five victims), while Figure 2 counts six cases, two of which were purely criminal.

Violence increases amongst conflict-era enemies as 2009 elections approach

The campaign for next year's legislative elections, launched in July amidst widespread concerns about intimidation (see July-August Update), was disrupted in September by a number of very serious incidents mostly targeting GAM/KPA's Partai Aceh (PA).

On September 9th, a grenade exploded at the house of former GAM military wing commander, and current Head of KPA and PA, Muzzakir Manaf, in the outskirts of Banda Aceh. A series of five arsons and grenade incidents followed, at a frequency of nearly one a day from September 15th-20th, targeting PA offices along the east coast and in Aceh Tenggara (see Box 1). On September 21st, a Partai SIRA office was also arsoned.⁵ The modus operandi of these attacks indicates they were meant to intimidate rather than harm,⁶ and no victims were reported. In many respects they are similar to April and May 2007's grenade attacks (eight incidents over two months). However, their sequencing and the fact that they took place across a wide geographic area mean that this is a significant escalation as compared to previous post-MoU incidents. Last years' incidents, which targeted a broad range of actors (GAM figures, but also non-GAM politicians and security forces), seemed rooted in local dynamics, and were only loosely connected to one another. In contrast, the September attacks appear to constitute a deliberate effort at hurting Partai Aceh across the province.

This gave ground to allegations by KPA/PA that the attacks were part of a plot hatched by "elements within Jakarta's government" to spoil the electoral campaign,⁷ and that they were possibly carried out by members of anti-separatist militias.

Tensions between KPA and militias are indeed on the rise. In former GAM strongholds in particular, ex-GAM combatants who surrendered before the MoU and were subsequently organized by the military in anti-separatist fronts (now regrouped under the umbrella organization Forkab – the Communication Forum of the Sons of the Nation), are under pressure from KPA to change sides again and support PA. National parties have also been courting organizations such as Forkab in order to cut their losses and undermine support to local parties.⁸ Tensions over elections might have fuelled clashes between KPA and Berantas (*Benteng Rakyat Antiseparatis* – Rampart of the Anti-Separatist People), a militia composed partly of GAM combatants who surrendered, in Aceh Utara (see Box 1).

Mutual distrust also intensified between KPA/PA and security forces. The police's failure to arrest any of the perpetrators of the September attacks reinforced KPA's suspicions of

Box 1: September's political violence and incidents between former combatant groups and security forces

- Sept 4th, Cot Girek, Aceh Utara. In retaliation to the murder on August 26th of a member of Berantas, an anti-separatist militia, four KPA members are assaulted by militia elements.
- Sept 9th, Lamreung, Krueng Barona Jaya, Aceh Besar. A grenade explodes in front of the house of Muzzakir Manaf, Head of KPA and Partai Aceh (PA).
- Sept 15th, Muara Dua, Lhokseumawe. Arson of a PA office.
- Sept 16th, Langsa. Arson of a PA office.
- Sept 17th, Kota Juang, Bireuen. A grenade is lobbed inside a PA office.
- Sept 19th, Baktiya, Aceh Utara. A grenade equipped with a time detonator is discovered in front of a PA office, but defused before exploding.
- Sept 20th, Aceh Tenggara. A PA office is arsoned.
- Sept 21st, Kota Juang, Bireuen. A Partai SIRA office is arsoned.
- Sept 24th, Lhokseumawe. Brawl between KPA members and ex-GAM combatants who surrendered before the MoU at the district BRA office.
- Sept 28th, Peureulak, Aceh Timur. A TNI soldier from Tanah Jambo Aye, Aceh Utara, is kidnapped. Aceh Utara district military commander accuses KPA. The following night, the military "kidnaps" Aceh Timur's Partai Aceh Head and Vice-Head. They are freed soon afterwards, allegedly after helping the military locate the missing soldier and secure his release.

⁵ Similar incidents continued in October, with the arson of a PA office in Langsa (October 11th) and a grenade explosion at KPA's headquarters in Banda Aceh (October 23rd).

⁶ The attacks were perpetrated in the early hours of the morning, or around the evening prayer, when people were not present at the target locations.

⁷ Adnan Beuransyah, PA's spokesman, Harian Aceh, September 18th.

⁸ Findings of field visits conducted jointly by Ausaid and the World Bank. Forkab claims 13,000 members, a potentially huge grassroots campaigning network in areas where the organization is strong, such as Aceh Barat.

connivance and that elements within security forces might be deliberately involved in running a “black campaign” to harm PA through means ranging from spreading disinformation to covert operations.⁹ The kidnapping of a soldier in Aceh Timur, soon followed by the abduction of two PA leaders by the military (see Box 1), showed alarmingly how tensions can still quickly escalate between the former parties to the conflict. The fact that the military engaged in violent retaliations in open disregard of the rule of law, is of particular concern. The incident also underlined the lack of formal communication channels allowing security forces and KPA to sort out disputes in a peaceful manner. Improved internal discipline within both KPA/PA and security forces is necessary in order to ensure smooth implementation of the elections. A more efficient and transparent police response to incidents such as September’s arsons and grenade attacks would help address suspicions of complicity.

Other hypotheses were also formulated about the attacks. Internal rivalries within KPA, an organization already fragmented by parochial disputes and turf wars over access to resources, both legal and illegal, have reportedly deepened as members compete for the lead positions on PA’s slates for district and provincial legislatures. In each electoral area, only candidates who secure one of the few top slots on the party’s list stand a reasonable chance of being elected. The word spread that September’s attacks might have been orchestrated by frustrated candidates disappointed at not having been selected or being relegated to secondary positions. Other rumors alleged that PA might have staged the attacks to bolster its popularity and change the public perception that it is the main perpetrator of political intimidation.

Other elections-related conflicts

Lower-level threats and pressures on supporters of political parties and voters remained widespread. Intimidation was prevalent amongst September’s elections-related incidents (37.5% - see Table 2 below). The ongoing delays in the formation of the provincial Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu – see July-August Update) are of concern, as Aceh continues to lack the appropriate institutional mechanisms for reporting and investigating cases. When created, Panwaslu will need support if it is to succeed in efficiently preventing incidents. During the 2006 Pilkada, Panwaslu’s performance was hampered by major flaws including a lack of capacity and authority and limited autonomy from the Independent Elections Commission (KIP).¹⁰

Table 2: September’s elections-related conflicts

Type of issue		# of cases	% of total
General legal / admin issues		2	8.5%
Unhealthy campaign practices	<i>Intimidation / violence against parties</i>	7	37.5%
	<i>Others</i>	2	
Registration of candidates (<i>caleg</i>)	<i>Koran reading test</i>	5	29%
	<i>Others</i>	2	
Political parties internal issues	<i>Rank on party list</i>	3	25%
	<i>Defections to other parties</i>	2	
	<i>Others</i>	1	
Total		24	100%

The second main source of conflict was the registration of candidates (*caleg*). In particular, the establishment of a mandatory Koran-reading test for all candidates, as per articles 13 and 36 of *Qanun* (local law) No.3 (see July-August Update), created frustration among applicants who failed the examination. Several cases of threats and intimidation of KIP personnel by

⁹ The recent re-establishment of military posts in parts of Aceh Utara and Bener Meriah also raised concerns from both KPA and the civil society.

¹⁰ See an upcoming report by the Conflict and Development program: Samuel Clark and Blair Palmer (2008). “Peaceful Pilkada, Dubious Democracy: Aceh’s Post-Conflict Elections and their Implications”, *Indonesian Social Development Paper* No. 11. Jakarta: World Bank. Soon available online at www.conflictanddevelopment.org

disgruntled candidates were reported. Finally, a quarter of September's election-related conflicts were internal disputes within political parties, such as *caleg* protesting or withdrawing their candidacy because they were dissatisfied with their rank on the party's list, or parties recalling members of parliament who defected to other political groups.

The Bupati of Aceh Besar's intention to resign underlines governance issues in Aceh

On September 5th, Bukhari Daud, Bupati of Aceh Besar, created a stir by announcing his intention to resign. More disconcerting was his firm refusal to disclose the reasons for this unexpected move. Amidst calls by the district parliament and the Department of Home Affairs (Depdagri) to reconsider his decision, Bukhari Daud agreed to continue working until a formal ruling is issued by Depdagri. He eventually shed some light as to his motivations in a written note to the parliament, saying that "the political and administrative climate was not healthy" and deploring the domination in Aceh of a vision of politics summed up in the expression: "Defeat and rule, or be defeated and ruled".¹¹ Allegations were relayed by the press that Bukhari was suffering from constant pressures by his "*Tim Sukses*", the figures who supported his candidacy during the elections, to have a say in nominations to government positions and tender processes. The same accusations suggested that Vice-Bupati Anwar Ahmad played a role in relaying such demands to Bukhari. PAN and PBR, the two political parties who backed the Daud/Ahmad ticket in 2006, swiftly denied any involvement. Sources close to Bukhari suggested that the Bupati, a well-respected academic with high religious credentials, had grown tired at his failure to impose higher moral standards upon a bureaucracy crippled by poor capacity and the predominance of personal ambitions and vested interests over the public good.

In this regard, the case served as a stark reminder of the challenges of governance in Aceh. It also acted as a wake-up call ahead of next year's elections. It raised awareness that corruption and lack of capacity can lead to government crisis, and that Aceh's administration needs to reform itself if it is to overcome the many challenges of the current transition period. Furthermore, it showed how poor governance is rooted in the domination of patron-client relationships which shape the way candidates to elected positions garner political support. In exchange for their backing, wealthy and influential individuals and political parties expect material rewards once their candidate is in office. Building the foundations for good governance must start with better oversight of the elections, improved monitoring of campaign finances, and closer scrutiny by the media and civil society of how patronage networks are built and operate.

The kidnapping of a World Bank consultant raises security concerns

On September 23rd, an international working with the World Bank as the coordinator of the Aceh Conflict Monitoring Updates program was abducted by a local youth gang armed with swords in Sawang, Aceh Utara. He was released later on the same day after convincing his kidnapers to drop demands for a Rp. 5 billion (US\$ 500,000) ransom.

This case was the first reported kidnapping to target a member of the international aid community. Seven Chinese nationals working for an Indonesian private company were kidnapped in Gayo Lues last April. The abduction of a Save the Children security guard in August later turned out to be a fake. Kidnappings are common in post-conflict Aceh (2008's average is of 3.5 cases a month, almost one per week), but thus far have typically targeted Acehnese rather than internationals.

¹¹ Serambi, September 14th.

Another source of concern is that the perpetrators' motivations were not merely criminal. The kidnappers were members of *Pasukan Peudeung* (the Sword Force), an alleged "anti-MoU" group formed by young followers of the late rogue GAM commander Teungku Badruddin (see Box 2).¹² Frustrated at how the peace process has failed in their eyes to fulfill the socio-economic needs of the Acehese population, *Pasukan Peudeung* (PP) has often been a spoiler of aid programs in Sawang, resorting to intimidation and threats as a way to draw attention to their grievances. The same arguments were used by the perpetrators of the September kidnapping to justify their action, thus illustrating the willingness of PP to go to greater lengths and undertake serious actions deliberately targeting internationals.

The threat represented by PP should not be overstated. Although part of a broader network of disgruntled ex-combatants reaching across district borders, PP is little more than a loosely organized youth gang operating mostly in northern Sawang and neighboring sub-districts. Local rumors alleging the presence in the area of an "invisible force" (*pasukan siluman*) of 500 combatants opposed to the peace process seem largely exaggerated, and the number of PP members actively involved in crime and intimidation does not exceed several dozen. The command structure of PP, already weakened by the death of its leader Tgk Badruddin, was further destabilized by the arrest of one of its prominent members, Tgk Brimob, last July. It seems the kidnapping was undertaken by a few elements without the knowledge of the others, and feedback from the field indicates that many members deeply resent the negative consequences that the incident brought to the group. Support to PP also appears to be waning among the local population.

The situation in Sawang is a striking example of how the peace process, although successful on the whole, can still fail locally to generate trust and faith among communities in general, and ex-combatants in particular. In findings from recent Ausaid/World Bank field visits conducted across the province to assess communities' perceptions of the peace process, Sawang stood alone as an area where the darkest expressions of criticism and pessimism were given. One of the most conflict-affected sub-districts in Aceh, Sawang is also one of the poorest. The sub-district allegedly benefited from the second largest allocation in Aceh Utara's budget last year, yet very little improvement in infrastructure and public services has been visible since 2005.¹³ Widespread unemployment and poverty contribute to one of the most volatile security situations in the province. In the wake of the incident, momentum should be seized to initiate discussions between all relevant stakeholders, including sub-district and district-level government, security forces, and donors, on how to improve service delivery to the area. Apparent divisions within PP ranks over the incident also potentially offer an opportunity for positively engaging the group, building on previous efforts by Interpeace.

Box 2: Tgk Badruddin... anti-MoU?

Tgk Badruddin and Sawang's KPA were pitted against one another in a local feud that resulted in his assassination in December of last year (see December 2007 Update). The feud reportedly originated from the exclusion of Badruddin and his men from the KPA's list of beneficiaries of the Rp. 25 million (US\$ 2500) individual reintegration assistance to ex-GAM combatants. It also stemmed from broader political divergences. Stigmatized by KPA as "anti-MoU", Badruddin was not so much opposed to peace itself as to the way GAM's elite was, according to him, betraying the aspirations of Aceh's people in the name of their own personal ambitions. In a document dated March 26th 2007, Badruddin denounced how KPA had taken advantage of the MoU to become the "new self-proclaimed king of Aceh" and demanded the disbandment of the organization, the revocation of the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA), and the strict implementation of the MoU provisions "in accordance with the will of the people of Aceh" [Document made available to the Updates in March 2008]. The "commandeering" of a Cardi NGO car by Badruddin in 2007, a crime for which he later served a seven-month prison sentence, was justified by his supporters as a way to draw the attention of the international community to the "failure of the MoU".

¹² For more on *Pasukan Peudeung*, see July-August Update's section on the "anti-MoU" threat. The analysis provided here is based on a number of interviews with PP, from March to September 2008.

¹³ Rp. 14 billion (US\$1.4 million) was allocated to rehabilitate Sawang's main road, which to this day is still in very poor condition.