

A new era of peace for Aceh

by Javier SOLANA, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

Today, as the EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) completes its mandate of monitoring the peace agreement signed sixteen months ago by the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), it does so with peace firmly established in the Indonesian province of Aceh.

After 30 years of continuous armed conflict, peace and stability are now restored. The people of Aceh can now move and express their opinions freely. They can enjoy life in their communities without fear. Perhaps the best proof of the progress made over the past 16 months is the fact that the first ever direct, democratic local elections were held in Aceh only four days ago and former rebels were able to stand as independent candidates. While we await the outcome, the European Union is confident that the election results will be respected and will contribute to the further consolidation of the peace process for the benefit of the people of Aceh and of Indonesia as a whole.

The European Union encouraged the efforts for peace in Aceh from day one by providing political and financial support for the negotiations in Helsinki that led to the signing of the peace agreement. However, without the political vision of the Government of Indonesia and of the GAM, who respected the undertakings given in Helsinki from the beginning, and the support of the people of Aceh, the AMM would not have been possible.

The EU will continue to stand by the people of Aceh in the ongoing peace and reconciliation process. We remain firmly committed to our goal of peace in Aceh with dignity for all. Because this is the basis for a prosperous and democratic Aceh within the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia

To achieve that goal, we are ready to provide support on all levels. In addition to AMM, the peace-monitoring mission, the EU has deployed an Election Observation Mission which will stay on in Aceh for a possible second round of elections. To ensure that the peace in Aceh is permanent, we are also backing the process with flanking measures, as part of a comprehensive approach that includes reintegration support to former GAM combatants and technical assistance and capacity-building in local governance and police training. These programmes will continue for years to come.

There is still plenty of work ahead. The reintegration efforts for the victims of the conflict as well as the reconstruction of houses and infrastructure destroyed by the December 2004 tsunami will have to be embedded in longer-term programmes benefiting all

affected citizens of Aceh. This will be a further step in normalising the situation in post-tragedy Aceh.

The AMM is a new departure for the EU in more ways than one. Not only is it the first time that the European Union has deployed a mission in Asia, it is also the first time that we have worked in partnership with countries from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Five ASEAN countries: Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, provided monitors alongside the participating European countries. In every part of the mission, the AMM has had fully integrated teams of EU and ASEAN monitors working together, contributing their comparative strengths and skills. This cooperation has worked extremely well, including in the field, where conditions were tough, as I was able to observe personally when I visited Aceh earlier in the year. The EU-ASEAN format has proved its worth and we are now in a position to build on this experience and preserve AMM as a possible model for the future.

The AMM efforts at helping to solve the conflict in Aceh fit into the EU's broader policy context of strengthening security and stability in the world. Global threats, global markets and global media mean that security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system. By working closely together, we can meet the security challenges of our time: international terrorism, transnational crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and violent religious extremism.

Our approach to crisis management has greatly benefited from cooperation with regional partners who ensure sensitivity to and respect for local conditions, circumstances and cultures. With this approach, the EU is aiming to become a global player, not a superpower. Through its political and economic weight, its resources and its shared values, it hopes to contribute to a safer world.

In Aceh the EU, together with its Asian partners, with the Government of Indonesia and with GAM, has been able to do just that and as we mark the conclusion of AMM operation on 15 December we can all be proud of our contribution to the peace efforts. Those who have suffered 30 years of conflict deserve no less.