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# **From Politics to Arms to Politics Again: The Transition of the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement - GAM)**

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# **Berghof Transitions Series**

## **Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics**

### **Editors**

**Veronique Dudouet and David Bloomfield**

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## About this Publication Series

This case-study is one of a series produced by participants in an ongoing Berghof research project on transitions from violence to peace (*Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics*). The project's overall aim is to learn from the experience of those in resistance or liberation movements who have used violence in their struggle but have also engaged politically during the conflict and in any peace process. Recent experience around the world has demonstrated that reaching political settlement in protracted social conflict always eventually needs the involvement of such movements. Our aim here is to discover how, from a non-state perspective, such political development is handled, what is the relationship between political and military strategies and tactics, and to learn more about how such movements (often sweepingly and simplistically bundled under the label of *non-state armed groups*) contribute to the transformation of conflict and to peacemaking. We can then use that experiential knowledge (1) to offer support to other movements who might be considering such a shift of strategy, and (2) to help other actors (states and international) to understand more clearly how to engage meaningfully with such movements to bring about political progress and peaceful settlement.

Political violence is a tool of both state and non-state actors, and replacing it by political methods of conflict management is essential to making sustainable peace. With this project we want to understand better how one side of that equation has been, or could be, achieved. Depending on the particular case, each study makes a strong argument for the necessary inclusion of the movement in any future settlement, or documents clearly how such a role was effectively executed.

We consciously asked participants to reflect on their experience from their own unique point of view. What we publish in this series is not presented as neutral or exclusively accurate commentary. All histories are biased histories, and there is no single truth in conflict or in peace. Rather, we believe these case-studies are significant because they reflect important voices which are usually excluded or devalued in the analysis of conflict. Increasing numbers of academics, for example, study "armed groups" from outside, but few actually engage directly with them to hear their own points of view, rationales, and understandings of their context. We are convinced that these opinions and perspectives urgently need to be heard in order to broaden our understanding of peacemaking. For exactly this reason, each case study has been produced with the very close co-operation of, and in some cases authored by, members of the movement concerned. As the results amply illustrate, these perspectives are sophisticated, intelligent, political and strategic.

The reader may or may not agree with the perspectives expressed. But, much more importantly, we hope that the reader will accept that these perspectives are valid in themselves and must be included in any attempt at comprehensive understanding of violent conflict and its transformation. We urgently need to understand in more depth the dynamics of organisations who make the transition between political violence and democratic politics, in order to improve our understanding of their role, and our practice, in making peace.

The views expressed are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies or any of its constituent agencies.

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## Introduction

The Acehnese and the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) have always described the nature of their rebellion against the Indonesian state as ‘politics, not guns’. According to the GAM leadership, they decided to take up arms because it was the only language that was available to them in order to make the central government in Jakarta understand the situation in Aceh, an Indonesian province located at the northern tip of Sumatra Island. It was a political action to counterbalance the language of the enemy. The GAM leadership, both in Aceh and in exile, has maintained that the conflict was never about violence per se, but rather a political conflict that required a political solution. Consequently whenever the other party to the conflict, the Indonesian central government, has shown the political will to negotiate a political solution, GAM has always responded positively.

The history of the conflict in Aceh since GAM’s establishment in 1976 can generally be broken down into four phases (see *annex 2*). The period from 1976 to 1989 saw the formation of the GAM movement, the declaration of Aceh’s independence by its leader Hasan Di Tiro, and the development of a low-intensity armed conflict. In the second phase from 1989 to 1998, in response to GAM’s increased military efforts, the Indonesian army undertook a counter-insurgency operation, known as the ‘Military Operations Area’ (DOM - *Daerah Operasi Militer*). The third phase followed the fall of Suharto in May 1998, which included mass protests, renewed political engagement for independence, increased repressive measures by state security forces, and a first (unsuccessful) attempt by the international community to facilitate a negotiated settlement. During the fourth phase, from 2004 until today, the humanitarian catastrophe of the tsunami was one important triggering factor for the resumption of negotiations, which led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 15 August 2005. Within this framework, far-reaching self-government competencies were negotiated for Aceh, including the right to form provincial parties, and legislation for its implementation was formally codified in the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LOGA), enacted by the Indonesian parliament on 11 July 2006.

The present peace agreement reached by GAM and the government of Indonesia has brought major changes to the political landscape in the Province of Aceh, transforming GAM from being an armed group to becoming a non-armed political movement which has to compete in a regular electoral process.

This paper looks at the character of the GAM movement, how it was drawn into the armed struggle, the factors and events that affected its adoption of a political strategy, and the present outcome of its transition. It was co-written by an Acehnese scholar and a German researcher, based on contributions made by two leading GAM members during the course of several focus group discussions.

# 1. Birth of the GAM movement

## 1.1 A reactive rebellion

Recent political movements in Aceh have evolved along the lines of the Acehnese struggle for economic, social and political justice. The discourse around nationalism was not the first and only starting point for the struggle. The Acehnese have for a very long time devoted their energy towards putting an end to the abuses and human rights violations committed over time by successive Indonesian governments and armed forces. The rise of contemporary nationalism in Aceh has been a reaction towards the seemingly unending feeling of inequality and oppression.

In 1953, nine years after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, and four years after full sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies was handed over to Sukarno's government in Indonesia, Daud Bereueh led an Acehnese rebellion against the central government. Interestingly, he had been one of the local leaders in the struggle against the Dutch reoccupation of Indonesia from 1945 to 1949, and his popularity stemmed from his image as a republican hero who had fought to secure the independence of Indonesia's republic. During these revolutionary times, the Acehnese people contributed greatly to the anti-colonial struggle, which led to Aceh being called a *daerah modal* (a model) for Indonesia. Jakarta used the region to demonstrate to the Dutch and the international community that Indonesia still existed, and that the proclaimed republic was unconquerable.

So how did a republican hero become a rebel? The primary cause behind the Bereueh revolt can be found in the Acehnese people's first great disappointment with their central government, who conducted the post-colonial institution-building process with a heavily centralistic understanding of the nation state. The centralisation of power in Jakarta resulted in the province of Aceh being merged into the province of North Sumatra.

Bereueh, who was then the governor of Aceh, decided to launch a revolt against the central government's unjust decisions regarding its 'periphery'. At the time, his movement did not call for Aceh to secede from Indonesia. Rather, he talked about the unjust policies of the central government, which had not only broken its promise of autonomy, but even abolished the very existence of the province of Aceh. Thus, Bereueh criticised the way in which the Indonesian nation state was being built in the post-colonial era. Despite the reactive character of this revolt, the government responded by sending thousands of troops and killing many of those involved.

The Bereueh-led revolt was only settled in 1959, through a negotiated agreement that established Aceh as a 'special territory' (*Daerah Istimewa*) with greater autonomous power in religious, educational and cultural matters. However, the heavy deployment of troops and the brutal operation to put down the rebellion resulted in collective bitterness amongst the local population and strong resentment towards the central government. This was especially true for the rural areas, where the campaign against villagers supporting the Bereueh revolt had been particularly brutal.

This popular resentment grew stronger as the status of *Daerah Istimewa* became virtually meaningless, and the promised benefits of the autonomy deal remained largely unrealised. The situation deteriorated further with the rise of the so-called New Order regime, led by General Suharto, who deposed Sukarno in 1966 and took over the presidency. Suharto's nation-building project was even more centralistic and militaristic than the previous one, and came in for heavy criticism for its massive exploitation of natural resources. General Suharto was also accused of being an accomplice

in the mass killings of hundreds of thousands of people during the 1965 anti-communist purge.

This feeling of bitterness between the centre and its periphery, and the deterioration of the relationship between Jakarta and Aceh prepared the ground for the birth of the Free Aceh Movement.

## 1.2 Political identity as the first weapon

The Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM), formally called ASNLF (Acheh-Sumatra National Liberation Front), began in 1976 when Teugku (Lord) Mohammad Hasan di Tiro, a supporter of the Darul Islam (Abode of Islam) movement under Bereueh, returned to Aceh from the United States. He founded GAM and (re)-declared Acehnese independence on 4 December 1976.

The generally reactive character of the Acehnese revolt can be seen in the evolution of Di Tiro's political ideology. In 1958 he had published a book entitled *Democracy for Indonesia*, in which he had then argued for a change in structural relationships between Aceh and Jakarta. His book promoted a federal system, accommodating the multiethnic states of Indonesia. However, disillusioned by the unchanging character of the Indonesian institutions, the dominant Javanese identity discourse and Indonesian politicians, in most of his later writing and speech Di Tiro promoted a historical narrative emphasising the golden time of the past, the problems of the present and the better future Aceh would be likely to have if it became independent from Indonesia. Aceh's identity and political history were the first crucial weapons for Di Tiro. In fact it was the only weapon that he initially used effectively. In order to gain support from the Acehnese people, he rhetorically promoted local patriotism in reference to Aceh's history, arguing that the region had never been colonised by the Dutch. Therefore he perceived the transfer of sovereign Aceh to Indonesia by the Dutch colonialists as an illegal act, and advocated for sovereignty over Aceh to be transferred back to the Acehnese.

Upon his return to Aceh from overseas, on 30 October 1976, Di Tiro began spreading awareness among Acehnese youth and intellectuals about Acehnese identity and the unjust position of the province within the new Republic of Indonesia. The positive reaction he received among his friends encouraged him to advocate the secession of Aceh from Indonesia. On 4 December 1976, together with a limited number of close followers, he declared Aceh to be an independent state. Beside the arguments revolving around history and the right to self-determination, the proclamation also claimed that the Indonesian government was robbing US\$ 15 million per year of Aceh's revenue from its natural resources.

Di Tiro's strategic objective in the weeks following the declaration of independence was to keep the conflict on a political level as long as possible, in order to prepare the people politically for the armed struggle. As he later declared,

[s]uccessful armed struggle can only be waged by a people who are politically conscious and politically organised and mobilised. Our Declaration of Independence is an instrument to achieve that; it is a preparatory step to a successful armed struggle (Di Tiro 1984: 17).

Di Tiro's political identity discourse enabled him to mobilise support from Acehnese intellectuals, who then became the main support base of his movement. Most of GAM's early leadership was indeed made up of university-educated Acehnese. The self-declared parallel government, which represented the first Acehnese Cabinet since 1911, consisted of medical doctors, engineers and businessmen. Ministers were inaugurated covering all political departments of a



national government, and Teungku Hasan Di Tiro was declared Head of State of Aceh-Sumatra, as well as head of military command.

The administrative structure was modelled on historical governance structures from the time when Aceh was an independent Sultanate. The movement's leadership divided Aceh-Sumatra's liberated and semi-liberated territories into 17 provinces, each headed by a governor who was assisted by a military commander. Each province was divided into various districts, run by a district head, and assisted by a district military commander (Di Tiro 1984: 41).

During the first two decades which followed this declaration, there was very little reflection and debate on the form and direction that a sovereign Aceh should take, and the prevailing view was that independence should be achieved first, before starting the internal democratic process of clarifying institutions, competencies and positions. One common view within GAM was that Aceh would become a constitutional monarchy, somewhat like Thailand or Malaysia, with Di Tiro as sultan or "*Wali Negara*". This view stemmed largely from the fact that Di Tiro's grandfather, Teungku Tjik di Tiro Muhammad Saman, had been given the mandate to continue the struggle against the Dutch invaders by Sultan Muhammad Daud, just before the latter's surrender and exile in 1903 (Kingsbury 2007: 9).

## 2. Counterbalancing the language of the enemy

The movement was drawn into the armed struggle for two main reasons: as a strategy of self-defence against the central government's militaristic approach, and in an attempt to develop and complete the structure of an independent movement or self-proclaimed government.

As a group, GAM never believed that they would win the fight with the Indonesian state solely by building up their military capability. GAM's strategy for using arms was not to achieve military victory, but to demonstrate Jakarta's inability to control the situation, by humiliating and weakening the 'enemy'. To this end, guerrilla warfare tactics were fully applied. GAM's military unit exploited their knowledge of the terrain and the support of the population, but all of these acts were committed with a very clear understanding, except by few elements, that the struggle could not be won by military means. Instead, they were trying to prove to the central government that they could not suppress their struggle, and thus to entice them to engage in peaceful negotiations.

During the first phase of the conflict, from 1976 to 1989, political mobilisation and education for identity-formation were high priorities for the GAM cabinet. In parallel, in 1977 the organisation adopted a defensive guerrilla strategy, whose core principles included keeping to the hills, always being in the enemy's neighbourhood, preventing regular troops from gaining any permanent base, using surprise tactics such as ambushing, and "becoming an illusive but powerful shadow on the horizon" (Di Tiro 1984: 68).

Popular support for Di Tiro's movement was quite limited in the first few years. It started as a political movement with a small number of armed members and with a clearly centralised command. It was indeed a very elitist organisation, only supported by a few hundred individuals such as lecturers, medical doctors and engineers. Its main support base came from a few rural areas dominated by relatives of Di Tiro and other GAM leaders in Pidie, North Aceh and East Aceh (see map *annex 3*), and a handful of former Bereueh followers who were dissatisfied with the previous political settlement.

Nevertheless, as the Indonesian government and armed forces under the New Order began to exploit Aceh's natural resources and terrorise its people, by increasing counter-insurgency operations in the entire province and imposing a complete ban on media reports that sympathised

with GAM's ideology or political demands, the level of support for the rebellion increased. The repressive and authoritarian state policies in Aceh nurtured local resentment against the central government, causing more and more Acehnese to lose hope and confidence that they would ever have a share in a common Indonesian project. The more brutally Jakarta reacted to this popular resentment, the more actively the Acehnese mobilised behind the resistance movement.

GAM only really became an armed group after the first crackdowns of the early 1980s. Violence broke out when the Indonesian government discovered the movement's growing informational activities, and its leadership was forced to organise their self-defence capabilities more systematically. By 1982, more than half of GAM's first cabinet had been killed and many other ministers had been imprisoned or forced to flee into exile. This included Di Tiro, who fled Aceh in late 1979 to later settle in Sweden. At least 700 followers of the then still comparatively small movement had been imprisoned by 1980.

In the following years, GAM's military wing, also known as AGAM, established armed groups in all districts along the coast between East Aceh and the capital, in the North and in West Aceh. The leadership in exile sought support from the Libyan government. This support enabled GAM to expand their recruitment and to start providing military training to young GAM supporters in Libya. 600 to 1000 men received such training between 1986 and 1989. The return of the Libyan trainees was crucial in improving the organisation of GAM's military unit on the ground.

Following the capture of a few hundred guns from the Indonesian military in 1989, the army and police forces turned fundamentally violent against anyone with the slightest connection to the guerrillas, and the use of torture against combatants and civilians increased significantly. Jakarta's decision to declare Aceh a Military Operation Area (DOM) in 1989 proved to be the biggest mistake in dealing with the Aceh conflict. Not only did this approach fail to deal with GAM, but it also resulted in an intensification of popular resentment against Jakarta, which led to further support for the independence movement. Instead of crushing the separatist rebellion, the operation actually produced a new generation of GAM members. By hardening Acehnese attitudes towards the struggle, Indonesia's military brutality created the best scenario for the movement to flourish.

During the DOM period from 1989 to 1998, there were vast numbers of extra-judicial killings, disappearances, rapes, tortures and other human rights violations. According to various estimates, between 10,000 and 26,000 persons were killed (Kingsbury 2007, Aspinall 2005a). As a result of the regime's continuous impunity and unaccountability, its victims began looking at different ways of gaining justice, i.e. by joining the armed rebellion. In fact, after 1998, this new generation of GAM activists progressively became the majority of the movement's members.

These new members lobbied the movement in favour of improving its armed capabilities during the 1990s. They started purchasing arms individually and organising their defence and resistance capabilities, for instance through arms training and the development of more sophisticated military units. The most intensive phase of military mobilisation took place in the period from 1998 to 2000. Weapons were purchased from various sources, including from the Indonesian troops who had been sent to Aceh to fight the rebellion. One GAM activist even claimed that "buying guns was easier than buying Coca Cola". In particular, the exiled Acehnese in Malaysia were rallied to become the logistical backbone for arming their comrades left behind in Aceh. As a result, arms became the main tool through which GAM was able to balance its power position with Jakarta, and thus create bargaining opportunities. When the political space was closed, the military option was the only available alternative to be used.

After 1979, despite being separated from its fighters and support base in Aceh, most of the GAM political leadership in exile took over political and administrative responsibilities, as well as international political lobbying and advocacy work for Aceh. The government-in-exile,

mainly based in the Swedish suburb of Norsborg, Stockholm, was led by GAM's founding father, *wali negara* (head of state) Di Tiro, as well as other exiled leaders such as Malik Mahmut and Zaini Abdullah.

GAM's mid-level political leadership and military structure were organised within Aceh, with the latter being technically subordinate to the former. Although the exiled leadership had the final decision-making power, the commander-in-chief (*panglima*) and the regional military commanders (*panglima wilayah*) in each of Aceh's 17 provinces were the real power-holders, since most decisions on the ground were dictated by the realities of the conflict and military imperatives. Constant telephone contact was maintained between the exiled leadership and the GAM military structure of command in Aceh. On the one hand, there was a linear chain of command from Sweden to the commander-in-chief and the troops in the field. On the other hand, the exiled leadership also had a direct communication line with the regional commanders, who regularly reported to the GAM leaders in Sweden, sometimes on a daily basis (Schulze 2004: 13).

In the political sphere, the exiled leadership focused on international lobbying towards the recognition of Aceh's right to self-determination, especially at the United Nations. In 1992, Di Tiro made a submission to the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Commission and to the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (Schulze 2004: 51). However, GAM's international advocacy work received very little attention, except from a few groups and sympathetic individuals overseas. The most serious support which the movement received was through its alliance with the Libyan government.

The general international context was not in GAM's favour. Di Tiro's attempts to exploit the global power struggle during the cold war were frustrated, because the Western countries were more interested in supporting the government of Indonesia as an ally in the war against communism in South East Asia. The US support towards Jakarta gave Indonesia the confidence to continue its military operations and brutality in Aceh. The military zone was maintained in Aceh until the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998.

### 3. From arms to politics again

Throughout the Acehese struggle it became clear that any attempt to solve the conflict through a political settlement would only be possible with a change of political system in Indonesia. In May 1998, in the wake of the Asian Financial crisis, and following several months of intense pro-democracy protests in Jakarta by political forces opposed to the New Order regime, Suharto was forced to step down from power, and replaced by his vice-president Jusuf Habibie, who initiated far-reaching democratic reforms and ended the DOM status of Aceh. The reformation movement in Jakarta and the collapse of military dictatorship opened up a possibility for dialogue between GAM and the central government.

#### 3.1 Inter-party political engagement until the 2005 tsunami

Both parties entered into negotiations from 2000 to 2003. This shift was initiated by a combination of conducive factors: the proactiveness of the leadership on both sides, the international community's perceptions and support, and the general desire of the Acehese public to move forward politically.

In 2000, there was a growing influence of internal factions on both sides of the conflict who favoured dialogue. They recognised the potential opportunities offered by a joint agreement and were able to secure a commitment to seek a negotiated settlement from their hard-liner colleagues. The prevailing feeling, after so many years of inconclusive armed confrontation, was in favour of trying to pursue the movement's political goals through nonviolent means. And at the time, the costs of an unsuccessful dialogue also seemed low enough for both sides to be able to justify the political gamble. GAM's participation in the negotiations was also strongly motivated by a desire for greater international legitimacy, which was provided by involving an international body as a third party, namely the Henry Dunant Centre (HDC), and by locating various negotiation rounds outside of Indonesia.

On the central government's side, the role of the new president Abdurrahman Wahid, who took office after the June 1999 general elections, was decisive. His conciliatory attitude to the conflict in Aceh was strongly influenced by the strong condemning reactions of the international community after the atrocities and dynamics in East Timor, and he was willing to restore his country's image and reputation by exploring a different approach with the Acehese liberation movement. In March 2000, the president made the first demonstration of his government's political will towards a negotiated solution to the Acehese conflict by sending an envoy, Bondan Gunawan, to meet a GAM military leader, Abdullah Syafie, in Aceh. It was the first act of direct communication between a high level central government official and a GAM leader since the movement's inception in 1976.

The Indonesian government subsequently invited the Henry Dunant Centre, based in Geneva, to facilitate and mediate the negotiations between themselves and GAM. Despite the military's unwillingness to support Wahid's initiative, the conciliatory approach continued and talks resulted in a "Joint Understanding on Humanitarian Pause for Aceh" signed by Hassan Wirayuda, as Indonesia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, and Zaini Abdullah, GAM's Minister of Health, on 12 May 2000. It was the first formal agreement ever to be achieved between the GOI and GAM. A Joint Security Committee (JSC), made up of GAM, TNI (Indonesian army) and international observers, was established to monitor compliance with the agreement and investigate violations.

After the Humanitarian Pause, the more substantial ‘Cessation of Hostilities Agreement’ (COHA) went into effect in December 2002. The COHA envisaged a ceasefire, the establishment of ‘peace zones’, the disarmament of GAM and relocation of Indonesian security forces. These measures were to be followed by an inclusive dialogue, aiming to involve broader sections of the Acehnese society and to create local mechanisms for a lasting peace. In the procedural sequencing, it was hoped that peaceful conditions would foster a climate of greater trust and allow for creative efforts to find a permanent solution.

The cooperative atmosphere which had made this phase of dialogue between GAM and Jakarta possible only lasted for a short period. The change of political situation in Jakarta once more affected the Acehnese conflict, as the hardliner nationalists who were the main base support of the new president Megawati Sukarnoputri, who took office in June 2001, did not see peaceful dialogue as the most favourable way to deal with Aceh.

In fact, both sides had fundamentally different views of the COHA process, and on the core issue of the future political status of Aceh. The Indonesian leaders believed that a solution had to be found within the framework of the unitary state of Indonesia. In July 2001, Aceh was granted a “Special Autonomy” status, and after the COHA agreement, the government remained steadfastly convinced that this generous law did not need to be extended. GAM, however, perceived special autonomy only as the ‘starting point’, and remained determined to bring about independence. They rather viewed the agreement as a means of internationalising the conflict.

Given the fundamental differences in perceptions and positions, and the persistent lack of basic trust, virtually no progress was achieved in terms of security, such as the relocation of troops or decommissioning of weapons. Armed clashes began to reappear soon after the agreement was signed. The process became vulnerable to disruptive action by ‘spoilers’ (Aspinall 2005a). A series of military-organised demonstrations forced monitors to be evacuated from the districts, and activities by army-backed militias undermined the negotiation process. During the negotiation process, GAM accepted the final Indonesian proposal for a political resolution in order to allow the COHA to continue, but this was followed by a further demand by the Indonesian government that GAM disarm. This would have effectively meant that GAM surrender and accept “special autonomy” for Aceh under the name of *Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam* (NAD - Peaceful State of Aceh), under terms unilaterally dictated by the government. GAM refused to surrender and the talks broke down in May 2003.

This refusal provided the pretext for renewed military operations (Kingsbury 2007); Jakarta declared martial law on 19 May, and launched *Operasi Terpadu*, the biggest military operation in Indonesia’s modern history since the East Timor annexation. In parallel, GAM stepped up its armed struggle, resulting in a new stalemate position on both sides.

### **3.2 GAM’s mobilisation for a political strategy**

On GAM’s side, the talks were seen as an opportunity to delve into the roots of the problem – the political problem. Moreover, with Aceh under the spotlight of international attention, the movement became more confident about engaging in dialogue and sitting with the ‘enemy’. The internationalisation of the Aceh question has been the main agenda of GAM’s political leadership for some time. Negotiations with Jakarta were deemed inconceivable without the involvement of a third party from the international community. This policy has been kept and maintained over time, in the hope that international involvement would help the movement to gain leverage and redress its asymmetrical position with the Indonesian government.

The new international climate became more favourable for the leadership in exile to engage with foreign governments and international civil society. The start of a more intensive and open international engagement in 2000 also helped the movement to change its attitude towards pursuing nonviolent policies, by exposing it to other international agendas such as human rights discourse. In order to counteract its external image as an armed group that had been involved in the complex of violence in Aceh, GAM started to make use of the human rights violations in the province as a weapon to advance the political cause for Aceh.

The humanitarian pause agreed in 2000 also helped the movement to build options, develop a better political strategy and learn to use the media more effectively for political purposes. It increased the leadership's internal legitimacy within the movement, identifying it as the best counterpart for negotiating a political settlement. It also forced GAM to better organise and unite its political wing, led by leaders in exile, and the military wing, which was mainly based in Aceh.

GAM's leadership in Sweden played a key role in the political negotiations. They had the advantage of being in exile and not being directly affected by the political dynamics within Aceh and Indonesia. They could also freely manoeuvre their political campaign to support their efforts to internationalise Aceh's conflict and its struggle without worrying about their safety and security.

GAM also used the space created by the humanitarian pause effectively to mobilise support in the rural areas. The recruitment, training, expansion and consolidation of the organisation ran in parallel to the peace talks with the Indonesian government. GAM's political wing was strengthened in areas that the movement had previously not reached. Rallies and speeches were organised in many places. By May 2003, GAM controlled between 60 and 80 percent of Acehese areas and population. It even disrupted the running of the Indonesian government administration in Aceh. GAM started to organise and strengthen its state structure in parallel to the Indonesian administrative structure in more systematic ways.

Various elements of GAM's own program were re-formulated and modernised in the Stavanger Declaration of July 2002. GAM's leadership in Sweden became the State of Aceh government in exile, led by president Di Tiro, prime minister and defence minister (operational) Malik Mahmud, foreign minister and health minister Zaini Abdullah, and information minister Bakhtiar Abdullah. The rest of the governmental team was based elsewhere, in the United States (education minister Musanna Abdul Wahab) or in Thailand (defence minister (procurement) Zakaria Zaman). Whereas the idea of reviving the Sultanate of Aceh or re-establishing the historic Islamic state had previously been perceived as key options (Di Tiro 1984: 136), the Stavanger Declaration made a clear statement in favour of establishing a democratic system in Aceh. The movement also transformed the name of its army unit, which became *Tentara Negara Aceh* (TNA - Aceh's State Army), and GAM itself became *Pemerintah Negara Aceh* (PNA - Aceh's State Government). A complete state structure was further imposed on the grassroots level by reforming the administrative apparatus and introducing a tax system.

These positive dynamics were further reinforced by the support received by the movement at the civil society level locally, nationally and transnationally. In fact, GAM has built three levels of political mobilisation and solidarity.

First, there is the international level: the movement has worked hard to exploit any international event seen as suitable to advance support for Aceh's cause. Abroad, Acehese exiles became the key constituent targeted both for financial and political reasons. Financially, Acehese immigrants have contributed to the struggle by supporting funding while the troops were having difficulties setting up logistics on the ground. Politically, the diaspora was perceived as a group of

‘different soldiers’, who were important for engaging with the public outside Aceh. Transnational solidarity networks, such as the International Forum for Aceh, also helped GAM by giving them an international forum to put forward their arguments.

On the Indonesian level, since the independence of East Timor and the collapse of Suharto regime, various civil society groups in Indonesia have been approached to advance and support the campaign for Aceh. Indonesian human rights groups have become more critical and sceptical towards their own government’s behaviour in conflict zones like Aceh and West Papua. This has pressured the government into using a non-military approach to resolve its domestic conflicts. Most of the contacts with Indonesian civil society have been made by Acehnese groups independent from GAM.

Finally, on the Aceh provincial level, GAM military commanders have incorporated and tried to work with many non-GAM actors throughout the conflict, in order to broaden their alliances for the struggle. In particular, youth and student movements have become important allies for GAM. Connections have been built with groups that advocate support for democracy, a referendum or independence for Aceh. One of the most important groups that turned out to be a key ally of GAM is the *Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh* (SIRA – Aceh Referendum Information Center), which became the extension of a political GAM wing within the strong civil society movement that has been emerging in Aceh since 1998.

The collapse of the Humanitarian Pause and the imposition of martial law in May 2003 resulted in a new crackdown on GAM and its supporters by the security forces and local militias recruited and equipped by the army. Even the former negotiators who had been guaranteed security during the HDC negotiations did not escape the new wave of arrests. With most of GAM’s political leaders being either arrested or killed, the military wing became the dominant force in the field. However, the political wing in exile continued with their work. In Malaysia, the Free Aceh Movement Government Council (also called ‘Majelis GAM’) played a significant role in supporting the military wing in the field, while the leadership in Sweden continued to do their best to gain international attention.

The latest political settlement resulting from the Helsinki peace process and Memorandum of Understanding has brought GAM a greater opportunity for organising Aceh’s affairs, in cooperation with other local political and civilian actors.

### **3.3 The Helsinki peace process**

The stalemate was once again broken through a leadership change in Jakarta, after the current government was elected in Indonesia in September 2004, led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his Vice-President Jusuf Kalla. These two leaders were strongly committed to negotiations, as they were both personally involved in informal facilitation during the 2002-2003 peace negotiations. They soon reopened the communication channel with GAM, as they understood that the military approach was not sustainable, and that in order to solve the Aceh conflict its roots would have to be addressed.

Already in early 2004, when he was still Minister for People’s Welfare under President Megawati and the military offensive was in full operation, Kalla organised some secret efforts to re-initiate talks with GAM, by using a two-track approach.

Through some trusted intermediaries, he first tried to get in contact with GAM commanders in the field and win them over in various ways, including by promising material incentives. When this became apparent, the GAM leadership in Sweden issued a statement warning “all groups to guard against the Indonesian government’s exploiting or making fools of them” (ICG 2005: 3). In

fact, it has long been an important objective of the Indonesian government to induce splits within GAM, especially by making separate approaches and offering large personal benefits to the field commanders. Such approaches have always failed in the past. The field commanders have always and almost without exception been very loyal to the Swedish-based leadership, deferring to their judgement, especially on political matters.

On another track, Kalla attempted to approach to the exiled leaders in Sweden. His closest aid, Farid Hussein, was given the task of opening an informal dialogue channel with the GAM leadership. However, it produced little result at first, mainly because GAM's position has always been against any form of dialogue which did not involve a trustworthy international third-party. An alternative channel, later to be called the Helsinki channel, was opened when Hussein got to know Juha Christensen, a Finnish businessman who used to live in the Indonesian region of South Sulawesi. Christensen became an intermediary between the two sides, since he already knew the GAM leaders from Stockholm. As it proved difficult to arrange meetings on a leadership level from both sides, Christensen decided to approach Martti Ahtisaari and his organisation Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) to act as a mediator. Ahtisaari was the former Finnish president, who had played a prominent role as European Union negotiator in the Balkans. He met with GAM leaders in Stockholm in July 2004. However, his initial attempts to restart formal negotiations made very little progress, since the degree of inter-party trust was still very low.

The situation changed significantly after the tsunami which hit the region in late 2004. On 26 December, an earthquake off the West coast of Aceh with a magnitude of 9.0 triggered a tsunami wave, which struck much of the Western and Northern coast of the provinces. Its impact generated an unprecedented human catastrophe, killing at least 160,000 in Aceh; it also altered the political landscape considerably. Combined with increased pressure from the international community, it was an important triggering point which enabled both sides to reconsider their positions and return to the negotiation table, willing to offer increased concessions. The Jakarta leadership became more assertive about pursuing peace for Aceh, and ended the military operation. They used the tsunami as an opportunity to seek an end to the war and allow greater development in Aceh. "Remember those who died because of the tsunami", said Vice-President Jusuf Kalla on many occasions. "We have to end the conflict in Aceh".

The first round of talks took place on 27 January in Helsinki. On the Indonesian side, the key negotiators included Justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaluddin and Deputy Minister for People's Welfare Farid Husain, both close to Jusuf Kalla, and State Minister for Communication and Information Sofyan Djalil, who originally comes from Aceh. On the GAM side, the negotiators included senior leaders like 'Prime Minister' Malik Mahmud and 'Foreign Minister' Zaini Abdullah, as well as prominent members of the Acehnese diaspora and foreign advisors. Due to health problems, Di Tiro did not attend the negotiations.

For the highly experienced delegation members, it soon became obvious which issues the first and future rounds of talks between GAM and GOI would need to cover. A general agenda had already been identified during the HDC-facilitated dialogue, and particular stumbling blocks had been demarcated (Aspinall 2005b: 22). The formula "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed", coined by Ahtisaari during the first round of talks, helped both parties to continue negotiating without the fear of losing face. The fact that arrangements for security issues were only put in place at a later stage also underlines the continued impact of prior positions and interests, and the need for building personal trust before reaching compromise on substantive issues. Even though GAM declared a unilateral ceasefire immediately after the tsunami, military operations continued to take place parallel to the humanitarian relief measures during the first half of 2005. The state of civilian emergency was lifted only at the end of March 2005, when the unilaterally-declared ceasefire had yet to be reciprocated. The situation of irregular skirmishes and ambushes



between GAM and Indonesian army (TNI) personnel only de-escalated after the final breakthrough in the fifth round of talks in Helsinki, on 16 July 2005 (Zunzer/Garatwa 2005).

On 15 August 2005, finally, both parties to the conflict reached the point of being able to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

## **4. The results of the present transition**

### **4.1 Content and implementation of the peace accords**

The most contested issue, over the territorial status of Aceh, was resolved by GAM giving up its demand for a separate state, while the government agreed to allow political representation for the Acehnese through local parties and to grant further power devolution to the province. The terminology of 'autonomy', which was strongly rejected by GAM leaders who associated it with a system of brutal oppression and human rights abuses, was replaced by the formula of 'self-government', which was accepted by both sides. The accord also comprised an immediate cessation of hostilities, and the demobilisation of 3,000 GAM rebels by the end of 2005. The Jakarta government committed itself to relocating or dissolving all paramilitary units, and to substantially reducing the number of troops and policemen in Aceh. All security issues were to be negotiated under the supervision of the international Aceh Monitoring Mission.

The legislative arrangement achieved under the political framework of the MOU manifests itself as an advanced form of provincial self-government. It includes the devolution of various competencies to the provincial level. Aceh has gained significant power in dealing with governance, economy and human rights, while Jakarta retains authority in the areas of defence, fiscal and monetary policy, foreign relations, justice, and freedom of religion.

The accord states that all Indonesian government decisions on international, national and administrative matters relating to Aceh need to have the consent of Aceh's legislature. The Acehnese also have a right to use regional symbols, specific names and titles, and customary law according to Aceh's tradition. In terms of political participation, a key achievement is the right to form provincial parties for contesting elections on the district, provincial and national levels - overturning a long-standing proscription of local or regionalist parties in Indonesia. An independent candidate can also be put forward in the direct elections for the head of Aceh's administration.

With regard to the economy, Aceh has the right to raise funds with external loans, as well as setting interest rates, setting and raising taxes, conducting trade and business internally and internationally, and seeking foreign direct investment in Aceh. One of the economic highlights is that Aceh is entitled to retain 70 percent of the revenue from all current and future hydrocarbon deposits and other natural resources in its territory and the surrounding sea. The seaports and airports shall be administered under Aceh's authority, and Aceh shall have jurisdiction over living natural resources in its surrounding sea. Free trade is permitted with Indonesia and foreign countries. Finally, the government shall be transparent in terms of collecting and allocating revenues between Aceh and Jakarta.

In terms of the rule of law, Aceh's laws must follow the universal principles of human rights as provided for in the UN international covenants on civil and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights. The accord also provides for the establishment of an independent and impartial court system, including a court of appeals. The police chief and the prosecutor shall be approved by the head of the Aceh administration. This is also the case with the recruitment of the police and the prosecutors. One other advancement regarding the rule of law is that all civilian

crimes committed by military personnel in Aceh shall be tried in the civil courts in Aceh. A human rights court shall also be established for Aceh, as well as a commission for truth and reconciliation, which has the task of formulating and determining reconciliation measures. Finally, all those who had been detained for participating in GAM activities have been released under an amnesty for all former political prisoners.

In order to facilitate the rehabilitation of ex-combatants, the Indonesian government has also allocated a reintegration fund administered by the Aceh government, to provide them with farming land and employment, or in the case of incapacity to work, adequate social security assistance. Funds have also been allocated for the reconstruction of public and private property destroyed or damaged as consequences of the conflict. Furthermore, compensation for civilians who have suffered a demonstrable loss due to the conflict is part of the MOU, although the exact amounts and procedures have not been laid down in detail in the agreement itself.

In return, GAM agreed to demobilise and disarm its combatants. The Indonesian government also committed itself to withdrawing its troops and non-organic<sup>1</sup> police units from Aceh, with the exception of 14,700 soldiers for external defence purposes and 9,100 policemen for upholding internal law and order in Aceh.

The implementation of the agreement was monitored by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), composed by 230 representatives from selected member countries of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and from the European Union.

The AMM monitored GAM's demobilisation and decommissioning of arms, which was executed in four stages, and completed before the end of December, in accordance with the MOU. A final weapon cutting ceremony was held in Banda Aceh on 21 December 2005. During the four phases, GAM handed in a total of 840 weapons for decommissioning. The relocation of non-organic military troops and police forces also took place simultaneously, under AMM monitoring. Ceremonies were held in Lhokseumawe port to mark the completion of the relocation of non-organic troops on 29 December and the relocation of non-organic police on 31 December 2005. A total number of 25,890 TNI personnel and 5,791 police were relocated during the four phases.<sup>2</sup> As soon as these parallel processes had been implemented, the violence and fighting were immediately suspended.

GAM leaders from Sweden, who had not set foot in Aceh since the last time they left the province, most of them in 1979, came back in 2006 and travelled throughout Aceh, receiving a massive welcome. Not long afterwards, GAM's military wing was abolished. It was replaced by a new entity, the *Komite Peralihan Aceh* (KPA - Aceh Transitional Committee), whose formal objective is to support the transition and the reintegration of ex-guerrillas. In practice, it is a very significant entity for ex-combatants of GAM to continue maintaining their cohesiveness in preparation for the upcoming elections.

Since its inception, GAM had always been a very united and cohesive movement. However, once it had been dismantled as an armed organisation, it did not succeed in forming a single political party ahead of the December 2006 elections to choose the head of Aceh's administration, and instead allowed its members to run as independent candidates. This created some dissensions within the movement, which became factionalised into two camps. The leadership from Sweden, supported by older elements within GAM in Aceh, chose a pair of candidates who built an alliance with a national political party, the United Development Party (PPP). However, the younger camp objected to this decision, and came up with their own candidates from the young faction of the

<sup>1</sup> In the Aceh context, non-organic troops consist of Indonesian troops that are centrally recruited, such as the Kopassus (Komando Pasukan Khusus) Special Forces, as well as troops recruited in one region and sent to another. Locally recruited troops are organic.

<sup>2</sup> For the AMM report on decommissioning, see [http://www.aceh-mm.org/english/headquarter\\_menu/decom.htm](http://www.aceh-mm.org/english/headquarter_menu/decom.htm)

movement. The KPA, which has become the most significant force in GAM following the peace process, supported the latter faction.

In the end, the ‘young camp’ won Aceh’s first-ever direct local election, and despite this split, GAM was able to claim an electoral victory. Indeed, the December 2006 provincial executive election in Aceh resulted in two former GAM military leaders gaining 38 percent of the vote. Through this relative majority vote, Mr. Irwandi Yussuf and Mr. Nazar Abdullah have become Governor and Vice-Governor of Aceh province. The other pair of GAM-affiliated candidates on the PPP list received 16%, while the other national parties, Golkar, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and President Yudhoyono’s Democratic Party (PD), gained 14%, 11% and 8% of the votes respectively.

In the local elections, many candidates put forward by GAM as heads of district in various parts of Aceh were also successful. In fact, the movement won in almost every district where it had candidates running, even in areas which had not been its strongholds. By late 2007, almost one half of Aceh was being governed by individuals with GAM affiliations at the district level.

#### **4.2 Peacebuilding challenges: the devil is in the detail**

Signing the MOU and winning the election did not spell the end for GAM. In fact, it was the beginning of a whole new struggle to implement the peace agreement. GAM and Aceh society at large are facing very different kinds of ‘fight’ in order to create a better Aceh. The whole peace agreement was to be followed by a progressive implementation of its content, i.e. the concrete delivery of changes on the grassroots level. This is important to state, in order to counter some voices who still have a sceptical view – that “we’ve been here before” at some point in history. Peace deals have been signed before, a third party has been involved before, monitoring groups have been brought in to observe the implementation before, but up until now the implementation has always failed.

While it is true that we have “been here before”, the present situation in Aceh is different. The current peace process has been running in parallel to the massive post-tsunami reconstruction work. Aceh, a place previously unknown to the world, has suddenly become the centre of international attention, which has been very influential in pressuring for the peace settlement to be fully implemented. Everyone is watching and closely observing events in Aceh, which are still on the world agenda. Constant international visits and pressure by world leaders in the last three years have changed the dynamics of implementing peace. The Acehnese have never experienced anything like this before.

The post-MOU period could be best described as ‘Aceh at a crossroads’. It is a crucial transitional moment, which could lead us either in the right direction or the wrong one. The post-settlement and post-election challenges are huge. The problems range from finding detailed mechanisms for implementing the agreement and its various clauses, the problem of reintegrating ex-combatants and compensating war victims, the new GAM-run administration’s ability to prove that they are better than the Jakarta government, the problem of rebuilding the economy, dealing with justice and past human rights violations, and even the problem of implementing Sharia law in the province.

In terms of the full implementation of the MOU, the government of Indonesia has legalised it by integrating it into a new law called the “Law on the Governing of Aceh” (LOGA). This law was submitted by the president, and adopted by the central parliament in July 2006. Therefore, beside the MOU political agreement between GAM and the Indonesian government, Aceh now has in this new governing law a legal foundation for the actual implementation of the peace

settlement. However, former GAM negotiators, calling themselves the 'Helsinki MOU Watch', have protested against the fact that the Helsinki agreement has not been adopted fully in the LOGA. Indeed, there are points in the MOU which are not clearly stated in the LOGA, for instance relating to the devolution of powers assigned to local government structures.

With regard to the reintegration of ex-combatants and the compensation for victims of the conflict, the central government and Aceh's government have set up an Aceh Reintegration Board (BRA). The BRA is responsible for fulfilling Jakarta's promises to reintegrate ex-combatants and compensating victims of the conflict, as stated in the MOU. The problem with the reintegration program is the lack of proper planning, and it is regarded by some as a very short-sighted program without a clear long-term vision. Job creation, livelihood programs and sustainable economic activities for those who have decommissioned their weapons is a crucial element for rebuilding Aceh, and will also depend on the level of economic development in the region.

On the governance level, while GAM candidates have been elected, Aceh has inherited a weak and corrupt local administration. According to Corruption Watch, Aceh is one of the most corrupt places in Indonesia, while according to Transparency International, Indonesia ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world. This problem, combined with a weak administration, will have an impact on Aceh's ability to maximise opportunities which have arisen as the result of the peace agreement. The vast amount of money available for development purposes could become irrelevant if the government fails to use it effectively and corruption is allowed to continue.

Another challenge in this transitional situation lies in the intra-community division created in the wake of the tsunami. International assistance for reconstruction work has been mainly targeting populations in disaster-struck areas, whereas little has been made available for post-conflict areas. This gap has not only created feelings of resentment, but it could also harm the long-term assistance needed to rebuild the province. The key is not rebuilding post-tsunami or post-conflict zones, but rebuilding Aceh as a whole. This gap, if it continues and is not addressed properly, will have a long-term impact on Aceh's recovery, and on the peacebuilding process as a whole.

Justice, human rights, and the problem of past abuses are also important benchmarks in the transition period for Aceh, and it has yet to be worked out how related MOU commitments will be implemented. The previous plan was to institute a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for Aceh, as part of a national one, as stipulated in the MOU. A national legal framework for a TRC has been developed and was approved by the house of parliament in Jakarta. However, in December 2006 the Indonesian Constitutional Court annulled the national law set out to establish the TRC. As a result, there is some uncertainty about establishing Aceh's TRC. Recent developments include a government proposal to establish a special TRC for Aceh, but this is currently still being worked out.

The imposition of Sharia law in Aceh, finally, is another challenge which might have a long-term impact on the region. The practice of Sharia law has created debate and controversy among the Acehnese. Islam is the main religion in Aceh, but the conflict has had nothing to do with Islam, as GAM is a nationalist movement. Sharia implementation was first proposed by Jakarta as a way to isolate Aceh from the international community, who have a very strong phobia against Islam. It is another form of the politics of isolation. By promoting a conservative type of Islam in Aceh, Sharia law would also give a wrong image of Aceh, by placing the province in the camp of many conservative Muslim or militant countries. This would make it difficult for Aceh to receive any further international community support. Some Acehnese also believe that Sharia would divide society in Aceh between its defenders and opponents. This division has already benefited the central government, eager to see a less solid or united Aceh. Moreover, it can also distract attention away from the conflict issues, shifting from the main issue of injustice to religious

divisions among the Acehnese.

In all these sectors, the real division of power between Aceh and Jakarta is still being discussed and contested.

#### **4.3 Epilogue: The future of the GAM movement**

The future of GAM as a significant political force will be strongly affected by the current political transition in Aceh. Internal dissensions have continued in the post-election phase. The establishment of local political parties by various elements within Acehnese society, including GAM, has created a new dynamic in the province. Up to now, there are 6 locally based political parties established and competing in the election process. GAM has closely associated itself with Partai Aceh (Aceh's Party), chaired by the former GAM military commander Muzakir Manaf. The remaining five are Aceh's People Party (PRA), Independent Voice of Aceh Party (SIRA), Safe and Prosperous Aceh Party (PAAS), United Aceh Party (PBA), and Sovereign Aceh Party (PDA).

For a while, the intra-party split within GAM which occurred prior to the December 2006 elections continued to cause damage to the organisation. However, the establishment and consolidation of Partai Aceh has reunified them again for a common purpose, in order to win the election in 2009. The key to this pseudo unity was the decision of those close to Governor Irwandi not to set up a separate political party. Had they done so, it would have prolonged the division among former combatants and GAM constituents throughout the district in Aceh.

Most of the GAM leaders who are involved in Partai Aceh have expressed their interest to win the 2009 parliamentary election in order to push for further change in Aceh. In order to do so, the movement must compete not only with other local parties, but they also have to run against the national political parties. In comparison with the national parties, GAM and many other local parties have little experience of competing in the electoral process. Unlike the previous election of Aceh's head of administration, the parliamentary election will require a harder 'fight' between parties on all levels, and in every community in Aceh.

Competition with experienced and well-funded national parties will require better skills. This is an area in which GAM and many other local parties do not have any experience. Capacity building for members of the KPA and many other GAM activists is not only a "should", but a "must". It is especially important considering GAM's weaknesses on the district or sub-district levels. The real fight in an electoral process will be in 2009.

In the immediate future, GAM's participation will get them drawn further into localised issues. Having the ability to convince the public and to articulate their ideas for a better future in Aceh will be important. In the future, those who will matter in Aceh will not be those who talk about the past, but those who can talk more about the future. The question that will determine GAM's future is whether they will be able to perform.

Jakarta's attitude towards the development of Aceh's peace process will also affect the long-term transformation of GAM's movement. If the present political will is maintained and the whole peace process is sustained, we might be able to observe one of the most successful conflict transformations in history, with an ex-rebel group becoming a democratic unarmed group, striving to work within the framework of a democratic process.

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## **ANNEX 1: List of Acronyms**

AMM	Aceh Monitoring Mission
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASNLF	Acheh-Sumatra National Liberation Front
BRA	Badan Reintegrasi Aceh, Aceh Reintegration Board
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative
COHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
DOM	Daerah Operasi Militer, Military Operations Zone
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, Free Aceh Movement
GOI	Government of Indonesia
HDC	Henri Dunant Centre. Later renamed Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
JSC	Joint Security Committee
Kopassus	Komando Pasukan Khusus, Indonesian Army Special Forces
KPA	Komite Peralihan Aceh, Aceh Transition Committee
LOGA	Law on the Governing of Aceh
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAD	Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Peaceful State of Aceh
Panglima	GAM Military Commander
PNA	Pemerintah Negara Aceh, Government of the State of Aceh
PPP	Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, United Development Party
SIRA	Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh, Aceh Referendum Information Center
TNA	Tentara Negara Aceh, Army of the State of Aceh (GAM's military wing)
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian Defence Force
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission



## ANNEX 2: Chronology

Compiled from timelines published by Schulze (2007) and Large/Aguswandi (2008).

### 1976 - 1989 Formation of GAM and the declaration of independence

- 1976 Exiled Acehese leader Hassan Di Tiro returns to Aceh from the United States. On 4 December, he establishes the Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front, more commonly known as the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), and declares Acehese independence.
- 1977 The Indonesian military launches a counter-insurgency security operation.
- 1979-1986 Di Tiro and other GAM leaders flee Indonesia and establish a government in exile, based in Stockholm.
- 1986-1989 600 to 1,000 GAM guerrillas receive military training in Libya.

### 1989 - 1998 Renewed insurgency and harsh military repression

- 1989 The Libyan-trained GAM militants return to Aceh and re-launch guerrilla activities against the Indonesian security forces.
- 1989-1998 President Suharto imposes a Military Operation Area (DOM) in Aceh, followed by a period of harsh military repression and systematic human rights abuses against the Acehese population. Between 10,000 and 26,000 persons are killed and tortured.
- 1992 Di Tiro lobbies for an independent Aceh on the international stage, by making submissions to the 48th Session of the Human Rights Commission and the 44th Session of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

### 1998 - 2004 Political and military activities after the fall of Suharto

- 1998 In May, in the face of popular protests prompted by the Asian financial crisis, Suharto is forced to resign and is succeeded by his vice president, B.J. Habibie. The new president initiates democratic reforms, ends the DOM, and withdraws Kopassus (special forces) troops from Aceh.
- 1999 After the June 1999 general elections, Abdurahman Wahid becomes President of Indonesia. In a burst of anti-government political activity in Aceh, one million

people rally in Banda Aceh on 8 November, demanding an end to human rights violations and a referendum on self-determination. The military and police carry out intimidation tactics and targeted murders on protestors.

- 2000 Talks between the Indonesian government and the exiled GAM leadership begin in Geneva in January, facilitated by the Henry Dunant Centre (HDC). In May, both sides agree to a Joint Understanding on a Humanitarian Pause, but violence remains significant through the end of the year.
- 2001 On 19 January, the Humanitarian Pause is extended, following all party talks in Switzerland. In July, Megawati Sukarnoputri takes up the presidency. In August, Aceh is granted “Special Autonomy” status, which provides for the introduction of Islamic Sharia law, and greater revenue-sharing of its natural resources. In practice, this law will never be implemented.
- 2002 In January, GAM commander Abdullah Syafie is killed by the Indonesian army. Nevertheless, the Geneva talks resume, culminating in the signature of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) in December. This agreement does not attempt to resolve the crucial conflict issues, but only to enact another ceasefire. It includes two major demilitarisation measures, and a joint security committee to monitor their implementation.
- 2003 The implementation of the COHA is impeded by an escalation of violence, and the talks break down after a final meeting in Tokyo in May. The government immediately endorses a return to the security approach, places Aceh under martial law and launches its biggest military offensive in the province (Operasi Terpadu). Meanwhile, GAM considerably expands its membership base and areas of activity, controlling between 60 and 80 percent of the province.

#### **2004 - 2008 Post-tsunami peace negotiations and peace implementation dynamics**

- 2004 In September, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is elected President of Indonesia. Vice-President Jusuf Kalla attempts to initiate secret talks with GAM; the first back-channel contacts open up in September and intensify in November, but little progress is made. On 26 December Aceh is hit by a tsunami, killing at least 160,000. GAM declares a unilateral ceasefire on 29 December.
- 2005 Military operations continue to take place in parallel to humanitarian relief measures. On 27 January, a round of peace talks between GAM and the government opens in Helsinki, facilitated by the NGO Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), headed by former Finnish President Marri Ahtisaari. The state of civilian emergency is lifted in March. After several rounds of talks, both parties sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 17 July. It includes a recognition of “self-government” in Aceh, an immediate cessation of hostilities, and the demobilisation of 3,000 GAM guerrillas by the end of 2005. The GOI commits itself to relocating or dissolving all paramilitary units, and to substantially reducing the number of troops and policemen in Aceh. These measures proceed successfully, under the supervision of the international Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM). In October, GAM creates the Aceh Transition Committee (KPA) to supervise the demobilisation of its combatants.

- 2006 On 11 February, the Aceh Reintegration Board (BRA) is created, mandated to manage the reintegration of former GAM members and combatants. Legislation for the implementation of the MOU is formally codified in the Law of the Governing of Aceh (LOGA), passed by the Indonesian parliament on 11 July. The AMM completes its mandate of monitoring and supporting the peace process. On 11 December provincial and district elections take place in Aceh. GAM members run as independent candidates. Former GAM military leader Irwandi Yussuf wins the governorship with 38% of the vote, and GAM-affiliated candidates win in 6 of 19 municipal and district elections.
- 2007 GAM candidates win several delayed elections at the district level. In July, some GAM members, behind former 'Prime Minister'-in-exile Malik Mahmud, open a GAM political party office.
- 2008 In April, the GAM party officially changes its name to Partai Aceh. Five other local parties are formed in order to compete in the April 2009 legislative election, in which voters will choose representatives at the district, provincial and national levels.

### ANNEX 3: Map of Aceh



Source: ICG (2007): 16.

## About the Authors

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