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PRESS RELEASE

Ablai Militia Leaders Plead Guilty to Crimes Against Humanity

The Special Panel for Serious Crimes in East Timor has this week accepted admissions of guilt from two Ablai militia leaders for murder and other Crimes Against Humanity committed in Same Sub-District in 1999.

Benjamin Sarmiento, the former Deputy Commander of the Ablai Militia in Same sub-district entered pleas of guilty to four counts of Crimes Against Humanity (Murder) while Romeiro Tilman, another former Ablai militia leader, entered a plea to one count of Crimes Against Humanity (Murder) during proceedings heard by the Court on Monday of this week.

Both Accused also entered pleas of guilty to a further charge of Crimes Against Humanity (Deportation) relating to the forcible transfer of the civilian population from Same Sub-District to West Timor during the violence which engulfed East Timor following the "Popular Consultation", or independence ballot conducted in 1999.

The pleas were entered pursuant to an agreement between the office of the Deputy General Prosecutor for Serious Crimes, the Accused and their Defence Counsel. This agreement, which was accepted by the Court, also saw the withdrawal of a number of additional charges against the Accused, including charges of Murder as a Crime Against Humanity against Sarmiento, and charges of Imprisonment or Deprivation of Physical Liberty, and Persecution against both Accused.

On Wednesday, submissions relating to the commission of the offence and sentence were made by both Prosecution and Defence Counsel, with the Court indicating they would issue their decision on sentence for the Accused on 17 July 2003 at 2pm.

Proceedings against two other alleged members of the Ablai militia, Joao Sarmiento and Domingos Mendonca, will continue to be heard separately, with their trial on Crimes Against Humanity charges being scheduled to commence on 7 July 2003.

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