

PRESS RELEASE

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ABLAI MILITIA LEADERS SENTENCED FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The Special Panel for Serious Crimes in East Timor today convicted and sentenced two Ablai militia leaders to imprisonment for murder and other Crimes Against Humanity committed in Same Sub-District in 1999.

Benjamin Sarmiento, the former Deputy Commander of the Tim Sasarat Ablai Militia in Same sub-district was convicted of four counts of Crimes Against Humanity (Murder) and one count of Crimes Against Humanity (Deportation). Sarmiento was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for the killing of 5 independence supporters and his role in the forcible deportation to West Timor of the civilian population of Same Sub-district between April and September 1999.

Romeiro Tilman, another former Tim Sasarat Ablai militia leader, was likewise convicted of one count of Crimes Against Humanity (Murder) and one count of Crimes Against Humanity (Deportation). Tilman was sentenced to 8 years imprisonment for having ordered the killing of 2 independence supporters in August 1999 of two independence supporters from Datina Village, Same Sub-district and the forcible deportation of civilians to West Timor during the violence which followed the UN-sponsored "Popular Consultation", or independence ballot conducted in 1999.

The conviction and sentence were imposed by the Special Panel after Sarmiento and Tilman pleaded guilty to these offences on 30 June this year 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.

Proceedings against two other alleged members of the Tim Sasarat Ablai militia, Joao Sarmiento and Domingos Mendonca are being heard separately, with their trial on Crimes Against Humanity charges scheduled to re-commence on 23 July 2003.

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