

January 16, 2004

## **Ex-General to Make Run for President of Indonesia**

By JANE PERLEZ

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Jan. 15 — The former chief of the Indonesian military, who has been charged by the United Nations with crimes against humanity, presented himself here on Thursday as a candidate for his nation's first direct presidential elections, scheduled for July.

General Wiranto, an amateur crooner with matinee idol good looks, told a luncheon of foreign correspondents and diplomats that he could provide leadership and security for Indonesia after what he called five years of "turbulence."

The general, who has been campaigning for months to win the nomination of Golkar, the second-largest party in the Indonesian Parliament and the former governing party under the authoritarian leadership of President Suharto, appears to be well-financed in his efforts. Many political analysts believe that General Wiranto would have the best chance of unseating the incumbent, Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose popularity has plummeted as economic conditions for ordinary Indonesians have deteriorated.

The general showed considerable strength in polls of Golkar party members several months ago. His main rival within the party, the parliamentary speaker, Akbar Tanjung, has been convicted of corruption and is awaiting a ruling on his appeal.

General Wiranto, 55, and six other military officials were charged in February 2003 by the East Timor Serious Crimes Unit of the United Nations with crimes against humanity in connection with violence surrounding the former province's 1999 independence referendum.

General Wiranto has not been called before an Indonesian court. American officials expressed disappointment that he was not among those charged by a special human rights court convened in 2002 and 2003 on East Timor, which tried the cases of 18 soldiers and militiamen. Fewer than half of them were convicted and sentenced. He appeared nearly two years ago as a witness in one of the trials, a time when he had just released a CD of love songs called "For You My Indonesia."

As the politicking for the presidential election has intensified, American officials have made it known that the nomination of General Wiranto would not be helpful for Indonesia's relations with Washington. The general has made courtesy calls to explain his campaign platform to a number of European embassies as well as the Australian Embassy, but not to the United States Embassy.

The conduct of the Indonesian elections is being watched with interest in Washington, and a considerable portion of the United States aid package to Indonesia is going this

year to supporting the election process. Two dozen parties have been certified to take part, but in the end the battle will be between the two major secular parties: Golkar and Ms. Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle.

Islamic religious parties, whose platforms call for Indonesia to become an Islamic state, are expected to win only about 10 to 15 percent of the vote, according to election experts. About 143 million voters are eligible to participate in the vote and the turnout could be as high as 80 percent, according to the National Democratic Institute, a Washington based group working here.

Despite the interest abroad in the general's indictment by the United Nations over East Timor, Indonesians themselves have paid little attention to it. Many regard the loss of East Timor, now an independent country, as a dark chapter in the country's history.

The general, who was forced out of his military position in 2000, defended his actions in East Timor. He said he had followed orders to help organize the referendum in East Timor and had prevented outright civil war at a very difficult period.

"It is very easy to say that there were gross violations of human rights when we know that is not the fact," he said. Moreover, he added, as defense minister he was a policy maker who could not be held responsible for every operation.