

My Neighbour

East Timor.

East Timor's Heartbreaking History

A former Portuguese colony, it was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. For more than 20 years, Timorese fighters struggled to free their country from Indonesian occupation. As many as 200,000 people died in those dreadful years. That's almost one quarter of the population.

12 November 1991. One of the darkest days in recent history. Timorese youth held a memorial procession to the Santa Cruz cemetery in the capital Dili. It became a pro independence rally. Indonesian soldiers opened fire. No one really knows but some say as many as 270 young people died. Another 200 were said to have *disappeared*.

The massacre was filmed and photographed by journalists. That became a turning point. The world began to sit up and pay attention to the suffering of East Timor!

In 1999, the United Nations sponsored a referendum in East Timor. The people were finally given the chance to decide their own fate. Close to 80% of Timorese voted for independence. Pro-Jakarta militia groups responded with waves of violence. The Indonesian military had to leave but not before burning houses and destroying buildings in the country.

East Timor became formally independent at the stroke of midnight on 20th May 2002.

Today the land still bears the scars of two decades of destruction and you can sense a heaviness in the hearts of the people. Orphans and widows carry on in silent pain.

