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Govt plays down lawsuit against Johnny

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JAKARTA (JP): Minister of Foreign Affairs Alwi Shihab played down on Saturday a lawsuit filed by two U.S. human rights groups against an Indonesian Army general, saying it was an ordinary case in the United States.

The minister expressed his confidence that the legal action against Lt. Gen. Johnny Lumintang would not affect the close relations between Indonesia and the superpower country.

Alwi said U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Robert Gelbart had called him to give his assurance about the steady relations between the two countries.

"It is just common practice in the United States that when someone is being sued, the court there must be responsive by issuing a summons to testify, to give a statement," Alwi said after attending a special Cabinet meeting at Bina Graha presidential office.

Before the Cabinet meeting, Alwi said Indonesia regretted the lawsuit.

"We cannot blame the United States, but we can only say that we regret that this has happened," Alwi said.

An American lawyer confirmed on Friday that her human rights organization had served an Indonesian general for crimes against humanity in East Timor. "We brought a complaint against Gen. Johnny Lumintang, charging him with crimes against humanity for this repression against East Timorese," said attorney Jennie Green who signed the document, as quoted by *AFP*.

The New York-based Representatives of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) served Johnny the complaint at Dulles International Airport outside Washington as he was preparing to leave the country on Thursday. The San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability also sued Lumintang for the same complaint.

The two groups acted on behalf of three East Timorese plaintiffs, including a mother whose son was killed during the mayhem after the independence referendum in East Timor last August.

Green said Johnny had until April 19 to respond to the charges of "torture, cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment, wrongful death, assault and battery and intentional infliction of emotional distress," in his capacity as Army deputy chief of staff at that time.

Johnny currently serves as the National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas) governor and was in Washington for a conference.

According to Green, Johnny could ignore the complaint and face the prospect of a default judgment.

The East Timor Action Network (ETAN) accused Johnny of ordering military commanders to plan a

crackdown on proindependence supporters if they won the self-determination referendum.

Indonesia has been in hot water due to the alleged role of its military in the rampaging violence exploding after the Aug. 30 ballot, which resulted in an overwhelming rejection to Indonesia's offer of wide-ranging autonomy.

""*Pak Lumintang's case has no relation at all with our laws or our way of handling East Timor,*"" Alwi said, commenting on the lawsuit. **(prb/byg/cst)**

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