

INDONESIA

Key negotiator is proud the deal came in such a short time

YENNI KWOK in Hamburg



Photo: CMI

Former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari used negotiating acumen honed over almost 30 years of conflict resolution to help hammer out the Aceh peace deal.

“I am very pleased with this peace process,” the diplomat said yesterday ahead of the signing of the deal. “I am very proud that we can find a solution in a short time. Such things seldom happen.”

It took about six months and five rounds of negotiations before the warring sides agreed to sign the memorandum of understanding.

“No mediator can force people to agree,” said Mr Ahtisaari, 68. “It only works if the parties have a genuine desire for a settlement. We always emphasised the peaceful solution for the dignity of all. There are no losers in this process, and this is the right attitude.”

Mr Ahtisaari, who has a long resumé in mediating major conflicts – Namibia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland and Ethiopia-Eritrea – since 1977, said he agreed to take up the Aceh issue after being approached by a Finnish businessman, Juha Christensen, who worked in Indonesia in the 1980s and is a member of the EU's monitoring team.

“We agreed to mediate only if the parties were serious in finding a solution,” said Mr Ahtisaari, board chairman of the Crisis Management Institute (CMI). “My hands are often full, and I do not want to waste my

time. But I could see that everybody was serious, and the new government of Indonesia was eager in finding the settlement.”

After the signing, CMI and Mr Ahtisaari will continue play a small role as the EU and some Asean members assume responsibility for monitoring and implementation of the peace deal.

He is very pleased with the EU's first mission in Asia, saying: “It is a very positive and courageous move.”

“CMI is pretty much out of the process, but we will still follow closely what is going on.

“I tend to see the CMI's role in this conflict as like that of a godfather or godmother, or somebody who guides the ship into the harbour. We have a moral responsibility to follow the process carefully.”

He said it was likely the crisis institute would receive more requests in the field of conflict resolution.

“I can imagine it would happen,” he said, with a polite laugh. “But, I am not really looking around. It is better that people come to see me.”

The interview was published in the South China Morning Post daily (www.scmp.com), 16 August 2006