

**A day after hundreds of soldiers went on a rampage at their base near Jayapura, military commanders have moved quickly to limit the damage — and public relations fallout — by meeting with the rioters, dismissing their senior officers and apologizing for the violence and damage caused.**

Army Chief Gen. Agustadi Sasongko arrived at the base in Sentani, Papua Province, early on Thursday, convening a closed-door meeting with the members of the 751 Infantry Battalion who had been involved in the violence on Wednesday.

Papua military command spokesman Lt. Col. Susilo said that Agustadi's visit to Sentani was to hear the grievances of the soldiers first-hand. "The personnel of 751 Battalion were given the opportunity to tell the Army chief in person what was on their mind," Susilo told state news agency Antara.

All soldiers involved in the incident were present at the meeting.

In Jakarta, Armed Forces Chief Gen. Djoko Santoso met with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to discuss the matter. "I regret the incident and apologize to the people of Sentani who were disrupted, including the journalists," Santoso told reporters after meeting with Yudhoyono, in a rare apology by the military. "Everyone [involved] will be processed and brought to trial."

Army spokesman Brig. Gen. Christian Zebua said that the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lambok Sihotang, deputy commander Maj. Raymond Power Simanjuntak and head of intelligence, First Insp. Simbolon, had all been suspended pending investigations.

In the first such incident since the fall of former President Suharto in 1998, hundreds of soldiers rioted after being angered by their senior commander's stance on paying only half of the costs of transporting the body of a colleague who had died of an illness a few days earlier back to his home village. The family and the battalion's soldiers had allegedly been asked to raise the remainder of the funds.

Press reports have also spoken of the soldiers complaining that their superiors had imposed various levies on soldiers' compensation and wages.

**By Christian Motte & Markus Junianto Sihaloho**