

URGENT ACTION

OFFICES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ATTACKED

Staff of the Indonesian and Jakarta Legal Institutes were threatened by violent ‘anti-communist’ protesters outside their offices. The organizations have since closed due to concerns for the safety of their staff. Indonesian authorities must take action to protect them and ensure that these human rights defenders are able to continue their work.

The office of the Indonesian and Jakarta Legal Aid Institute (YLBHI and LBH Jakarta) were surrounded by people claiming to be “anti-communist” at around 9pm on 17 September 2017, following accusations the organizations were hosting a seminar about the banned Indonesia Communist Party (PKI) and the mass human rights violations in 1965, where an estimated 500,000 to 1 million people were killed. In reality, the event in question was a performance by artists and activists portraying the recent crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Indonesia.

The angry protesters prevented anyone from leaving the building and shouted that they would do anything to eradicate the ‘communist’ threat and threatened to shut down YLBHI and LBH Jakarta. The police, led by the Chief of Jakarta Police Force (Kapolda), tried to explain to the crowd that no seminar about the PKI, or the events of 1965, was taking place, however their attempts to disperse the crowd were unsuccessful.

The crowd, which had swelled to almost 1,000 people, started to throw rocks at YLBHI and LBH Jakarta’s office at around 1am on 18 September, and destroyed the perimeter fences while trying to enter. Hundreds of police, who had started to guard the offices earlier that afternoon, eventually had to use force to disperse the violent demonstration after they too were attacked and hit by stones. Amnesty International Indonesia monitored the situation and observed that, despite the escalation of threats against the office and the people inside, the police reacted appropriately to the events.

Although Indonesia has seen an improvement in the exercise of the right to freedom of expression over the last two decades, a culture of silence has prevailed in regard to discussions about the 1965 atrocities. These continued threats and attacks against the YLBHI and LBH Jakarta’s staff send a chilling effect to other human rights defenders in the country who already face a shrinking civil space to conduct their human rights work.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- In consultation and agreement with the Office of the Indonesian and Jakarta Legal Aid Institute, promptly implement measures to guarantee their safety and enable the continuation of their legitimate work at their office; and
- Promptly open an impartial, thorough and effective investigation into the threats and attacks against the Office of the Indonesian and Jakarta Legal Aid Institute.

Contact these two officials by 30 October 2017:

Head of National Police
General Pol. H.M. Tito Karnavian
National Police Headquarters
Jl. Trunojoyo No.3, Kebayoran Baru
Jakarta Selatan 12110 Indonesia
Twitter: @DivHumasPolri
Fax: +62 (0)21 7200 669/ 721 8741
Email: mabes@polri.go.id
Salutation: Dear General

Ambassador Budi Bowoleksono, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia
2020 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20036
Phone: 202.775.5200
Twitter: @KBRIWashDC
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 16 September 2017, the day before the YLBHI and LBH Jakarta offices were attacked, the police banned a closed seminar at the same venue which was to be a discussion by survivors about the historical truth of the 1965 mass human rights violations.

From 1965 to 1966, an estimated 500,000 to 1 million people were unlawfully killed and hundreds of thousands were held without trial for periods ranging from a few days to more than 14 years when the Indonesian military launched a systematic attack against members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and suspected sympathizers. A three-year investigation into the human rights violations committed in 1965 that was carried out by the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) and completed in July 2012, concluded that the findings meet the criteria of gross human rights violations, and include crimes against humanity, as defined by the Indonesian Law No. 26/2000 on Human Rights Courts. Komnas HAM and other human rights organizations have documented a range of human rights violations during this period including unlawful killings, torture, enforced disappearances, rape, sexual slavery and other crimes of sexual violence, slavery, arbitrary arrest and detention, forced displacement and forced labour. Many victims and their families also faced violations of their social, economic and cultural rights, and continue to this day to experience discrimination both in law and in practice. To date, there has been no indication that the government will even launch a criminal investigation. Meanwhile, attempts to establish a truth commission on the national level have stalled due to a lack of political will.

In recent years there have been many attempts by the Indonesian security forces or vigilante groups to stop both closed-door discussions and public events relating to the 1965 mass human rights violations. In Ambon, Maluku province, the organizers were forced to move their discussion about the findings of the International Peoples Tribunal (IPT) 1965, a civil society initiative to raise international awareness on the 1965 mass human rights violations to a church after being subjected to intimidation by the police on 18 March 2017. More recently, on 1 August 2017, the local police and military disbanded a workshop in Jakarta which intended also to share the findings of the IPT. Further intimidation by the security forces has been documented in Bandung and Cirebon (West Java), Semarang (Central Java), Surabaya (East Java) and Yogyakarta. In other cases vigilante groups have taken the law into their own hands while disbanding events. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/6908/2017/en/>

According to local human rights organizations, there have been at least 39 cases since 2015 where authorities or vigilante groups had disbanded events and intimidated those involved in events related to the 1965 atrocities.

These restrictions to the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in relation to the events of 1965 is at odds with initiatives by President Widodo who has pledged to address all past human rights violations and abuses in the country, including those of 1965. In April 2016 the government organized a symposium 'Examining the 1965 Tragedy: A Historical Approach' (*Membedah Tragedi 1965: Pendekatan Kesenjaraan*), which brought together survivors, scholars, human-rights activists, artists, former members of the Indonesian military and government officials to discuss the events of 1965. One of the key recommendations from the symposium was for the authorities to end all forms of restrictions to the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in relation to any public discussions related to the 1965 mass human rights violations.

Amnesty International maintains that the victims of the 1965 violations and the families have the right to peacefully assemble to discuss and exchange information and ideas about the past.

Name: group
Gender m/f: both

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