

Human rights in Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the most brutal human rights violators in the world. Amnesty International says hundreds of thousands of civilians have been murdered since President Suharto took power in 1965. A United Nations human rights expert reports that torture is "widespread and routine."

A bloody history

A massive bloodbath followed the the so-called "Year of Living Dangerously," when the military seized power in 1965. The victims were called "communists," but most were simply people working for a better society - union organizers, land reform activists, and so on. Also targeted were ethnic Chinese.

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, aided and abetted the killings, described the events as "one of the worst mass murders of the twentieth century." More than 600,000 people were killed. Some put the total dead at one million.

Suharto's New Order government ended political pluralism and installed a rigid, military-dominated system.

Suharto banned political parties and created three groupings: GOLKAR (the government party), the United Development Party and the Indonesian Democratic Party.

These last two are forbidden to criticize the government or campaign at the village level, and are forced to pledge allegiance to the state ideology, Pancasila.

The armed forces are guaranteed a role in government under the "dual function" clause in the constitution. President Suharto personally appoints 500 representatives to the country's top legislative body, which in turn chooses the president. The armed forces have another 75 seats. Not sur-

prisingly, Suharto has been unopposed in every presidential election.

There are hundreds of "tapol" (political prisoners) in Indonesia. Amnesty International says an estimated 3,000 prisoners have been held on political charges since 1966, most of them convicted after unfair trials. Hundreds of thousands more have been detained without charge or trial for up to 14 years, and some have 'disappeared' in custody. The press has been heavily restricted, with a combination of government-imposed and self-censorship.

Indonesia also violates economic, social and cultural rights. The economy is geared towards the army and rich Indonesians, with generous incentives for foreign corporations to invest. UNICEF figures show half of the country's wealth is in the hands of the richest 20 per cent of the population.



Megaprojects like the Kedung Ombo dam in Java or tourist developments push indigenous people and farmers off their land.

Although Indonesia is the world's largest Islamic country, Muslim activists have also been targeted by government restrictions: hundreds have been put on trial.

"The government tries to brush off these violations as isolated incidents

of the work of a few poorly-disciplined soldiers, when in fact they are the by-product of a network of institutions, procedures and policies which the government uses to crush perceived threats to stability and order," says Amnesty International secretary general Pierre Sané.

Indonesia's empire

Indonesia is a heterogenous society, united only by the legacy of Dutch colonialism. Its people live on thousands of islands, each with its own culture. The country's motto, Unity in Diversity, sounds noble. But in reality it is an empire run from Java.

Soon after it gained independence, Indonesia put down a separatist uprising in the Moluccas islands and threatened to invade neighbouring Malaysia. In the early 1960s,

Indonesia invaded the western half of Papua New Guinea to keep it from becoming an independent country as it broke free from the Netherlands.

Indonesia's invasion failed, but the United Nations granted Indonesia rule over West Papua (now renamed Irian Jaya) if the population chose Indonesia in a referendum. In 1969, Indonesian authorities rounded up a few chiefs and forced them to

vote to become the 26th

province of Indonesia. More than 100,000 Papuans have been killed since then in an occupation which set the pattern for the occupation of East Timor. The Free Papua Movement continues to fight for independence.

Indonesia has also crushed independence efforts in the strongly Muslim territory of Aceh, at the far end of the archipelago, at a cost of 2,000 killed between 1989 and 1993.

Demanding democracy

Indonesia made a rare appearance in world headlines in the summer of 1996, when riot police battled protesters in the streets of Jakarta. The protests began after police attacked the Indonesian Democratic Party headquarters (PDI), because its leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, showed signs of taking democracy seriously. The regime had already organized an internal party coup against Megawati, but her supporters refused to accept the illegal ouster. They took to the streets and organized daily teach-ins at PDI headquarters.

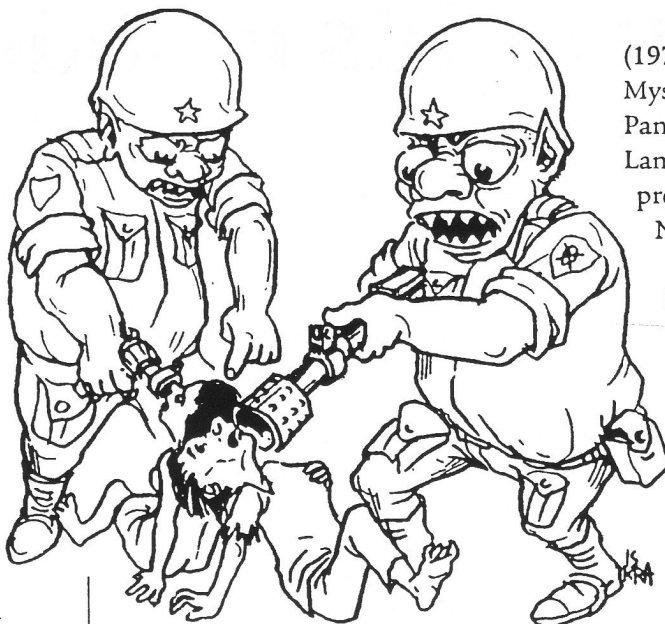
At the time, several Western ministers, including Canada's Lloyd Axworthy, were in Jakarta discussing trade. Poised to attack, the military waited until the ministers left, with the army and police striking just hours after their departure. At least 75 people were killed or are still missing since the crackdown.

The government blamed the riots on the underground social-democratic Peoples' Democratic Party (PRD), whose demands for labour rights and a referendum on self-determination in East Timor aroused the military's anger. A number of PRD leaders, as well as the head of the country's main free trade union, Muchtar Pakpahan, were arrested and charged with subversion, a "crime" punishable by death.

Government attempts to scapegoat non-governmental organizations won't relieve the pressure for democracy growing in Indonesia. Megawati, despite her moderation, has emerged as a symbol of opposition.

The "Asian concept" of human rights

Indonesia, along with China and Malaysia, leads a bloc of Asian governments in international forums which reject "human rights" as a Western-imposed notion. This bloc says there is an "Asian concept" of



human rights that places greater stress on order and collectivity, and rejects criticism as unwarranted interference in internal affairs.

Asia-based (including Indonesian) non-governmental organizations exposed this myth in 1993, when they gathered in Bangkok, Thailand. "As human rights are of universal concern and are universal in nature, the advocacy of human rights cannot be considered to be an encroachment on national sovereignty," said the groups' Bangkok declaration. In recent years, they have cast their spotlight on two regional human rights catastrophes: East Timor and Burma.

INFIGHT (the Indonesian Front for the Defence of Human Rights) made the call in even stronger terms. In a letter to the Swedish parliament, INFIGHT declared: "As the people of Indonesia, we are of the opinion that we are entitled to make this appeal, as our basic rights have been violated by the Indonesian government since long ago... an enormous amount of foreign aid has been used by the Indonesian government to violate our basic rights. Therefore every foreign country giving economic aid to Indonesia, including the Swedish government, should be morally responsible."

INFIGHT pointed to a long series of political killings in Indonesia: Purwodadi (1965-1967), Malari

(1974), Tanjung Priok (1984), Mysterious Killings (1984), Ujung Pandang (1987), Aceh (1990), Lampung (1989), East Timor (1975-present), Haur Koneng (1993), and Nipah and Sampang (1993).

Paying Suharto's bills

"What's scandalous is that foreign governments have let the Indonesian authorities get away with it for so long, apparently seeing the country only as an economic prize and strategic linchpin," said Amnesty International's Sané. Western governments, led by Japan, prop up President Suharto's regime.

The Consultative Group on Indonesia, which groups all major donors, gives Indonesia over \$5 billion a year - the economic basis of the Suharto regime's survival. Canadian government representatives at the 1996 meeting mentioned "concern" about human rights and East Timor, but still praised "Indonesia's key contribution to regional peace, stability and economic development in Southeast Asia."

Canada has supported Indonesia's quest to become a strong player in these areas for 42 years. Canadian aid to Indonesia runs at \$35 to \$70 million a year. Indonesia remains one of our largest bilateral aid recipients. Beyond aid, the Indonesian economy relies heavily on foreign loans and investment from countries like Japan, Australia, France, Britain, Germany, the United States, and Canada.

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