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*promoting human rights, peace and
democracy in Indonesia*

Indonesia's unresolved mass murders: undermining democracy

26 September 2012

By Chloé Pellegrini

Edited by Esther Cann

This briefing gives an historical overview of the 1965–66 massacres, persecutions, and continuing discriminatory policies against alleged communists and their descendants in Indonesia. It shows how such practices have over the years also been extended to other groups, contributing to a state of political repression, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. Failure to address the past could fuel conflict and even result in further atrocities. The briefing concludes that a truth-seeking process, official historical clarification, and a genuine reconciliation process through judicial proceedings, reparations and rehabilitation for victims, are necessary if Indonesia is to maintain its progress towards sustainable democracy. It ends with a set of recommendations for the Government of Indonesia, the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) and the Attorney General, as well as for the international community.

Introduction

On 1 October 1965 in Indonesia, General Suharto aborted an attempted coup against President Sukarno and blamed the Communist Party of Indonesia (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI) for it. Between October 1965 and March 1966, the Indonesian army and army-sponsored civilian mobs then slaughtered some 500,000–1,000,000 alleged members or sympathisers of the PKI and affiliated organisations.

Almost 50 years later, representations of this tragic period remain highly controversial in Indonesia. Discriminatory policies against the 1965-66 victims and their descendants are still pervasive today. Despite a few hesitant changes and the report recently released by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) on the 1965-66 events, the national history of the period has not yet been settled in a way which could allow a genuine reconciliation process and the end of the stigmatisation of those linked to past left-wing politics. Political discourses, both officially and at the grassroots level, nationally and locally, continue to compete over the representation of the 1965-66 events in search of legitimacy and the shoring up of national and communal identity.

From 1965 to 1998, the Suharto regime based its political legitimacy and its 'New Order' ideology on a master-narrative of the 1965-66 tragedy, one that was imposed as official national history and did not allow alternative versions. This national history depicted the PKI and affiliated groups as the national enemy, instigators of the 1 October coup d'état and the perpetrators of atrocities against the state. Conversely, it celebrated the army and those civilians who committed the anti-communist killings as 'heroic saviours' of the nation. Identities of victims and perpetrators were deliberately interchanged. Anti-communist persecutions were all pervasive. Although alternative versions started to be promoted after the end of the New Order era in the late 1990s, the 'demonization' of Communism has survived as a convenient founding myth upon which political leaders can build a sense of national unity.

The mechanism of fostering national identity by defining a commonly identified national enemy has been repeated throughout the years. Challenges to this unifying myth continue to be perceived by some political, ethnic and religious groups as a threat to national identity, leading to ongoing discrimination against alleged Communists and their descendants, committed in the name of national unity and identity. Victim groups and civil society organisations as well as international organisations continue to challenge the official version, but these conflicting discourses sometimes trigger conflicts and communal divisions.

Furthermore, the 'demonization' that led to gross human rights violations against alleged Communists has been reproduced against other groups as well. Failure to address the past may therefore fuel further inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts, and could even produce similar atrocities. There is therefore an urgent need to address the past and its legacy, not only to ensure rehabilitation of the victims and punishment of the perpetrators, but also for Indonesia to develop as a peaceful and democratic nation.

1945–1968: from Sukarno to Suharto's 'New Order'

Sukarno's era

Sukarno was the first President of the Republic of Indonesia after the independence of the country from the Netherlands in 1945. Criticising the model of parliamentary democracy, he sought a system where decision-making relied on consensual agreements between the three major political ideologies: nationalism (Nasionalisme), religion (Agama), and Communism (Komunisme), known as 'Nasakom.'

Sukarno relied on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) to counter-balance the power of the army and vice-versa, fuelling competitiveness and dissension between the two forces.¹ Hence the PKI had a key decision-making power in the Sukarno Government and this was unpopular within sections of the army.

Economic measures were implemented such as land reforms and confiscation of American and British plantations and oil companies² that stirred local dissent and fears from Western countries that Indonesia was on the verge of becoming communist in the setting of the Cold War.³ American and British economic and political interests were threatened by the PKI's growing influence, by Sukarno's policy of non-alignment and his friendly links with the Soviet Union and China.⁴ The US and the UK strengthened their ties with anti-communist sections of the Indonesian army and army Commander General Nasution.⁵ A CIA memorandum states that both the UK and the US agreed that it was desirable to "liquidate" Sukarno.⁶

In the early 1960s, rumours of a possible CIA-backed coup against Sukarno spread, undermining the Indonesian President's credibility within the army.⁷ Conveniently for Western interests, while in early 1965 the PKI had a membership of 3 million in Indonesia,⁸ the aftermaths of the 1 October 1965 coup attempt put an end to the party's role in Indonesian politics and led to mass killings of its members.

1 October 1965: attempted coup d'état

On the morning of the 1 October 1965, a group of army officers calling itself the 30 September Movement (*Gerakan 30 September*, G30S) kidnapped six top generals of the Indonesian army. General Nasution, also targeted by the movement, escaped capture but a soldier on duty at his house was kidnapped instead of him and Nasution's five year old daughter was killed during the assault.⁹

¹ Simons G., 2000, *Indonesia, the long oppression*, p.154 sq.

² Roosa J., 2006, *Pretext for mass murder: the 30th September movement and Suharto's coup d'état in Indonesia*, p. 13

³ Simons G., 2000, pp.161–166.

⁴ TAPOL bulletin 163, "What the US and Britain knew but never revealed", October 2001, <http://www.tapol.org/bulletin/2001-163.html#1965>

⁵ Roosa J., 2006, p. 209

⁶ Cited in TAPOL bulletin 163, "What the US and Britain knew but never revealed," October 2001, <http://www.tapol.org/bulletin/2001-163.html#1965>

⁷ Roosa J., 2006, p. 209

⁸ Simons G., 2000, p.161

⁹ Budiardjo C., 1996, *Surviving Indonesia's gulag: a Western woman tells her story*, p.40-50

In an early afternoon radio broadcast, the GS30 Movement claimed to have taken President Sukarno under its protection to prevent a military coup against him.¹⁰ A few hours later General Suharto, Commander of the Indonesian Army's Strategic Reserve Command (*Komando Cadangan Strategis Angkatan Darat*, KOSTRAD) took control of the army and aborted the coup. Over the next few years, he was to progressively oust Sukarno from power and became the President of the Republic of Indonesia in 1968.¹¹

October 1965 – March 1966: the anti-communist mass killings

A few days after the failed G30S coup, the dead bodies of the kidnapped generals and Nasution's sentry were found in a well on the military base of Lubang Buaya in the outskirts of Jakarta.¹² Suharto blamed the PKI for the aborted coup and the murder of the generals. On 10 October, in the name of restoring national order against the communist threat, he created the Command for Restoration of Security and Order (*Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*, KOPKAMTIB), an extra-constitutional security and intelligence agency in charge of political persecution and control, with extra-legal powers. Outside the constitutional law, KOPKAMTIB outlawed the PKI, hunting down and arresting alleged members and sympathisers.¹³ Suharto allegedly ordered massive killings against the PKI, affiliated left-wing organisations, and sympathisers of Sukarno throughout the country.¹⁴

Orchestrated by the Indonesian army, the killings were perpetrated between early October 1965 and March 1966. They were particularly fierce in Central and East-Java, Bali and North Sumatra. The PKI, having no armed wing or weapons, was defenceless against the killings, and a lack of communications prevented its members from hiding from their murderers.¹⁵ It is estimated that between 500,000 and 1,000,000 alleged communists and 'sympathisers' were murdered.¹⁶ In a 1968 intelligence report, the CIA described the killings as "one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century, comparable to the atrocities of Hitler, Stalin and Mao..."¹⁷

Drawing upon existing dissension between the PKI and other political groups, the army trained and armed militia units recruited among local trade unions, student organisations and religious groups. *Banser* (*Barisan Serbaguna*, Multipurpose Brigade), which was the armed faction of Ansor, the youth wing of the largest Indonesian Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), played a key role in the

¹⁰ Ibid. pp.40-50

¹¹ Simons G., 2000, p.185

¹² Budiardjo C., 1996, p.42

¹³ Ibid. 52 ; Roosa J., 2006, p. 12

¹⁴ Jakarta Globe, "KomnasHam report lays blame for 1965-66 killings primarily on Suharto", 18 January 2012, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/komnas-ham-report-lays-blame-for-1965-6-killings-primarily-on-suharto/492017> ; Colombijn F. and Lindblad J.T. (eds.), 2002, *Roots of violence in Indonesia* (p.180) ; Roosa J., 2006, p.22-24

¹⁵ Roosa J., 2006, p.223

¹⁶ No systematic investigations have been made nationwide and most sites of mass graves still remain unknown. Hence the numbers above are incomplete estimations by historians and human rights groups who rely on official and unofficial sources. Cf. Briere E., "Shadow play: political mass murder and the 1965 Indonesian coup" in Heribert A. (ed.), 2010, *Hushed voices: unacknowledged atrocities of the 20th century* p.167; McGregor K. "The Indonesian killings of 1965-66", *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, 4 August 2009, http://www.massviolence.org/The-Indonesian-Killings-of-1965-1966?cs=print#outil_sommaire_1

¹⁷ Quoted in Briere E., "Shadow play: political mass murder and the 1965 Indonesian coup" in Heribert A. (ed.), 2010, p.163

massacres.¹⁸ So did youths from the Catholic Party of Indonesia (*Persatuan Mahasiswa Katolik Republik Indonesia*, PMKRI) and militias from the Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI).¹⁹ Cultural and religious symbols were manipulated by the military instigators of the killings in order to stir communal hatred, especially among Hindu and Muslim groups.²⁰ Lists and arbitrary denouncements of alleged PKI members were compiled and provided to the killers, and the national media encouraged the worst atrocities in the name of national order.

American and British support for the killings

The United States and the United Kingdom secretly welcomed and supported the killings, carefully concealing the role of their intelligence services and ambassadors from journalists and international public opinion.²¹ Whilst well aware of the killings, both countries promoted anti-communist policy, working to scapegoat the PKI both in Indonesia and abroad. The American media celebrated the Indonesian purge of communists as “a historical turning point.”²²

On the 5 October 1965, the British political adviser to the Commander-in-Chief in Singapore wrote to the Foreign Office that “everything possible should be done surreptitiously to blacken the PKI in the eyes of the army and the people of Indonesia.”²³ On the same day, in his correspondence with the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador in Jakarta stated that “a little shooting in Indonesia would be an essential preliminary to effective change in Indonesia”²⁴ and that British participation “should be carefully concealed.”²⁵

The United States provided the Indonesian army with lists of PKI leaders and supplied small arms labelled “medicines” to arm non-military killers, hoping to make the slaughter look like a popular reaction to the 1 October coup.²⁶ Meanwhile the UK supplied radios to “help in internal security” and assist the generals in “their task of overcoming the Communists”²⁷, lifted the embargo on the sale of British military equipment to Indonesia²⁸ and suspended military confrontations with Indonesia over

Malaya, with the Foreign Office stating that the UK “shall not attack them [Indonesia] while they are chasing the PKI”²⁹.

¹⁸ McGregor K., “A bridge and a barrier: Islam, reconciliation and the 1965 killings in Indonesia” in Braüchler B. (ed.), 2009, *Reconciling Indonesia: grassroots agency for peace*, p.214

¹⁹ McGregor K. in *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, 4 August 2009

²⁰ Braüchler B. (ed.), 2009, p.216

²¹ TAPOL bulletin 163, “What the US and Britain knew but never revealed”, October 2001,

<http://www.tapol.org/bulletin/2001-163.html#1965>

²² Quoted in Simons G., 2000, p.178

²³ Ibid. p.181

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ RG 59, Central Files 1964-66, POL, 23-9 INDON, 5 November 1965. Cited in TAPOL bulletin 163, “What the US and Britain knew but never revealed”, October 2001, <http://www.tapol.org/bulletin/2001-163.html#1965>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cited in Campaign against Arms Trade (CAAT), “UK arms sales to Indonesia in the early Suharto years”, December 2004-January 2005, http://www.caat.org.uk/resources/caatnews/2003_12/caat-in-depth.php

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

1968-1998: Suharto's 'New Order' and the shattering of Indonesian society

Persecutions against political prisoners and their families

Alongside the mass killings, some 750,000 people were arrested in 1965–66 for allegedly being PKI members. Of these political prisoners, only 800 were tried (0.1%), most of whom were sentenced to death. Most remained in prison for years, without justice or access to legal representation. Despite many releases in the 1970s, some 55,000-100,000 persons were still in detention by 1977.³⁰

As a recent video by the Indonesian human rights organisation, KontraS, has pointed out, for many prisoners, their eventual release did not mean 'freedom.'³¹ Between 1970 and 1995, released prisoners were singled out for further persecution. Their ID documents were stamped with the letters ET, standing for *Ex-Tapol*, meaning 'ex-political prisoner.' Compelled to report regularly to the police or the military, they had no freedom of movement, association, expression or employment, and were subjected to arbitrary denunciations, re-arrest and blackmail.³²

Through the 1980s and 1990s, screening regulations were used to hunt down people who had relationships by marriage or blood with *Ex-Tapols* or alleged members of the defunct PKI, cutting them off too from employment and civic rights. Officially implemented in 1990, the 'Special Investigation' (*Penelitian Khusus*, Litsus) screening regulation required screening of people's values, attitudes and opinions, and classified suspected communists according to the categories of '*Ex-Tapol*, 'unclean,' or 'environmentally unclean'³³, depending on their alleged degree of involvement in the PKI.

The army, parliament, government and universities were purged of 'unclean' staff and employees were dismissed. Families were shattered by suspicions over the PKI background of their members, leading to the break-up of marriages and creating an atmosphere of pervasive fear in society.

Political manipulation through intensive propaganda

Between 1984 and 1998, the compulsory screening in schools of the state-made film 'The September 30 PKI Rebellion' (*Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*)³⁴ induced people to believe that enraged Communists had committed atrocities against the generals during the G30S coup and against peaceful Muslims within communities. Gerwani, the women's organisation affiliated to the PKI, was accused of sexual mutilation of the bodies of the dead generals. PKI members were presented as "sub-humans,"³⁵ and accused of having evil supernatural powers.³⁶ Such narrative myths were strengthened by official commemorations and sites of memory like the Sacred Pancasila monument that depicts the butchering of the generals by the PKI and the heroism of the army saviour of the nation against the

³⁰ Briere E., "Shadow play: political mass murder and the 1965 Indonesian coup" in Heribert A. (ed.), 2010, p.167

³¹ KontraS, "Peristiwa 1965," July 2012, <https://vimeo.com/45233333> (part 1) <https://vimeo.com/45234260> (part 2).

³² Heryanto A., 2006, *State terrorism and political identity in Indonesia: fatally belonging*, p.17

³³ Ibid, p.19

³⁴ Available on Youtube, "Pengkhianatan G30 S-PKI," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddYExsNtX6w>

³⁵ Colombijn F. and Lindblad J.T. (eds.), 2002, p.181

³⁶ Tempo magazine cited in Heryanto A., 2006, p.35-36

Communist "evil," and the Museum of Communist Treason (*Museum Pengkhianatan PKI*) inaugurated in 1992.³⁷

Hushing up political dissent in the name of 'the danger of communism'

In 1988, the official discourse of the danger of communism was fiercely revived. Rumours of communist conspiracies against the Government and other political groups circulated in the media. Every dissent of a political nature was readily labelled as a communist threat and security forces drew upon this imaginary enemy to legitimise widespread and systematic violent repression. The PKI label was conveniently used to crush workers' protests³⁸ and as a means for local authorities to prevent potential peasant movements. In 1992, peaceful student demonstrations in Yogyakarta to protest over the Santa Cruz massacres in Dili (East Timor) were crushed. The students arrested were forced under duress to confess that Communists had masterminded the event and sought to take power.³⁹ In 1996, demonstrations organised by the Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat Indonesia*, PDI) led by Megawati, Sukarno's daughter, were repressed under the same pretext.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid. p.141

³⁸ Ibid. p.18

³⁹ Ibid. pp.86-88

⁴⁰ Simons G., 2000, p.194

1998–2001, the end of the New Order: hopes for reconciliation and accountability

Wahid's presidency (1999–2001): a milestone towards national reconciliation

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, anti-communist persecutions embedded in the New Order ideology began to ease. The Presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid, former long-term leader of the influential Islamic organisation *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU), introduced hopes for a genuine reconciliation process through historical clarification, rehabilitation of the victims and their families and prosecution of the perpetrators of the massacres. Wahid personally appealed on national TV for investigations into the period and asked forgiveness for NU involvement in the 1965–66 massacres, also calling for an end to persecutions and for the rehabilitation of victims.⁴¹

In 1999 and 2000, two new laws on human rights were passed, criminalising crimes against humanity and genocide. In 2001, a draft law to establish a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was introduced.⁴²

Civil society truth-seeking and reconciliation initiatives

Although localised and not on a national level, some secular and religious civil society organisations have dedicated themselves to investigate the past and challenge the official national historiography imposed by the New Order. President Wahid inspired the Yogyakarta branch of Ansor, the youth wing of *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU), to create the organisation Syriakat (Muslim Community for Social Advocacy, *Masyarakat Santri untuk Advokasi Rakyat*), focussed on reconciliation and victim rehabilitation at the grassroots level.⁴³ Syriakat has organised informal truth and reconciliation workshops in East Java where victims and perpetrators of 1965–66 have shared their stories and the audience expressed their views on the past.⁴⁴

In 1999, the Indonesian Society of Historians launched an appeal for research on the 1965–66 mass killings⁴⁵ and the *Investigation Foundation for Victims of the 65–66 massacres* was created.⁴⁶ For the first time in November 2000, the Foundation was allowed by official local authorities to begin the exhumation of a mass grave in Kaliworo, East Java.⁴⁷ A similar project was undertaken in 2002 in Kedunganti village in Blitar, East Java.⁴⁸ However, both projects were met with local hostility and had to be cancelled. The former was interrupted by a local Muslim organisation which attacked the re-burial ceremony, while the latter was finally banned by local authorities under the claim that the exhumation would stir social unrest.⁴⁹

The outcomes of these two investigations illustrate well the continuing divisions in Indonesian society over its own past, and the vividness of anti-communism rooted in memories and misrepresentations. In the years following Wahid's mandate until today, discriminatory policies against alleged communists and their descendants have never been completely eradicated and have even sometimes been reinforced.

⁴¹ Braüchler B. (ed.), 2009, p.197

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, p.220

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Colombijn F. and Lindblad J.T. (eds.), 2002, p.44

⁴⁶ Heryanto A., 2006, p.1

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.24

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2001–2012, political and judicial backlashes: anti-communist discrimination pervades

Megawati's presidency (July 2001 – October 2004): the renewal of anti-communism

In November 2002, a ban on communist participation in political life was reintroduced by the Megawati Government. Investigations into the 1965 massacres were cancelled. Phobic anti-communist rhetoric was revived, once again labelling Communism as the national common enemy that threatens national order and unity.⁵⁰

Yudhoyono's presidency (October 2004–present): judicial failures and renewed censorship

Under President Yudhoyono, a series of judicial backlashes has weakened the accountability process instigated by former President Wahid. In 2006, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission law was nullified as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.⁵¹

In general, the Indonesian judicial system has failed to successfully prosecute any cases of gross human rights violations. Out of the 34 people prosecuted, only 18 were convicted, and all of them were subsequently acquitted on appeal. Moreover, members of the security forces involved in atrocities returned freely to their duties or entered the political arena.⁵² Hence impunity remains prevalent and the instigators and perpetrators of the 1965 massacres have never been held accountable for their crimes. Former President Suharto himself died in 2008 without ever been brought to justice for the crimes committed under his rule.

Victims' civil rights are still denied by the state. The elderly victims of the 1965–66 massacres and their descendants, who have been victims of persecution or discriminatory policies by the state for decades, are still not recognised as victims, and no reparation scheme has been nationally implemented. In 2006, despite the creation of the Witness and Victim Protection Agency (*Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban*, LPSK), the few persons who sought reparations through the agency had their demands denied.⁵³

Some victims are still reluctant to seek out their relatives who disappeared during the purges, and do not dare to speak up in fear of being labelled as PKI partisans.⁵⁴ While Indonesia signed the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in 2010, it has still not ratified the Convention.⁵⁵ A few elderly victims have demanded that the Government apologise and asked to have their names cleared, but the Government has remained silent.⁵⁶ In

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) "Transitional Justice in Indonesia since the fall of Soeharto," July 2011, http://ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Kontras-Indonesia-Derailed-Report-2011-English_0.pdf

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jakarta Post, "Editorial: after 45 years, the backlash," 30 September 2010, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/09/30/editorial-after-45-years-backlash.html> ; Jakarta Post, "Students confused by conflicting facts about Sept. 30 coup," 1 October 2010, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/01/students-confused-conflicting-%E2%80%98facts%E2%80%99-about-sept-30-coup.html>

⁵⁵ See UN Treaty Collection, Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary General, http://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-16&chapter=4&lang=en

⁵⁶ Jakarta Globe, "Elderly victims of 65 coup attempt seek justice after a lifetime of pain," 5 October 2010,

2011, descendants of victims who took legal action through the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation (*Lembaga Bantuan Hukum*, LBH) in order to recover their economic rights to pensions, land and retirement funds saw their complaint refused by the Supreme Court.⁵⁷ The pension issue has affected 22,000 people.⁵⁸

Historical clarification of the 1965–66 massacres has once again been hushed up through censorship of the education curriculum, publications and the media. In 2006, history school textbooks returned to a version that once again blamed the PKI for the 1 October 1965 aborted coup, under the justification that this version was “more acceptable for Indonesians.”⁵⁹ Simultaneously, President

Yudhoyono reactivated the law that gives the Attorney General's Office (AGO) authority to control and ban printed material, so as “to maintain public order.”⁶⁰ This law was used in 2009 to ban the book by the academic John Roosa, *Pretext for mass murder: the September 30th movement and Suharto's coup d'état in Indonesia*.

The demonization of communism as the national enemy and a temptation to celebrate the Suharto regime are still prevalent in the political sphere. In October 2010, a national debate was opened about the potential rehabilitation of Suharto as a ‘national hero.’ On this occasion, a senior politician did not hesitate to publicly state that the October 1965 coup was “a communist coup attempt” and that the killings “were necessary evils for national stability and development.”⁶¹ Similarly in February 2011, a Ministry of Defence spokesman stated that the Government still considers communism as “a latent threat to the nation.”⁶²

Civil society: truth-seeking initiatives, resistance and inertia

Localised truth-seeking and reconciliation workshops about 1965–66 are organised throughout the country. They are mainly initiated by victims' organisations, historians, human rights activists and some Muslim organisations like Syriakat or the Institute for Study and Human Resource Development of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) in East Java, and the Institute for Human Resources Studies and Development (*Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia*, Lakpesdam NU).⁶³ However, these events are more likely to be attended by educated urban middle-class Indonesians,

<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/elderly-victims-of-communist-purge-seek-justice-after-a-lifetime-of-pain/399670> ; Jakarta Post, “Book offers new hopes for rights violations victims,” 16 April 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/04/16/book-offers-new-hope-rights-violations-victims.html>

⁵⁷ Anita Rachman & Ulma Haryanto, Jakarta Post, “46 years on, coup victims still battle for compensation,” 30 September 2011, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/editorschoice/46-years-on-coup-victims-still-battle-for-compensation/468634>

⁵⁸ Anita Rachman & Ulma Haryanto, Jakarta Post, “46 years on, coup victims still battle for compensation,” 30 September 2011, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/editorschoice/46-years-on-coup-victims-still-battle-for-compensation/468634>

⁵⁹ Jakarta Post, “Students confused by conflicting facts about Sept. 30 coup,” 1 October 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/01/students-confused-conflicting-%E2%80%98facts%E2%80%99-about-sept-30-coup.html>

⁶⁰ Jakarta Post, “Fear of PKI leads to banning of books,” 30 September 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/09/30/fear-pki-leads-banning-books.html>

⁶¹ New York Times, “Indonesia debates possibility of honor for Suharto,” 23 October 2011,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/23/world/asia/23indo.html? r=1>

⁶² Jakarta Post, “FPI merely imagining PKI threat, says expert,” 3 July 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/07/03/fpi-merely-imagining-pki-threat-says-expert.html>

⁶³ McGregor K., in Braüchler B. (ed.), 2009

and their outreach is limited. Furthermore, they are often disturbed, not to say impeded by anti-communist movements that claim that Communism is still a threat to the country.

Muslim organisations are divided over the handling of the 1965–66 events. Former members of Ansor and Banser involved in the killings are fiercely opposed to any challenge to the official version of the past, and some of the younger generations are ready to use violent means to crush truth-seeking events. For instance Yusuf Hasyim, former head of an Islamic boarding school in East Java and of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), defended the 1965–66 killings and the part that NU took in the murders until his death in 2006. He organised workshops and exhibitions in 2001, 2003 and 2004 to reassess the status of Muslims as victims of communist greed and crimes in years prior to 1965, celebrating the killings as a “just war.”⁶⁴ After Hasyim’s death, accusations against the communists continued through the NU magazine ‘AULA’ which published violent caricatures of former President Wahid and the Communists in 2007.

Extremist organisations like the Islam Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) or the Youth Islamic Movement (*Gerakan Pemuda Islam*, GPI) do not hesitate to storm truth-seeking events about 1965 and organise violent protests against them.⁶⁵

Furthermore, younger generations remain ambivalent and reluctant to reconsider the past. It is symptomatic that, during debates organised on 1965–66 within universities, students reportedly tend to refrain from asserting personal opinions about the period although they eventually continue to loosely condemn the PKI for the coup. For example, one student was quoted as saying “I don’t understand the story line, but I definitely disagree with what the PKI did.”⁶⁶

July 2012: Komnas HAM report, a milestone towards justice and accountability

While there are still huge obstacles to reconciliation and rehabilitation of the 1965-66 victims and ending discriminatory policies against the victims’ descendants, a decisive step has just been made towards justice and accountability at the national level through the recent release of an investigation into the events by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) on 23 July 2012.⁶⁷

For the first time, the Commission acknowledges the scale of the 1965-66 crimes against PKI members and sympathisers and those “allegedly involved in G30S,”⁶⁸ finds sufficient evidence of

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.217 sq.

⁶⁵ Jakarta Globe, “Deplorable FPI strikes again,” 25 June 2010,

<http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/deplorable-fpi-strikes-again/382537> ; Jakarta Post, “FPI merely imagining PKI threat, says expert,” 3 July 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/07/03/fpi-merely-imagining-pki-threat-says-expert.html> ; Jakarta

Post, “Conference on 1965: tragedy overshadowed by FPI threat,” 19 January 2011,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/01/19/conference-1965-tragedy-overshadowed-fpi-threat.html>

⁶⁶ Jakarta Post, “Students confused by conflicting facts about Sept. 30 coup,” 1 October 2010,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/01/students-confused-conflicting-%E2%80%98facts%E2%80%99-about-sept-30-coup.html>

⁶⁷ “Statement by Komnas-HAM on the results of its investigations on the grave violation of human rights during the events of 1965-66”, 23 July 2012, (unofficial translation by TAPOL),

http://www.tapol.org/reports/Komnas_HAM1965_TAPOL_translation.pdf

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.3

"crimes against humanity,"⁶⁹ identifies the perpetrators of these crimes and calls for legal proceedings against the "individuals, commanders and members of military units" responsible.⁷⁰

The results of the Commission's four year investigation in four regions (Maumere, Maluku, South Sumatera and North Sumatera) and collection of testimonies of 349 witnesses and survivors are overwhelming. Evidence relating to over 240,000 victims has been documented, and while the report does not attempt to extrapolate numbers of victims nationwide, evidence is given of "widespread and systematic" killings, exterminations, enslavement and forced labour, forced evictions and banishments, arbitrary deprivation of freedom, torture, rape and sexual violence and enforced disappearances.⁷¹ The report acknowledges that the victims were targeted for their alleged ties with the PKI and recognises the Indonesian state as the mastermind of the crimes, underlining that "these events are the result of state policy to exterminate members and sympathisers of the Communist Party of Indonesia which was deemed to have conducted resistance against the state."⁷² It goes further by demonstrating and asserting that the crimes listed above amount to crimes against humanity under international law and refers to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)⁷³ as legal precedents.

The Commission asserts its commitment to justice and accountability by requesting legal action against perpetrators and state officials with command responsibility,⁷⁴ recommending that the Attorney General should "take forward the above investigations with further investigations"⁷⁵ and briefly suggesting that "non-judicial mechanisms" could also be beneficial to victims and their families.⁷⁶

Crucially, the report challenges central elements of the anti-PKI myth, stating quite clearly that there was no evidence that the PKI masterminded the 1 October 1965 coup and committed crimes against the rest of the population. However as the report is primarily aimed at establishing a basis for legal accountability, it focuses on military and police personnel as the perpetrators of the atrocities and does not acknowledge the role of civilian mobs in the killings.

It is unsurprising that among the first to react to the report's release were Ansor, the youth wing of Nadhlatul Ulama (NU). Ansor dismissed the report as "a forced settlement,"⁷⁷ stating that "it is better for us to forget and forgive what has happened in the past" and that "PKI members killed many of NU's ulema. Yet, we never demanded [PKI members] be brought to trial for what they had done."⁷⁸ Similarly, a group of 23 civil society organisations rejected the report, affirming their continuing will to protect Indonesians from the communist atheist threat.⁷⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.14

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.22

⁷¹ Ibid. p.23

⁷² Ibid. p.1

⁷³ Ibid. 17

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.25

⁷⁵ Ibid. 26

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jakarta Post, "Apology to 1965 victims not necessary: GP Anshor", 15 August 2012,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/08/15/apology-1965-purge-victims-not-necessary-gp-anshor.html>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jakarta Post, "Groups reject justice for 1965 survivors", 16 August 2012,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/08/16/groups-reject-justice-1965-survivors.html>

The urgent need for historical clarification and national reconciliation

The legacy of the 'demonization' of Communism since 1965-66

While the July 2012 Komnas HAM report undoubtedly represents a decisive step forward, further steps are needed to achieve widespread historical clarification of the G30S attempted coup and the 1965–66 massacres in Indonesia, as anti-communism is still pervasively “internalised in the national psyche.”⁸⁰

Generations of Indonesians have been taught to hate, despise and fear the PKI ‘abomination’ from an early age in schools and within communities. In the collective memory, the PKI remains the national common enemy upon which many Indonesians still rely to define their national and communal identity. The Suharto regime based its legitimacy and ideology upon this founding myth of the Communist evil by which all groups were threatened, justifying state-sponsored violence, repression and authoritarianism. Anti-Communist propaganda through state rituals, monuments, commemoration events, and the media has survived the New Order regime. With the exception of President Wahid’s administration, subsequent regimes have continued to draw upon the anti-PKI myth to cement an appearance of political national unity.

Systematic distortion of the identities of victims and perpetrators of the 65–66 massacres is still pervasive. The PKI is still represented as the ‘instigator of atrocities’, while the army and the mobs responsible for the massacres are celebrated as ‘national heroes’ who saved the nation from Communist chaos. This is despite the fact that no evidence has ever been offered to prove the involvement of the PKI in the 1 October 1965 coup attempt or its participation in any abuses against the Indonesian population prior to 1965.

These representations forced upon the collective memory are not likely to be dissolved easily without a genuine national effort towards truth-seeking, historical clarification, the official definitive dismissal of the New Order’s version of the past, and the prosecution of the real instigators of the atrocities that took place in 1965–66.

The myth of communist cruelty and identity politics: democratic progress at risk

The pervasiveness of the anti-PKI myth for political convenience at the national and local levels has stirred community divisions, and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of the massacres puts at risk Indonesia’s progress towards sustainable democracy based on human rights and the rule of law. Since 1965 and for 47 years, PKI members and their descendants have been constructed as a distinctive evil group, almost considered as an ethnic group⁸¹ that should be eradicated from Indonesian society for the national good. Heryanto shows how in Indonesia “ethnicity is deeply internalised as something inherited, natural and inherent”⁸² and therefore how the stigma of communism is passed on through the generations through heredity, and so could lead to endless division and conflict. Anti-communist discrimination does not only fall on the elderly people who witnessed, or were victims of, the 1965–66 events, but also on their descendants who are linked with them by blood and therefore are presented as themselves guilty of their ancestors’ supposed misdeeds.⁸³

⁸⁰ Heryanto A., 2006, p.34

⁸¹ Ibid, p.26

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, p.18

Ethnic and religious identities are particularly sensitive in Indonesia. Inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-community antagonisms have often been major factors in ethnic-based civil conflicts, for example on the islands of Kalimantan, Maluku and Sulawesi in the late 1990s. Prior to the 1965 events, clashes between the then-powerful PKI and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) over land tenure and management policies had already cemented devout Muslims' hatred for the "atheist" PKI.⁸⁴ Hence competition over the truth about 1965–66 is deeply embedded in groups' intimate representations of themselves and of the other, and in their ways of asserting their identity as groups. Truth-seeking and historical clarification endeavours on 1965–66 are perceived not only by the ruling political classes as a threat to national unity, but also by some communities as a threat to their own cultural identity and political legitimacy.

Despite the efforts by former President Wahid and some Muslim organisations to promote historical clarification and reconciliation, some other Muslim groups still actively seek to cement Muslim identity through the renewal of the anti-PKI myth, representing the Muslim community as victims of communist cruelty, and as martyrs and heroes who saved the nation, the 1965–66 killings being a "just war."⁸⁵ Extreme movements like the Islam Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, FPI) and the Youth Islamic Movement (GPI) perpetuate this resistance to historical clarification of the past through violent outbreaks against reconciliation and truth-seeking endeavours.

Overall the 'demonization' of a national common enemy as a scapegoat responsible for ongoing socio-politico-economic problems is a mechanism that repeats itself in Indonesia. The use of a founding myth that justifies the persecution of a given group has already been reproduced at the national level, especially against Muslims during the New Order period. There is therefore an urgent need to address this repetitive mechanism of fostering a phoney national unity through the demonization of specific groups as national enemies. Furthermore, the practice and expectation of impunity, rooted in the legacy of 1965, has facilitated past and ongoing human rights violations by security-forces personnel, especially in conflict areas such as East Timor, Aceh and Papua, and continues to undermine Indonesia's contemporary democratic credentials.

If the tragic past of 1965–66 is not officially, nationally, and judicially addressed, historical repetition could occur and lead to further ethnic-civil conflicts in Indonesia. Failing to come to terms with the traumatic legacy of the past, and continuing to nourish distorted versions of the tragedy, do not only harm victims and their descendants, but also put at risk Indonesia's progress as a democratic nation.

⁸⁴ For more details on the clashes between the PKI and Muslim communities, especially on the Madiun affair (1948) cf. McGregor in Braüchler (ed.), 2009

⁸⁵ Hasyim quoted in *ibid*, p.218

Recommendations

To the State of Indonesia: Truth-seeking and historical clarification

- To the President of Indonesia:
 - To respond to the Komnas HAM July 2012 report, to seek further investigation and clarification, and to acknowledge officially and nationally the 1965-66 events and the ongoing persecutions of victims and their families
 - To build a comprehensive programme to ensure the full rehabilitation and reintegration of victims and their families into the national community
 - To work with the legislative assembly to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances
- To the Minister of Justice and Human Rights:
 - To put an end to all discriminatory regulations and policies against 1965 victims and their families and descendants, in accordance with article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
 - To restore the civil rights of victims and their families and re-allocate to them the assets they lost due to discriminatory policies
- To the Minister of Education and Culture:
 - To put an end to censorship about the 1965-66 and New Order atrocities,
 - To develop and deepen balanced historical perspectives regarding the 1965 events, through genuine and extensive research into the 1965-66 events and the New Order discriminatory policies, open debates on the conflicting narratives, and reform school textbooks accordingly
- To the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission on Violence Against Women:
 - To help civil society organisations to expand their reconciliation activities within communities to help people to question and reassess their representations of the past

To the Attorney General: Judicial proceedings

- To undertake further investigations into the findings of Komnas HAM's findings of crimes against humanity during the 1965-66 events in order to develop a more coherent picture of the events and the names of the perpetrators, including civilian groups

To the international community

- To assist the Indonesian state to progress transitional justice measures, by addressing ongoing discriminatory legislation against victims and their descendants, supporting the rehabilitation of victims and their families, working to promote reconciliation, and prosecuting those individuals responsible for the atrocities
- To highlight the 1965 case and consider Komnas HAM's 2012 report in assessing all forms of cooperation with the Indonesian government, in particular with security forces, in support of building justice and accountability in Indonesia
- To assist the historical investigation at the national level through the provision of increased financial assistance and the provision of historical and legal expertise
- To assist civil society organisations to implement memorialisation and alternative truth-seeking projects – without imposing ready-made reconciliation packages – through financial and other assistance

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