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CARMEL BUDIARDJO is an English graduate in economics married to Suwondo Budiardjo an Indonesian civil servant who is one of 55,000 of his fellow countrymen who have been imprisoned without trial for the past seven years. She herself spent three years in detention without trial in Indonesia, returning to England after being released in November 1971. In February 1973, Amnesty International urged President Suharto to declare a broad amnesty for the prisoners. Mrs Budiardjo has now sent a letter appealing for her husband's release. Below is a first-hand account of her own ordeal in prison.

THREE YEARS AS A POLITICAL PRISONER IN INDONESIA

by: Carmel Budiardjo

I had been living in Indonesia for sixteen years when I was arrested, together with my husband, in September 1968. For him, it was the third time he had been arrested since the events of October 1965. For me it was the first time though I had repeatedly been called for interrogation.

From the first frightening moments of my detention, when I was taken blindfolded to an interrogation camp, up to the time of my release in November 1971 when I was formally handed over to an official of the British Embassy in Jakarta and ordered to leave Indonesia immediately and for ever, I was never tried, formally charged or even permitted access to legal advice.

I left behind me my husband, still in detention, where he has spent altogether more than six and a half years without trial, formal charge or access to legal advice. My repeated efforts with the Indonesian authorities to have him released and permitted to join me in Britain have fallen on deaf ears.

In a way, my arrest did not come as a shock to me. Many of my friends had been arrested since 1965 on allegations of being 'directly or indirectly involved in the 1965 coup', a label conveniently applied to all persons associated in any way with the leftwing movement in the pre-October 1965 days. I knew very well that I too was in disfavour with the new regime of General Suharto. Up to the time of the abortive coup, I had been an active member of the leftwing association of university graduates, the HSI, which was banned immediately after the coup together with the Communist Party and numerous other leftwing organisations. Within days of the coup, I was summarily dismissed from my post as an economic research worker at the Indonesian Foreign Ministry because of my HSI membership and also lost other forms of employment as a lecturer in economics and a writer of popular economic essays.

During those early years of anti-communist hysteria, more than half a million people were killed in massacres that swept the countryside under military guidance or protection and an estimated quarter of a million were thrown into detention. My husband was arrested in October 1965 and then released in March 1966 and re-arrested thirteen days later. Why I was not arrested until November 1968

is anyone's guess, for my political involvement had not advanced one iota since 1965. I was not in a position to establish any relationship with the underground movement that sprang up after the Communist Party was banned; I could not even articulate my opinions about the new government's economic policy for no newspaper would dare to publish the views of a person so strongly under suspicion and disfavour. I lived those three years as so many people in Indonesia are living to this very day, trying only to survive in a country where people stigmatised for 'coup involvement' - and that includes the wives and children of political detainees - encounter intolerable difficulties in getting jobs, continuing their education and even preserving for themselves a place to live.

This kind of existence became the lot of my two children, a girl aged seventeen and a boy aged twelve, after my husband and I were both arrested. They faced tremendous financial problems, ostracism from both friends as well as close relatives and on top of all this, they had to cope with the presence day and night of military guards in the house. The Army was planning to commandeer our home - which they did in 1970 - and kept it under constant guard for nearly two years following our arrest as rival groups fought over possession of the house. It was a great relief to me when my family in London managed to arrange for the children to leave Indonesia and settle down in England - but the parting and separation caused me great sorrow.

During my three years' detention, I experienced at first hand the ruthless segregation of a segment of the Indonesian population which the government chooses to brand as a 'danger to the national security'. Once a person is arrested as a political prisoner, he is denied all opportunity to challenge the grounds of his detention. Arrest, detention, interrogation and the decision regarding a prisoner's status are entirely in the hands of military intelligence officers whose brief is security, not justice. Only a minute fraction of the prisoners have been tried (some 300 so far). The rest, amounting to anything between fifty and a hundred thousand, remain, without trial, the captives of a military apparatus which is still bent upon utilising the 'communist menace' as a means for justifying its increasing curtailment of democratic liberties.

During my three years of incarceration, I experienced exactly the same conditions as all other political prisoners. We were denied all forms of reading except the Bible (or, for Moslems, the Koran); not even government controlled newspapers were allowed in. We had no access to radio or television and no educational activities were permitted except religious instruction and 'reindoctrination', though I personally was occasionally expected to teach army officers English. Though relatives are allowed to send in food parcels -

without which we could hardly have survived - family visits are strictly limited, particularly in prison. During the fifteen months I spent at the Bukit Duri Women's Prison in Jakarta, I was allowed to meet my relatives only twice. No form of written communication was permitted to us, not even to notify our families of our whereabouts. There were women in prison with me (who have not yet been released) whose families have lost trace of them and who have been without family contact for seven years or more. Many of them have no idea of the whereabouts and circumstances of their own children.

Accommodation was grossly overcrowded, both at the interrogation camps and in prison. We slept on stone floors and no mats or other 'bedding' were ever supplied to us; whatever equipment we used came from visiting relatives or through church donations. In the interrogation camps, medical facilities are totally absent, whereas in prison they are rudimentary, erratic and unreliable. Twice I personally witnessed prisoners dying in their cells unattended medically after having been held in conditions that were clearly detrimental to their ailing health.

Food was at all times and in all places totally inadequate. I learnt in prison what it feels like to be desperately hungry. Our daily food ration amounted to only two plates of rice plus a small dish of watery vegetables and a small piece of soybean curd or occasionally a tiny portion of salted fish. We saw meat or eggs only a few times a year on festive days. Apart from this we received only drinking water; nothing else was ever supplied, not even soap, sugar or clothing. From recent reports, I know that in the past few months, the food rations for political prisoners have further deteriorated in the wake of the current food crisis in Indonesia and sharply rising prices.

The Indonesian Government asserts that the prisoners whom it still refuses to release are all 'diehard communists' and therefore security risks. There are certainly a considerable number of communists and leftwingers among the women with whom I shared those years of detention whose only crime is their membership prior to the abortive coup, of an organisation that was perfectly legal at the time. But there are many among them who could hardly be described even as conscious political beings of any colour. Among them are young girls, arrested in 1965 at the age of 13 or 14, who had been training at the ground subsequently used by the coup organisers as their headquarters in October 1965. Whether they are being held as accomplices, witnesses or merely high-spirited youngsters who were in the wrong place at the wrong time is not clear even to them, because they have never been charged or tried. Yet they have already spent more than seven years in prison and have long since lost hope for their future. Their situation is particularly desperate.

Torture is widely employed against Indonesia's political prisoners, particularly during interrogations. The methods used vary from the primitive to the more sophisticated. Some prisoners are severely beaten with anything from a soldier's heavily-buckled belt to the spiked long tail of the tropical pari fish. Others are subjected to electrical torture, used in many cases on a man's genitals. Many women are stripped naked and beaten during interrogation and several of my co-prisoners suffered the insertion of crude implements into their vaginas. The raping of women interrogatees or detainees is not uncommon. I heard a **hair-raising** account from one prisoner who saw a detainee die under torture and another have his ear lobe bitten off by one of the thugs present at an interrogation. The woman who told me the story had herself been subjected to severe torture and was unconscious for several days after deep gashes had been cut into her thigh and buttocks during an interrogation.

The Indonesian Government has repeatedly shown itself to be unable to provide precise figures about the number of political prisoners it holds and statements published by government spokesmen have been blatantly contradictory. The Indonesian Government now admits that it holds 39,000 political prisoners who are already or soon will be confined to permanent 're-settlement' camps on remote islands. These are presumably the 'B' prisoners who, as the government itself admits, cannot be tried for lack of evidence but whom it will not release for security reasons. Though I do not know for certain, as prisoners are never informed of their classification, I assume that my husband is in this category.

But this figure does not appear to include the several thousand prisoners classified as 'A' category who are awaiting trial and who would not therefore be sent to 're-settlement' camps. Only recently, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, said that there were 10,000 prisoners in this category. Neither does it include the many thousands of 'X' prisoners who are awaiting classification. Arrests are still being made and recent reports indicate that the prisons in Jakarta whose populations were somewhat depleted by the transfer of some 'B' prisoners to 're-settlement' camps and a small number of releases of 'C' prisoners, are now again seriously overcrowded because of the arrival of many new detainees. For all these reasons, I estimate that there are probably more than 70,000 political prisoners in Indonesia today and the number may well be as high as 100,000.

Little is heard in the world today about Indonesia's tens of thousands of political prisoners. This may be because Indonesia, despite its 120 million population and enormous size, is so little known in the West or because no meaningful resistance has yet risen to challenge the Suharto regime. They have been neglected by world opinion at a time when there is a growing concern about the infringement of civil liberties in so many countries and about the widespread use of torture. This is a situation that should not be allowed to continue.