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International Secretariat,
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23 May, 1974
Indonesia
CB/glw

To: Co-ordination groups for Indonesia in Austria, Germany and the
Netherlands
National Sections in U.S.A., Japan and Victoria(Australia)

From: Research Department, International Secretariat

Re: Indonesia: Massive New Transfers of Political Prisoners

We have received reports from many different sources that in April a large number of prisoners were transferred from prisons in Jakarta and other parts of Java to destinations unknown but believed to include Nusakembangan and possibly Buru.

The news received so far is as follows:

Jakarta

- 400 prisoners have been moved from Salemba Prison; according to one source, the destination is Nusakembangan but this is believed to be only for transit to other places;
- the wife of one adopted prisoner in Salemba has informed us that her husband was transferred to Cilacap (this could be Nusakembangan which is just off the coast from Cilacap in the south of Central Java) and from there he will be transferred to a workcamp in Central Java and used to work on an agricultural project;
- according to another source of information, all Jakarta prisons will soon be 'empty of political prisoners'. Moves already made will soon be followed up by more transfers. A feeling of great uncertainty has spread among the families of those prisoners not yet moved; they visit the prisons more frequently with food to keep the prisoner well supplied in preparation for transfer and to check on whether he is still there;

Central Java

One source of information in Central Java also reports preparations for large-scale transfers and adds that they will be sent to Nusakembangan where they will be used on the construction of a cement plant (Japanese-financed) in Cilacap.

East Java

A large number of prisoners are being transferred from places of detention in East Java. Prior to the transfer, the prisoners are being assembled and re-divided according to a re-classification undertaken earlier this year. They are, according to this source, being transferred to three places: Buru, Nusakembangan and to the Kalisosok Prison in Surabaya.

General

- All reports confirm that the prisoners' families are not given prior notification of the prisoner's transfer, nor are they told immediately afterwards where the prisoner has been moved. The wife referred to above has been told that she will be informed of her husband's whereabouts on about 15th May and has been assured that she will soon be allowed to send provisions and receive letters;

- None of the sources of information made any comment on the category of prisoners being transferred. We believe they are prisoners (including many re-classified from C or A), and that A prisoners, awaiting trial, will not be transferred to camps.

Analysis

In October, 1972, a spokesman of Kopkamtib stated publicly that, in addition to the 10,000 prisoners already transferred to Buru, re-settlement sites were being sought for 29,000 B category prisoners. Places mentioned as possible sites were the islands of Nias and Siberut.

Following this announcement, nothing more was heard of these intentions. In mid 1973, there were widespread reports in Jakarta that "all B category prisoners" were going to be released in two batches, one by 17th August and the second by the end of the year. These reports were so widely believed among prisoners' families (and therefore also among prisoners) that many families were coming to Jakarta to await the releases. When the releases failed to materialise, our impression was that somewhere in Kopkamtib a decision taken had been challenged and counter-manded.

In July 1973, General Sumitro, Kopkamtib Commander, in an interview with Dr. Verkuyt of the Netherlands displayed a more conciliatory attitude towards the prisoners. Sumitro's visit to Buru in October 1973 was a well-publicised effort to display a more friendly or 'fatherly' attitude towards the prisoners. Symbolic presentations of gifts were made to intellectuals in Buru, and pictures were published of Sumitro with prisoners and their children. There is strong reason to believe that these efforts by Sumitro were part of his rapprochement with dissident students to win their support in his own bid for power. He suffered defeat in this endeavour. He was dismissed as Kopkamtib commander and President Suharto has resumed full command of Kopkamtib and so also, full responsibility for the political prisoners.

The repression that has followed the defeat of the student protest is reflected too in the reversal to a hard line policy towards the prisoners which is now manifesting itself in the decision to transfer all prisoners, a policy that was already fore-shadowed in the Kopkamtib statement of October 1972.

We should not lose sight of the fact that President Suharto is now fully responsible for prisoner policy as Kopkamtib commander.

Conclusions and Action

Although we cannot be absolutely sure about the final destination of the prisoners now being transferred, it is clear that a massive shift of prisoners is under way, and this may soon leave prisons in Jakarta and other towns empty of all save the sentenced prisoners and those awaiting trial. The reports seem to suggest that the government is now intending to use prison labour on development projects which are proliferating in Central Java rather than sending them off to a place like Buru just to care for their own sustenance.

Whatever the destinations, the transfers take the situation a major step closer towards the plan promised by the government, the removal of all the untried and untriable prisoners to indefinite detention in places far from their families and society as a whole where they will be 'dimanfaatkan' (made use of), and denied all prospect of either release or trial.

This development, which represents a consolidation of earlier intentions, requires renewed effort to make the Indonesian question a matter for special international concern. The International Secretariat has sent a letter to President Suharto, protesting at the moves and demanding that they be halted and that all B prisoners be released immediately (see attachment).

Actions planned and recommended

1. These developments are to be the subject of a press statement to be issued at the U.S. Section Annual meeting in New York on June 1.
2. Groups in other countries should approach the press on the 1st June to coincide with the U.S. Section's release.
3. Make urgent appeals to President Suharto on the same lines as the International Secretariat letter.
4. Solicit the support of influential individuals in making similar appeals. (Australia should use the MPs Amnesty group, the U.S. should use people on the House of Representatives Sub-Commission on International Organisations and Movements).