

INTERNAL (for AI members only)

AI Index: ASA 21/11/79
Distr: NS; CO; AD

TC: National Sections
Coordination Groups on Indonesia
Adoption Groups with Indonesian prisoners

Amnesty International
International Secretariat
10 Southampton Street
London WC2E 7HF
England

FROM: Asia Research Department

DATE: 18 December 1979

RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN INDONESIA

Summary

Attached is an article from the Asian Wall Street Journal of 11 December 1979. It contains a full report of a release ceremony held in Jogjakarta, Central Java on 8 December 1979, when 669 Indonesian political prisoners, held in connection with the attempted coup and subsequent events in 1965, were released. The 669 prisoners released in Jogjakarta formed part of a larger number of 2,045 (or 2,150 according to a report by the news agency Reuter of 8 December 1979) released in other areas of Indonesia on the same day. As a result of these releases, the Indonesian Government now claims that all B category prisoners (those held without trial due to insufficient evidence to bring them to court), except 105 who are to be released before the end of the year, have now been released.

Distribution

This circular is being sent to all national sections, coordination groups on Indonesia and groups with Indonesian adoption and investigation cases.

AI Concern

AI is concerned that all prisoners of conscience in Indonesia should be released immediately and unconditionally. This means that:

1. AI is still awaiting independent confirmation that all B category prisoners have in fact been released. (Groups will be informed of the formal closure of cases affected by the last phases of the release program early in the new year.)
2. AI will continue to be concerned by restrictions on released prisoners entailing less than unconditional release.

Although a large proportion of the individual prisoner cases assigned to groups will be closed as a result of these releases, it is still intended to maintain a high level of work on Indonesia. The work will focus on the following areas:

- A It is hoped that some groups will continue to work on Indonesia following the formal closure of the adoption cases previously assigned to them. These groups will continue to press the Indonesian authorities to lift certain restrictions on released political prisoners who were imprisoned following the events of 1965. These restrictions include:

1. Restrictions in employment opportunities:

Released political prisoners are not permitted to become civil servants, join the armed forces or work in a "vital" industry. In practice, this means that the only avenue of employment open to released political prisoners is to work in private industry/commerce or in some form of self-employment. It has been reported to AI from several sources that former prisoners are discriminated against when applying for jobs in private industry (for example, they are often required to produce a "Certificate of Non-involvement"* in spite of repeated assurances from the Indonesian authorities that this procedure is no longer necessary). To establish some form of self-employment, considerable initial capital is needed, which, for obvious reasons, the released prisoners do not have. Consequently, the prospect of finding employment is bleak, in a country where unemployment and under-employment are already problems for the population as a whole.

2. Civil and political rights:

- a) released political prisoners are not permitted to stand as candidates in elections and it is not clear whether they are entitled to vote;
- b) released political prisoners have their identity cards marked in a particular way which indicates that the holder was formerly a political prisoner;
- c) released political prisoners must obtain a travel authorization if they wish to travel outside their home area. Such travel permits are issued by the local military authorities in the area in which the former prisoner lives; if the permit is granted and the person is able to travel outside his locality, s/he is required to report to the military authorities of the area to which s/he travels upon arrival. Similarly, if a former prisoner wishes to move permanently from one town to another, permission must be sought from the military authorities.
- d) released political prisoners are forbidden to write books or to newspapers and magazines;
- e) released political prisoners are forbidden to speak at public meetings;
- f) released political prisoners are forbidden to become members of mass or political organizations;
- g) released political prisoners are forbidden to travel abroad;
- h) released political prisoners are unable to speak freely to foreign visitors;
- i) released political prisoners have not had their pension rights restored, in some cases even when the released prisoner was receiving a pension for some time prior to 1965 and the date of their arrest, and despite having paid contributions towards a pension;

* Certificate of Non-Involvement: certificate issued by the authorities stating that the bearer was not involved in the 1965 coup. Although formally abolished, the certificate is still required in practice, even for students seeking admission to certain schools.

- j) following the attempted coup and subsequent events in 1965, many political prisoners found that their property (family home, for example) had been confiscated and taken over by others. In spite of assurances that such property would be returned to them, this has not been the practice in the majority of cases.

AI wishes to draw the attention of the international community to these restrictions placed upon released prisoners. To this end, some adoption groups will be requested to continue working on Indonesia with the object of urging the Indonesian authorities to lift these restrictions against former political prisoners. In addition, it is envisaged that these adoption groups will be actively involved in the raising of relief to be channeled to Indonesia (see Recommended Actions, below). In January 1980, further instructions regarding this aspect of future work on Indonesia will be sent out to national sections/coordination groups/adoption groups but agreement on the allocation of this work has still to be arranged between the Research Department and the national sections/coordination groups/adoption groups concerned.

B AI groups will continue to work on behalf of individual political prisoners in Indonesia, among them:

1. those prisoners who have been tried for alleged involvement in the events of 1965. In some instances, because of the lack of available information, these cases will be of investigation status. However, AI is concerned that many of these prisoners who have been convicted of involvement in the 1965 events have not received a trial which conforms to internationally-accepted legal standards. It is hoped that more cases of this sort will be taken up in future. (See Asian Wall Street Journal article which states that 1,014 political prisoners have been brought to trial since 1965.)
2. those prisoners of conscience held in Indonesia on charges other than involvement in the events of 1965; this group includes:
 - a) students sentenced to varying periods of imprisonment following widespread demonstrations in 1977-78 against corruption in official circles and the ineffectiveness of government social and economic policies;
 - b) persons arrested (and sometimes tried) for advocating autonomy for outlying provinces of the Indonesian archipelago (for example, the group of Irian Jaya prisoners featured in prisoner of conscience week 1978).

Recommended Actions

1. All groups with untried prisoners held in connection with the events of 1965 should write to one or more of the following authorities in Indonesia (see below) requesting information on their individual prisoner and confirmation of the person's release. In addition, you should urge that the release be unconditional and all restrictions imposed upon released prisoners lifted. (Realistically, it is not expected that replies will be received from the Indonesian authorities, but it is important to keep them informed that AI is still concerned with these violations of individuals' rights.)

Persons to whom these letters should be addressed are: General Mohammad Jusuf, Minister of Defence, Admiral Sudomo, Commander of KOPKAMTIB, Lieutenant General Yoga Sugama, Commander in Chief of KOPKAMTIB.

2. Groups should continue in efforts to raise relief for released prisoners. At present, a further circular is being prepared which contains documents which, it is hoped, some sections will translate and produce in leaflet form. The documents are collections of letters from Indonesian prisoners, released prisoners, information on the restrictions imposed upon released prisoners in addition to a brief commentary on political imprisonment in Indonesia. This circular will also be sent to all groups with Indonesian adoption and investigation cases, and the documents can obviously be given general distribution and as such be used in fund-raising activities..

3. Further instructions regarding the continuation of some group level work on Indonesia following the formal closure of cases will be issued once the necessary consultation has taken place. It is hoped that these can be provided by the end of January 1980.

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: ASA 21/11/79
Distr: NS/CO/AD

Amnesty International
International Secretariat
10 Southampton Street
LONDON WC2E 7HF
England

Date: 17 December 1979

RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN INDONESIA

YOGYAKARTA - In a high-ceilinged old gymnasium in this central Java city, 669 political prisoners stand stiffly at attention while an Indonesian Army officer drones through the ceremony that will lead to their release. In the grandstands, families the men and women haven't seen in more than a decade sit quietly.

Finally, the prisoners in unison chant an oath promising to renounce Communist ideology forever, and the ceremony ends. The prisoners, who have been held in Indonesian jails without charges or trial for up to 14 years on suspicion of involvement in an abortive pro-Communist coup attempt in 1965, are free.

In moments, the solemn discipline of the ceremony melts into chaos as families and ex-prisoners rush together. Across a railing, a pretty teenage girl is kissing her father. Slowly, softly she kisses the wiry, weathered man, first on one cheek and then the other. She pauses, looks searchingly into his face, then begins to kiss him again. The man, a former Army captain, looks past the girl to his wife and silently grasps the woman's hand.

Nearby, two more teenagers are waving and calling to their father, tears streaming down their faces, as a thin man pushes through the crowd toward them. In another part of the gym, two men reel about locked in an embrace while friend and relatives cling to them.

The emotional scenes, played out across Indonesia last weekend, marked the resolution, in large measure, of one of the most bitter chapters in Indonesian history. In releases like the one here, Jakarta set free 2,045 prisoners.

As category 'B' political detainees, they were nearly the last of tens of thousands of people Indonesian security forces arrested for alleged involvement in the 1965 coup attempt, but never charged or tried because of lack of hard evidence to prove the allegations. The weekend release left 105 'uncooperative' category 'B' prisoners in Indonesian jails. National security chief Adm. Sudomo said that these prisoners will be freed 'before Christmas,' but under strict surveillance.

That release will fulfill an Indonesian promise made in 1976 to free all 'B' prisoners by the end of this year. Jakarta expects the releases will brighten Indonesia's tarnished human rights image abroad.

The category 'B' releases don't mean Indonesia has wiped its human rights record clean or that no more political prisoners are held. Moreover, the latest releases didn't put to rest a continuing controversy over Jakarta's own prisoner count. And the program doesn't solve the problems facing former detainees attempting to readjust to life outside prison.

But in meeting its commitment to free all prisoners held without trial, Indonesia should win a measure of goodwill, despite these blemishes.

The category 'B' prisoners have, in the past been the focus of sharp criticism from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. The long detentions have provoked subtly expressed diplomatic pressure from the U.S. and other friendly countries which found the detainees a political embarrassment.

Western diplomats, some of whom were originally sceptical of the 1978 release pledge, welcomed the weekend releases.

'Basically, they've made good on their promise,' said one foreign official. 'It's gone a lot smoother than anyone could have contemplated.'

The Western countries were particularly happy to hear Adm. Sudomo's pledge to release the 105 remaining 'B' prisoners before the year end. The group, which includes a number of prominent left-wing writers, journalists and intellectuals, including novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, had been judged 'uncooperative' by security officials.

Sources say some armed forces aides wanted to detain the group past the 1979 deadline, until the prisoners recanted their alleged Communist sympathies. But other officials, arguing that their continued imprisonment would diminish public relations benefits from the release, apparently won the day.

'It's a tremendous relief,' sighed one diplomat at the Yogyakarta ceremony.

Indonesia's political prisoners are a legacy of the most traumatic and important political event in the country's 34 years of independence, the abortive 1965 leftist coup attempt. The upheavals that followed eventually toppled President Sukarno and brought then Gen. Suharto and the anti-Communist Indonesian armed forces to power. It also ignited a firestorm of reprisals that resulted in several hundred thousand killings, mostly of alleged Communist sympathizers, and in hundreds of thousands of arrests of suspected leftists.

Most of those swept up - the number may have been as high as 750,000, but no one is sure - were released for lack of evidence, but several 'A' category prisoners were charged with direct involvement in the coup attempt. Tens of thousands more were classified 'B'.

They were put in this category because, by its own admission, Jakarta couldn't produce sufficient evidence to charge them formally or bring them to trial. The 'E' detainees were jailed in prison across the archipelago, including a large work farm complex on remote Buru Island.

Foreign critics of the detentions protested that holding the prisoners for years without trial violated their human rights. Some of the prisoners, in a few permitted meetings with reporters in recent years, complained of mis-treatment at various times during their long detention. Most maintained that they had no knowledge of the 1965 coup plan. They were, they said victims of a sweeping purge that netted many persons with only tenuous links to the Communists.

In 1975, with Indonesia holding more than 30,000 'B' prisoners, the first releases began. Most analysts think signs that unfavourable international attention to the prisoners prodded Jakarta to begin the releases, although government officials deny this. The analysts note that the Indonesian public has been generally reticent on the prisoner issue - neither campaigning for the releases nor opposing them.

In 1976, security chief Sudomo pledged to clear the jails of all remaining 'B' prisoners by the end of 1979, a promise that will, apparently, be kept.

He gave the government's latest official tally of prisoners taken following the 1965 coup. He said that the 105 'uncooperative' 'B' prisoners were held in a camp at the central Java town of Magelang. The officer said the group included 'mostly leadership level' members of former Communist organizations. However, he pledged to release the prisoners 'before Christmas'.

Those in this small group will be kept under special surveillance following release, and will have to report to local military commanders every week, Adm. Sudomo said.

In addition to the soon-to-be-freed 105 'B' prisoners, the admiral said that Indonesia held 23 'A' category prisoners still awaiting trial. He said the 23 would be tried next year. To date a total of 1,014 'A' category detainees have been convicted of involvement in the coup. Of these, 752 are still serving sentences, while 262 have been released.

Indonesia's prisoner count has been criticized for discrepancies in the past. Too often, the official tallies, if carefully cross-checked, don't add up - a point that has sparked charges by Amnesty International and other foreign critics that Jakarta is concealing large numbers of detainees. In 1977, for example, Amnesty International claimed Indonesia held 55,000 to 100,000 prisoners, a number well above the official mid-year tally of 31,461 by Indonesia.

Jakarta's apparent inability to get an accurate count of detainees was illustrated again in the weekend release. Reporters

comparing the government figures on the day of the release with those issued by the Security Command just three weeks earlier turned up a 38-person discrepancy. In answer to queries, Adm. Sudomo said the 38 detainees were removed from the tally sheet because they had been 'sentenced' by military courts during the three week interim. However, no news of such sentencing has appeared in recent weeks. Analysts found it highly unusual that the slow Indonesian judicial process would have completed that number of cases in so short a time.

But most observers, while conceding Indonesian security officials are poor accountants, tend to accept the government's figures as reasonably accurate. They say no serious evidence has emerged to indicate Jakarta holds many more people than it says it does.

However, Indonesia also holds a number of more recently detained political activists. This group consists mostly of Moslem dissidents who have agitated against the Suharto regime and a number of students who have criticized the government. Most of these detainees were arrested in 1977 and 1978 during the parliamentary and presidential election campaigns. One diplomatic source puts their number at 30 to 40. But another Western analyst says it might top 100.

Diplomats say Indonesian officials pledge that these prisoners will be charged and tried. But domestic and foreign critics alike note that Indonesia's weak legal system generally provides scant protection against arbitrary arrest and detention should the government choose to exercise its powers.

The newly released category 'B' detainees face problems that make readjustment to civilian life an uphill struggle. The government hasn't formally listed the restrictions imposed on the ex-detainees. But Adm. Sudomo, at the press conference, outlined some of them. The official said the ex-prisoners were 'free citizens, but still under supervision'. They may vote, but not stand for office. They may join government-sponsored cooperatives, but not the armed forces or the civil service. They can 'live anywhere they want' but must report their movement from one place to another. They can go abroad, but only with 'special permission'.

The restrictions can be a burden. Because they are tainted as leftists many former prisoners have had trouble finding jobs. 'They carry a special stigma,' contends one Western political analyst, 'most have gone home to their families and depend on them.'

Several hundred ex-prisoners have permanently resettled in Indonesia's outer islands to begin new lives, including 92 on the once dreaded prison island of Buru. Most analysts think the prisoners' choice to resettle is voluntary, as Adm. Sudomo insists it is.

So far, the release program hasn't shown the former detainees to be the security risk Jakarta once thought they were. Political

analysts detect little if any sign of renewed leftist activities. 'So far they've behaved very well,' Adm. Sudomo conceded. He noted only one 'incident' involving ex-detainees since the release program began.

Such a good record eventually could help speed the reintegration of the prisoners into society. But for those without money or sympathetic relatives the euphoria of release could soon sour into frustration.

Two hours after the release ceremony, Sumardi, a 55-year-old former school administrator from Solo waits in an empty stadium beside the gym with his two brothers. With the families of several other prisoners they've hired a van to take them home. The brothers haven't been together in 14 years, since Mr Sumardi was arrested for his membership in a leftist teachers' union.

The brothers aren't talking when a reporter approaches. Mr Sumardi nervously smiles; the brothers don't. 'I'll go home first, then make plans,' Mr Sumardi says, 'I don't know what work I'll do, but I still have my strength.' The man says he's learned a little about rubber processing from working on estates on Nusakambangan Island, the site of one of Indonesia's toughest prisons. The brothers' clothes are faded and frayed. They are poor. The ex-prisoner's plans seem vague and hollow. (The Asian Wall Street Journal, 11 December 1979)