

# how the prisoners live

What is life like for the tens of thousands of political prisoners in prisons and detention or interrogation centres throughout Indonesia? The overriding feature is their deep resentment at being detained for their political views or past associations, and their frustrations at being held for so many years without trial or prospects of release. Added to this, the conditions in which they must live present continuing hazards to their health and welfare and to their peace of mind.



*Prisoners at work in Buru island.*

The Indonesian Government uses the low living standards of the Indonesian people as a pretext for doing nothing to improve the lot of the political prisoners. But by keeping them in custody, and for such a long period of time, they inevitably assume responsibility for these prisoners and are under obligation to provide them with basic minimum standards.

It is not easy to describe actual conditions. Most places where prisoners

are held are completely closed to outsiders and few who are released would risk their freedom by giving an account of what they experienced. Moreover, there are numerous prisons, camps and interrogation centres in both large towns and small towns, and in places remote from centres of population. There are even places of detention referred to in Indonesian as "tempat tahanan gelap" or "illegal places of detention" whose very existence is concealed from the surrounding population.

The welfare of the prisoners is left largely to the discretion of local military commanders, and whatever central, provincial or regional policy may be, the officer in charge of a prison or detention centre is in practice in a position to regulate things very much as he likes and to determine how much of any official allocation for prisoners is actually spent on them.

Besides the so-called "re-settlement camp" on Buru Island, and the women's detention camp in Plantungan, Central Java, places of detention can be subdivided into prisons and detention or interrogation centres. The latter generally cater for newly-arrested detainees and are run by the local army unit or its intelligence unit. The prisons, which accommodate prisoners after their initial period of interrogation, are in the hands of the Military Police Corps (CMP). Some are ordinary prisons taken over in part or as a whole from the civil authorities, whilst others are regular military prisons. Where general prisons are used, political prisoners are kept in strict isolation from criminal prisoners and conditions of the untried political prisoners are in all cases far worse than those of convicted criminal prisoners.

## ACCOMMODATION

In the prisons, accommodation is grossly over-crowded, unhygienic and forbidding. In Tangerang Prison on the outskirts of Jakarta, three prisoners are confined to a cell 1.4 metres by 2 metres. In Padang Military Prison, Central Sumatra, cells built for four persons are used for between eight and twelve prisoners. At the local prison in Lampong, South Sumatra, prisoners are herded into dormitories where they sleep packed closely together on the floor. The prison at Ambarawa in Central Java is reputed to be one of the worst of all the prisons used for political prisoners, and the building - used first by the Dutch and then the Japanese - is in a serious state of disrepair.

Accommodation at detention and interrogation centres is generally far