

Minta Maaf! Say Sorry for 65

Factsheet: The 1965-66 mass killings in Indonesia

The anti-communist purge

On the night of 30 September 1965, the Indonesian army led by General Suharto aborted a coup attempt against the then-President Sukarno and blamed the Indonesian Communist party.

Backed by the West, General Suharto unleashed a murderous campaign of terror against suspected communists and alleged associates, including leftwing activists, artists and intellectuals, peasant's groups and labour unions. Suharto took over as President and maintained hardline authoritarian rule in Indonesia for decades to come.

The mass killings and detentions

Hundreds of thousands of victims of the anti-communist purge were killed, disappeared, raped and imprisoned. Between October 1965 and March 1966, it is reliably estimated that between 500,000 and 1 million people were killed and some 1.7 million more were imprisoned without trial. This was one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century.

The perpetrators

The crimes were committed by the Indonesian army under the command of General Suharto, as well as army-sponsored civilian mobs, gangsters and para-military groups of the kind featured in THE ACT OF KILLING. Not one person has been brought to justice for the massive violations of human rights committed over a sustained period. The killers are instead applauded by the government as national heroes.

The victims

In the late 1970s, the Indonesian government released thousands of remaining 1965 political prisoners, thanks in part to an international campaign led by TAPOL. TAPOL's founder, Carmel Budiardjo, was herself imprisoned without trial by the Suharto regime for three years in the late 1960s. Many convicted prisoners, however, remained in jail until the 1990s.

The surviving victims and their families have received no official apology or compensation for their suffering. On the contrary, they continue to be stigmatized and suffer from legal discrimination as well as physical and mental health problems. They face difficulties in obtaining jobs and have been prevented from voting or working in professions such as education and the law. A solidarity movement of victims is trying to deal with the past and establish the truth about 1965 through oral history activities, books, documentary films and sharing stories at various events.

The official findings: Crimes against humanity

In July 2012, a landmark investigation by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights found evidence of systematic and widespread crimes against humanity, including violence on a massive scale, extra judicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, rape, sexual abuses, enforced disappearances and slavery.

The Commission recommended: (i) a follow-up criminal investigation by the Attorney General and the establishment of a special human rights court to try the alleged perpetrators; and (ii) the establishment by the government of a non-judicial truth and reconciliation commission. The Commission's report has, however, been stonewalled by the Attorney General, who has failed to respond to the findings, and the Government, which has rejected them.

Why the 65 events still matter

The events of 1965-66 were one of the darkest periods in the history of the world. Despite this, while the atrocities of Rwanda, Bosnia and Cambodia are well known, Indonesia's mass murders are hardly known about and no-one has been held accountable. The victims continue to suffer from outrageous discrimination and the unpunished crimes against humanity lie at the heart of the ongoing problem of impunity in Indonesia. The country has made substantial progress in its transition to democracy since the downfall of Suharto in 1998, but the perpetrators of other gross violations of human rights in Timor-Leste (East Timor), Aceh, West Papua and elsewhere have also evaded justice and even occupy prominent positions in authority or public life.

The Say Sorry for 65 campaign

The Indonesian government is coming under growing pressure to acknowledge the truth about the 1965 crimes and apologize to the victims and their families. President Yudhoyono has stated he is committed to dealing with past abuses. Please add your voice to those of the victims by:

- Signing the online petition: www.change.org/saysorry
- Write to the Indonesian Ambassador in US expressing your concerns and urging President Yudhoyono to acknowledge the crimes and apologize to the victims. Free campaign postcards are available at screenings.

Send this message to the Ambassador. HE Dr. Dino Patti Djalal, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; Fax 202-775-5365; email: komwsh@embassyofindonesia.org

I am writing to you in solidarity with the 1965/66 victims and their families. I was shocked to learn that for almost 50 years, the government of Indonesia has ignored hundreds of thousands of victims, while the victims and their families have been discriminated against and stigmatised. As an essential first step, I ask you as President of Indonesia to acknowledge the truth about the atrocities and apologise to the victims and their families for the violence which took place and the discrimination they have experienced ever since.

For more information about the campaign: www.etan.org

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