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## **Indonesia: Hundreds arrested – what price for economic stability?**

More than 250 peaceful political activists have been arrested in the last two weeks in Indonesia, yet other governments are ignoring the renewed crackdown on opponents of the regime or its economic policy, Amnesty International stated today.

"World leaders must use their influence not just to pressure Indonesia to implement economic reforms but also to stop the repressive measures being employed by the authorities against its own population," the organization urged.

Among those being targeted for arrest are people calling for President Suharto not to stand for a seventh term in the March 1998 presidential elections. At least 20 members of one organization, Aldera (the People's Democratic Alliance), have been briefly detained and four are now facing charges. There is serious concern for the safety of Aldera's Secretary General, Pius Lustrilang, who has been missing since the beginning of February and there are fears that he may be held in incommunicado detention. Aldera supports a presidential coalition of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the former leader of the People's Democratic Party (PDI), who was ousted in a government backed congress in 1996, and Amien Rais, the head of the Muslim group Muhammadiyah.

One hundred and twenty eight supporters of Megawati remain in custody in Jakarta after demonstrating on 11 February against rising prices, growing unemployment and government corruption. There are reports that five of the detainees may face charges under the Anti-subversion Law which has been extensively used in Indonesia to jail government opponents and carries a maximum sentence of death. The remaining 123 detainees are facing five year jail sentences.

"The Indonesian authorities have a policy of zero tolerance when it comes to any criticism of the regime or its policies," Amnesty International declared. "Economic stability must not be bought at the cost of individual freedom."

Riots sparked by rising food and fuel prices have spread across Indonesia in the past weeks increasing tensions in the country. Initial perceptions of relative restraint by the security forces in dealing with the riots are being replaced by fears of serious human rights violations after reports that five people were shot dead and another 15 injured when security forces opened fire on rioters over the weekend.

"The Indonesian security forces have a poor record when it comes to dealing with disturbances, both peaceful and violent, yet foreign governments have continued to sell them weapons which are used against the civilian population," Amnesty International stated.

"It is now the responsibility of those governments to monitor the use of the equipment they have sold and to put pressure on the Indonesian authorities to act with restraint in dealing with both peaceful demonstrations and riots," the organization added. ENDS.../