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INDONESIA: CRACKDOWN CONTINUES AS ASEAN LEADERS MEET IN JAKARTA

Leaders of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are assembling in Jakarta this week amidst a crackdown on political opponents of the government more severe than any experienced in Indonesia's recent history, according to an Amnesty International report released today.

The crackdown began with a raid on the headquarters of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) on 27 July. Some 249 people were arrested during the raid and subsequent riots, dozens of people wounded and at least five people killed. According to Indonesia's National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM) 23 people are still missing. Since then the authorities have detained 108 people for their alleged role in orchestrating the riots.

"Rather than taking seriously its responsibility to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for causing deaths and injuries during the raid, the government seems intent on diverting attention away from the real issues by intimidating, harassing and arresting peaceful activists," Amnesty International said.

During the raid, only supporters of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of former president Sukarno, who were occupying the headquarters were targeted for arrest. None of the youths claiming to support Suryadi -- who had recently ousted Megawati as leader of the PDI at a government backed congress -- were arrested or charged despite participating in the violent storming of the office.

Some 116 of Megawati's supporters are now on trial and the verdicts are expected today. Despite the charges against them being largely politically motivated, efforts by their lawyers to have the charges dropped have been ignored in all but eight cases.

"These trials are nothing short of a farce," Amnesty International said. "Even the judges have described the case as chaotic, complaining about prosecution lawyers failing to produce evidence and witnesses on time."

Peaceful political, labour and human rights activists are among those detained since the raid. Some of them have been tortured and many were held for days or even weeks in incommunicado military detention without lawyers or families. One was beaten, kicked and had a truncheon pushed into his mouth damaging his throat and preventing him from eating for three days.

Of those arrested in the crackdown, 27 are now threatened with subversion charges -- which carries a maximum sentence of death. In its report, Amnesty International reiterated that most, if not all, are prisoners of conscience.

“If the Indonesian government is serious about its public commitment to human rights, then it must review these charges -- no one should face the death penalty for peacefully participating in political activities,” the organization said.

One of those charged with subversion, independent labour leader Muchtar Pakpahan, had a previous sentence which had been quashed by the Supreme Court reimposed last week. The three year sentence -- increased to four years on appeal -- was handed down in November 1994 after Pakpahan was found guilty of inciting violence during labour riots in Medan in Sumatra in April 1994. After an international outcry, he was acquitted after spending months in prison.

“Pakpahan was acquitted in 1995 demonstrating the baseless nature of the charges,” Amnesty International said. “To reinstate the sentence now when he is already facing more false charges is simple victimisation. It is the action of a government which will go to extreme lengths to silence its opponents.”

Four months after the raid the harassment of peaceful activists continues. 32 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) deemed to be a "problem", have been singled out for investigation by the authorities. Among them are environmental, labour, student and legal groups, including the well-known legal aid group, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundations (YLBHI), which is involved in defending the PDI members currently on trial.

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For more information, to receive a copy of the 44-page report *Indonesia -- Arrests, torture and intimidation: The Government's response to its critics* (AI Index: ASA 21/70/96), or to arrange an interview, please call:

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