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Indonesia: Student Prisoners of Conscience Convicted at start of Election Campaign should be immediately released

As Indonesia begins its "Festival of Democracy" -- the 1997 parliamentary election campaign -- Amnesty International is calling for the immediate release of a group of student activists sentenced today to lengthy prison terms in Jakarta for their entirely peaceful pro-democracy activities.

"At a time when Indonesia is professing the right of Indonesians to participate in the country's political system, nine young people are being sent to join many others detained in prison for their peaceful political activities," Amnesty International said today, strongly condemning the trials and verdicts.

"The severity of these sentences demonstrates the lengths to which the authorities are willing to go to remove political opponents. They are designed as a reminder to other young activists not to engage in political activity outside the limits prescribed by the government."

The sentences of up to 13 years were handed down today by the South Jakarta and Central Jakarta District Court against nine activists from the People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik*, PRD) and its affiliated organizations.

A peaceful demonstration protesting against the sentences outside the Central Jakarta District Court was violently broken up by riot police, and five demonstrators were arrested and taken to an unknown destination.

All nine defendants were tried under Indonesia's most repressive piece of political legislation, the Anti-subversion Law, under which hundreds of people whose words or actions were considered to be disruptive of public order, critical of Indonesia's state philosophy or the government, have been incarcerated in Indonesia's prisons or even put to death.

The nine defendants were arrested in August 1996 during a round-up of political dissidents following riots in Jakarta in July 1996, which were blamed on the PRD.

"In reality the trials had nothing to do with the riots," Amnesty International said. "The evidence against the young activists related solely to their peaceful participation in labour demonstrations or calls for political change."

Like other political trials in the country, the trials of the nine were characterised by unfairness, with the defence being unable to cross examine witnesses and evidence of torture and ill-treatment of the defendants being ignored by the courts. In disgust at the court proceedings, the nine activists announced a boycott of their trials on 21 April.

Background

The nine members of the PRD sentenced today are:

- Budiman Sudjatmiko, 27, leader of the PRD, was sentenced to 13 years in prison.
- Petrus Haryanto, 26, Secretary General of the PRD, received a sentence of six years
- Garda Sembiring, 27, Jakarta leader of Indonesian Students Solidarity for Democracy (*Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia Demokrasi - SMID*) received a sentence of 12 years
- Ignatius Damianus Pranowo, 26, Secretary General of Indonesian Centre for Labour Struggle (*Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia, PPBI*) received a sentence of nine years
- Ignatius Putut Arintoko, 20, a member of SMID, was sentenced to one and a half years' imprisonment
- Ken Budha Kusumandaru, 23, a member of SMID, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment
- Suroso, 23, a member of SMID, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.
- Victor da Costa, 22, member of SMID, was sentenced to one and a half years' imprisonment
- Yakobus Eko Kurniawan, 25, PRD leader, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Last week, in two separate trials conducted in the Surabaya District Court, three other activists associated with the PRD were sentenced to prison terms after being found guilty of subversion. Female labour activist Dita Indah Sari, 24, leader of the Indonesian Centre for Labour Struggle (*Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia, PPBI*) received a six year prison sentence, while Coen Hussein Pontoh, 27, from the National Peasants' Union (*Serikat Tani Nasional, STN*) and Mochamad Sholeh, 21, from SMID, were each sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

Two other PRD activists, Wilson B Nurtiyas and I Gusti Anom Astika, are still being tried for subversion, as is independent labour leader Muchtar Pakpahan. His trial has been postponed while he is in hospital.

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