

INDONESIA

Open Letter from Amnesty International to President Suharto on the occasion of the May 1997 Parliamentary Elections

On 29 May, the Indonesian people will participate directly in the national elections for the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) in Indonesia. But the spirit of this "Festival of Democracy" is undermined by the continuing curbs in Indonesia on freedom of expression and association.

During your presidency, social and economic life in many parts of Indonesia have undergone significant change. But the transformation and development of Indonesia will not be complete until its citizens can fully enjoy basic civil and political freedoms as well as economic development.

Indonesians can be proud of their country's great diversity. Part of that diversity is the lively community of intellectuals and commentators who contribute not only to debate within Indonesia but also to the world's understanding of Indonesia. This diversity is also reflected in the many political, economic, social and religious groupings that seek to protect and advance the interests of their communities and constituencies. Allowing that diversity free expression and association will, in the long term, serve the interests of Indonesia's development and stability.

Amnesty International is therefore concerned by the recent severe sentences passed on twelve peaceful critics of the state belonging to the unofficial People Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik* - PRD) or its affiliated organizations. We believe that they are prisoners of conscience and call upon you to release them immediately and unconditionally. We are also disturbed that your government has returned to using the Anti-subversion Law against peaceful political opponents which it considers to be contrary to the spirit of democracy and development in Indonesia.

These concerns are heightened as Indonesia enters the final stages of its parliamentary election process. National elections are often occasions when underlying tensions and dissatisfaction in society find expression. Amnesty International recognises the responsibility of your government to maintain public order and protect life and property during this sensitive period. But this should not be at the expense of basic freedoms, as reflected in Indonesia's national philosophy of *Pancasila*, protected in its constitution and set out in international human rights standards.

Amnesty International is concerned that some individuals have already been arrested for their peaceful political activities in connection with the election, some for advocating an

election boycott, others for expressing views critical of your government. Several of these people have been sentenced to prison terms or are facing charges. Elsewhere, people participating in peaceful demonstrations related to the elections have been arrested and ill-treated by members of the security forces.

As the election process proceeds, we urge you to ensure that people are not arrested, imprisoned or otherwise victimised for exercising their right, enshrined in international human rights standards, to express peacefully their political beliefs and to associate freely for the peaceful promotion of their interests.