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# *amnesty international*

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## £INDONESIA

### @Predictions of a psychic - a threat to national stability?

**JULY 1995**

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Amnesty International is concerned by the detention of **Permadi Satrio Wiwoho**, 55, Chair of the Association of Indonesian Psychics. He is currently being tried on blasphemy charges. The organisation believes that the arrest of Permadi is another example of the government silencing peaceful opposition and is a violation of the right to freedom of association and expression. These rights are guaranteed under international human rights standards and under Indonesia's own constitution. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience detained simply for the non-violent expression of his opinion.

Arrested on 19 March, Permadi is being tried under Article 156(a) of Indonesia's Criminal Code. This Article states that anyone found guilty of inciting feelings of hostility towards a recognized religious group is liable to a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. He is currently being held at Wirogunan Prison in Yogyakarta, Central Java. His trial began on 6 July. Permadi's interrogation focused on remarks he made during a seminar at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, central Java, which took place last year. He is reported to have suggested that the Prophet Mohammad was a "dictator", thus causing offence to Islam. The police also questioned people who attended the seminar including

Permadi Satrio Wiwoho, Chair of the Association of Indonesian Psychics. He faces five years' in prison for the non-violent expression of his opinion. © Jawa Pos

politicians, a political observer, several students and the Dean of Gadjah Mada University. Two of the speakers at the seminar, one of whom is human rights campaigner, Adnan Buyung Nasution, were also questioned by the police. Permadi denies the allegations and maintains that his comments were taken out of context, and that they were in response to questions from the audience at the seminar.

Permadi was also questioned over remarks he made in an interview with *Radio Unisi* in Yogyakarta. He is said to have predicted a year of political uncertainty for Indonesia and to have named Megawati Soekarnoputri as a possible successor to President Suharto. Megawati Soekarnoputri is leader of the opposition *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI)* party, Indonesia Democratic Party, and the daughter of Indonesia's first President, Sukarno. The police threatened to investigate *Radio Unisi* after it was discovered that taped versions of the interview, which have since been banned in Jakarta, were made available to the public. Now, however, the charges against Permadi centre on his alleged blasphemous remarks, although the Government party Golkar have threatened to sue him over other political remarks he is said to have made.

The attitude of the Indonesian Government towards peaceful critics was summed up by the comments concerning Permadi made by Armed Forces (ABRI) Chief of Staff for Social and Political Affairs, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Ma'ruf: "*Everybody, including soothsayers or others, have similar national interest. That is to keep the stability*". He further justified the investigation of Permadi by stating: "*they [psychics] can make predictions, but they should not create chaos among the people*". Permadi has come under attack from other quarters. On 23 March, a group of Muslim youths demonstrated outside the National Police headquarters in the capital, Jakarta, where he was being held. They had demanded a heavy sentence for Permadi. There have also been demonstrations outside Permadi's home in Jakarta.

Despite these feelings of hostility against Permadi, there has been concern that he is being unjustly detained and tried. A political commentator recently questioned the detention of Permadi, arguing that: "*people like Permadi should be given bail and protected by the government while out on bail*". Abdurrahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur, Chairman of *Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)*, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, said after examining Permadi's alleged blasphemous comments: "*We didn't see anything that was sacrilegious.*"<sup>3</sup> Permadi himself said in response to one period of interrogation lasting five hours: "*It is a naïve joke, a sign of an unhealthy situation in the country if such a prediction is considered as disturbing national security.*"<sup>4</sup>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There continue to be heavy restrictions on a wide range of political and civil liberties in Indonesia, including freedom of speech, assembly and conscience. Political dissidents, including academics, trade unionists and human rights defenders remain at risk of persecution by the

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<sup>1</sup> [Reuters](#), 23 March 1995

<sup>2</sup> [Tirias](#), 22 June 1995

<sup>3</sup> [Jakarta Post](#), 24 March 1995

<sup>4</sup> [Agence Presse](#), 16 March 1995

authorities. Three members the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) are currently on trial for their involvement in the publication of independent magazines and Tri Agus Susanto from the non-governmental organisation *Pijar* is also on trial for similar offences<sup>5</sup>. A parliamentarian, Sri Bintang Pamungkas, is also facing trial for his alleged criticism of the government in seminars in Germany in April.<sup>6</sup>

This series of trials has not gone unchallenged. A political commentator recently questioned the government's determination in using the law to keep all critics silent:

*The government uses the law to corner its opponents and thus deny them freedom of movement. That is what's behind the current rash of "political trials". At first sight this gives an impression of democracy and respect for the law on the part of the government. However, in these cases the law is being used to stabilize existing power and face down government opponents. So the law is actually being used to undermine the principle of the law, which is justice<sup>7</sup>.*

The case of Permadi is yet another example of the climate of fear which operates in Indonesia for those perceived as government critics and is consistent with the long-term pattern of interrogation, harassment and imprisonment of peaceful political opponents. Such practices demonstrate a continued unwillingness on the part of the government to tolerate freedom of speech and association.

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<sup>5</sup> For further details, see Amnesty International's report: Indonesia: Attacks on free speech (ASA 21/22/95), April 1995.

<sup>6</sup> For further details, see Amnesty International's report: Indonesia: Parliamentarian questioned after  
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<sup>7</sup> Tiras, 22 June 1995

**WHAT CAN YOU DO:** Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, Bahasa Indonesia, or in your own language:

☞ urging the immediate and unconditional release of Permadi, who is detained solely for the peaceful expression of his opinion;

☞ urging the Indonesian Government to ensure that those peacefully expressing their right to freedom of opinion and association do so free from intimidation and the threat of imprisonment.

**WHO TO SEND APPEALS TO:**

⇒ Minister of Religious Affairs

Dr. Tarmizi Taher  
Menteri Agama  
Jl. Lap. Banteng Barat 3-4  
Jakarta  
Indonesia **Salutation: Dear Minister Taher**

⇒ Chief of National Police

Maj. Gen (Pol.) Banurusman Atmosumitro  
Kapolri  
Markas Besar Kepolisian RI  
Jl. Trunojoyo 13  
Kebayoran Baru  
Jakarta Selatan  
Indonesia **Salutation: Dear Maj. Gen. (Pol.) Banurusman Atmosumitro**

**ALSO SEND COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

⇒ Chairman, National Commission on Human Rights

Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ali Said  
Ketua, Komisi Nasional Hak Azasi Manusia (KOMNAS HAM)  
Departemen Kehakiman RI  
Direktorat Jenderal Pemasarakatan  
Jl. Veteran No. 11  
Jakarta Pusat **Fax: +62 21 525 3095 (c/o Ministry of Justice)**  
Indonesia **Salutation: Dear Lt. Gen. Said**

and to diplomatic representatives of Indonesia accredited to your country.

**Please send appeals immediately**

**KEYWORDS:** PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE1 / CENSORSHIP / PHOTOGRAPHS /

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