

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Indonesia: Stop silencing public discussions on 1965 violations**

Amnesty International is concerned about continued attempts by the Indonesian authorities to silence public discussions, and disband events, related to serious human rights violations that occurred 50 years ago, the most recent at a writers festival in Bali. These actions are a clear restriction of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and must end immediately.

In the wake of a failed coup attempt on 30 September 1965, the Indonesian military – led by Major General Suharto – launched an attack against members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and suspected sympathizers. Over the following two years, it is reported that between 500,000 and one million people were killed. An investigation by the Indonesian National Human Rights commission also found other human rights violations including torture, enforced disappearances, rape, sexual slavery and other crimes of sexual violence. Hundreds of thousands of people were imprisoned without trial – many spent years in jail. Victims still continue to face discrimination.

Although Indonesia has seen a marked increase in the space for freedom of speech and expression following the fall of Suharto in 1998, a culture of silence has prevailed in discussing the 1965 mass human rights violations.

This pattern of suppression continued last week when Indonesia authorities threatened to revoke the permit of the internationally acclaimed Ubud Writers and Readers Festival if any events concerning 1965 went ahead. This forced the organisers to cancel three panel sessions dedicated to the victims of 1965, a screening of Joshua Oppenheimer's *Look of Silence*, and an art exhibit and book launch for the *Act of Living*. This is the first time in the festival's 12 year history that the authorities have interfered with the festival.

This has not been an isolated incident. Earlier in October, police in Salatiga, Central Java confiscated and burnt hundreds of copies of *Lentera* magazine, run by the Satya Wacana University's Faculty of Social and Communication Studies in Salatiga, because it featured an in depth report and front cover to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the violence.

On 15 October, a survivor of the 1965 killings, now a Swedish citizen, was deported from Indonesia after being interrogated by police for almost 12 hours. He has reportedly been blacklisted from returning to the country after attempting to visit his fathers' grave, who had been killed during that time, in West Sumatra.

Private meetings or public events organized by victims about the 1965 events have often been disbanded by the authorities or broken up by vigilante groups with police doing nothing to prevent the harassment.

Victims and survivors of serious human rights abuses have a right to exercise their freedom of expression and discuss the past. In the absence of genuine measures by the government to date to establish the truth, Amnesty International believes that public events and discussions on the 1965 violations such as the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival Indonesia play an important role in providing such spaces. These events can help victims and their families understand what happened to them, counter misinformation and highlight factors – such as discrimination – that led to the abuses. Such spaces, allow societies to understand why abuses were committed so that they are not repeated.

In October 2014, President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo entered office and committed to respecting and protecting human rights in Indonesia, including addressing past human rights abuses in the country. In May 2015, the government announced a non-judicial mechanism to resolve past human rights abuses, including 1965 violations. Victims and NGOs are concerned that this process may prioritize reconciliation and undermine truth and justice.

Amnesty International believes it is time that the Widodo administration face the past and take long overdue measures required to provide the 1965 victims with truth, justice and full reparation. President Widodo should make a public call to end to all forms of restrictions against public discussions on 1965 and ensure that the government starts listening to victims and others, instead of suppressing their voices.