

Press release: We oppose the suppression of democracy and human rights in Indonesia

This week, President of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto will be in Sydney as part of an official visit to Australia. This visit takes place after some eight decades of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Australia. Such a long history of connection between our two nations is largely the result of links built in the 1940s by ordinary people in Australia who supported Indonesia's struggle for national liberation against the Dutch colonial regime.

Central to this campaign was the imposition black bans on Dutch shipping by trade unionists which began as the Dutch attempted to recolonise the Indonesian archipelago after World War Two. These boycotts seriously hampered Dutch supplies and war materials reaching Indonesia and were labelled by Sukarno, the first President of the Indonesian Republic, “a magnificent, freedom loving stand”.

In light of this history, we call attention to four key demands of pro-democracy and human rights activists in Indonesia during the administration of President Prabowo. In particular, the detention of activists after protests in August this year, the official declaration of the dictator Suharto as a national hero, the public denial of serious violations of human rights in 1998 and large-scale deforestation as part of the ‘food estate’ program.

Firstly, the Indonesian National Police have named 959 individuals as suspects in connection with the August 2025 demonstrations, comprising 664 adults and 295 minors. These protests, sparked by government austerity policies, unemployment, and a proposed allowance raise for parliament members, turned violent when police vehicles struck motorbike food delivery workers, escalating the situation nationwide.

The National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia (KOMNAS HAM) reported that hundreds of people were injured during the police crackdown and alleged arbitrary arrests and detentions. We call on President Prabowo Subianto to release all detained protesters and hold accountable those responsible police and military brutality.

Secondly, we strongly condemn the decision of President Prabowo to grant the title of national hero to dictator Suharto, who became Indonesia’s President in 1965-66 amidst one of the large campaigns of mass killing in world history. The New Order military dictatorship was responsible for serious violations of human rights and crimes against humanity, particularly in East Timor, West Papua and Aceh.

Thirdly, we condemn the Minister of Culture's denial of mass rapes in May 1998, which the National Commission on Human Rights has confirmed as crimes against humanity. A fact-finding team established by former President BJ Habibie in 1998 found evidence of mass rapes during the riots, with at least 52 cases of violence against women, mostly of ethnic Chinese descent, reported.

Finally, as part of its 'food estate' program, the government is implementing a project in Merauke, South Papua Province, which involves the destruction of 2 million hectares of forest and is expected to result in approximately 782.45 million tons of additional CO2 emissions. The food estate program also involves serious violations of human rights including the displacement of Indigenous communities and increased militarisation. We urge President Prabowo Subianto to revoke the project and respect Indigenous peoples' rights to their land and culture.

The right to independence, democracy and dignity were won in Indonesia through a long campaign to end hundreds of years of Dutch colonisation and against the New Order military dictatorship. These struggles involved incredible sacrifice, including the martyrdom of freedom fighters and activists – 13 of whom are buried in the New South Wales (NSW) town of Cowra – and the detention, murder, torture and forced disappearance of many others.

We in Australia stand on the side of those struggling for democracy and human rights in Indonesia today.

For further information, please contact **Eko Waluyo**, Program Coordinator of Indonesian Solidarity, a non-governmental human rights organization based in Sydney, at **0432 460 512**.

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