

INDONESIA: official attitude to political detention - September 1971

These extracts are from a speech given by the Indonesian Attorney-General at a luncheon arranged by the Djakarta Foreign Press Correspondents Club on 20 September 1971. The Attorney-General, Lieutenant-General Sugih Arto, was outlining his Government's policy on political imprisonment and answering criticism about the continued detention of over 50,000 alleged communists, most of whom have been detained without trial since the failure of a left-wing coup attempt on 30 September 1965.

"..... I am not going to talk about how many political prisoners we have, how many in Class A, in Class B, in Class C, because we keep on a floating rate, like the yen vis-a-vis the dollar. Everyday it changes. If I say about 50,000, then that is about right. It changes every day; it doesn't increase any more, it decreases because people are being released.

The problem of releasing C prisoners is not one of national security but of personal security, their own security..... It is still a question of whether they will be received back in their villages, whether they can live peacefully with their families and find employment. Before releasing these prisoners, we must prepare the communities first to make them realise that it's about time they think about this problem and accept the prisoners back as normal members of society. It has taken a long time to prepare the community, two years, I think, and now we are releasing C prisoners. We hope, by the end of the year, not to have a single C prisoner any more. This news will, I think, be received abroad with much joy because most of the criticism is about these people. Another thing about which there is much criticism from abroad is that we are holding prisoners without any consideration for the law, that is to say, against the law. I talked about this to Professor Julius Stone from Australia, and Mr. Sean MacBride, Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists. I explained to them that our law gives powers to the Attorney General to arrest people where there is suspicion of subversion, and these powers are unlimited. This law still exists, and the Attorney General has very great powers to arrest people. I hope you will remember this.

So all people being held in connection with the G.30.S (September 1965 attempted coup) have been arrested according to a regulation of the Kopkamtib (Army Command for the Restoration of Law and Order).

The most serious cases are the A prisoners, against whom there is enough evidence for them to be brought to trial. There are about five thousand now. They are not going to be released, they are going to be tried first.

Then there are the B prisoners. We know for certain they are traitors, that they are ideologically conscious; but there is not enough evidence to bring them before court. Most of the B people are now in Buru, an island in Maluku which is a little larger than Bali but with a population of only 30,000 while the population of Bali is about 2.5 million..... There are now about 10,000 people in Buru. 2,500 were taken there this year, 5,000 in 1970 and 2,500 in 1969. They get government support for the first eight months; they are given rice, tea, coffee, sugar, etc., and after that they have to stand on their own feet.

They are expecting their families to join them in 1972. We can't force the wives to join them. According to research we conducted in Java, 70% have refused to join their husbands, and half of these have asked for a divorce because they have been separated for so long. Many have children attending university or high school and would prefer to stay in Java. We have told them that if they join their husbands in Buru, it would be very difficult to get back, because there are no regular ships. And facilities for their children are inadequate. We have built six primary schools in Buru, but there are no high schools.

There have been big improvements in Buru..... But there are still lots of

problems. One big problem was the crop failure last year, because of pests. Three hundred hectares of crops were destroyed. We sent sprayers and insecticides supplied by the Indonesian Council of Churches and now everything is all right again.

The difficult problem is that of socialising these people for when they eventually get their freedom. The first stage is in Buru; they must become good citizens according to our standards, and then they will be set free to return to their places of origin. So there are people (on Buru) from the churches, and from the other religions for what we call 'mental rehabilitation'. And people from the Ministry of the Interior for 'political rehabilitation'. This is so that they can think and act like real Pantjasila-ists (Pantja Sila = the five-point Indonesian State ideology) as is expected of Indonesians. This will take a long time.....but we are hopeful of success. The churches and mosques are full. Perhaps, after 1972, we shall be able to relax our policy towards these people. The general elections went well, and we know exactly how strong we are, so we can take chances.

Another problem in Buru is how to create small communities..... The number of people with schooling there is not very great. Of course there are scholars there, jurists and technicians but they are not fit for village heads. They are too advanced, fit to become prime minister or political party leaders, but not to become village heads. Another problem is to find enough people to teach at the schools so that children who go there to join their fathers can have a normal education like elsewhere in Indonesia.

..... Another problem is the A category prisoners; 5,000 have to be brought up for trial. In the six years since 1965, we have tried about 200 people.....that is, a rate of 30 a year. At this rate, it will take us 150 years to try 5,000 people. Of course, this is not possible. A few months ago, the Ministry of Justice announced that it was appointing 500 new judges. These judges can help speed up the trials.

Another complaint is that we are not treating the prisoners well..... If you think about the situation in Europe, then the treatment will be disappointing, but if you come with open minds.....considering how rich and poor we are, then your conclusion will be that we have done everything we can to give them proper treatment. We are very poor and need every rupiah for development.....so what we give them is the maximum possible. I am not asking you to agree with what is going on, but at least to understand....."

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The following points were made in answers to questions:

--- C category prisoners are just followers of the Communist Party, they joined but without being really convinced of communist ideology. We hope to finish releasing them by the end of this year. B category are cadres of the Communist Party, but we have no evidence to bring them before court.

--- (In reply to a question about sending packages to individuals in detention.) It is not permitted to help specified persons, for example to send slippers to Pramudya Anantatoer. If you want to send help, the government will decide to whom it will be given. Assistance is channelled through the Kopkamtib, then we take care of the transportation. If you want to help us, please contact my office. Families can send one food package a month to Buru, and letters free of charge from Buru to Java and vice versa.

--- Up to now, help to families of prisoners has only be provided by the religious organisations; nothing has yet been done by the government.

--- (In reply to a question about assistance to families of prisoners.)
This is not a problem, because they are not prisoners; they are free citizens. They are not under the jurisdiction of my office or the Kopkamtib.

--- (In reply to a question about the number of prisoners in detention.)
In Buru alone, we have 10,000 people. I cannot tell you the number throughout the whole of Indonesia because it is a floating rate. I can only give you an estimate.

--- X category covers people newly arrested who are still under interrogation. They have not yet been classified as A, B or C.

--- (In reply to a question about the number of executions.)
I think about seven have been executed.

--- (Are Buru prisoners allowed to write books?)
They are permitted to write. The problem is: there are no pencils or paper. They are not allowed to have pencil or paper.