

The History of Violence and the State in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper argues that systematic acts of violence in Indonesia only began to occur during the time of Dutch colonial rule and increased in scale in the post-Independence period when the number of victims of the violent of 1965 was greater than during the whole period prior to Independence. The tragedy which took at least half a million lives was the biggest act of violence in the history of Indonesia and has had widespread repercussions in terms of human rights, the repressive role of the state, and further acts of state-perpetrated violence for the following four decades. It also overlapped with inter-communal violence where community groups were coerced or willingly assisted in the killing of alleged members of the communist party. According to some definitions, the events of 1965-66 can be considered an act of genocide consisting of the partial destruction of a group in society similar to the act of killing the intellectual elites of Cambodia. Reconciliation has been effected at the local level in recent times, with notable efforts taking place between Muslim groups and the victims of the violence. However, such reconciliation needs to take on national proportions through active investigations as a part of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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List of Acronyms and Foreign Language Terms

<i>Banser NU</i>	A paramilitary group formed by Nahdhatul Ulama
<i>Barisan Tani Indonesia – BTI</i>	Indonesian Farmers’ Front
<i>Gerakan Tiga Puluh September – G30S</i>	30 September Movement
<i>Gerwani</i>	Women’s wing of the PKI
<i>Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam – HMI</i>	Islamic Students’ Association
<i>Kartu Tanda Penduduk – KTP</i>	Indonesian identity card (originally effective for a three-year period, increased to five years)
<i>kyai</i>	Islamic cleric
<i>Kokam Muhammadiyah</i>	A paramilitary group formed by Muhammadiyah
<i>Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi – KKR</i>	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
<i>Kopkamtib</i>	Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order
<i>Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat – MPR</i>	People’s Consultative Assembly
<i>Muhammadiyah</i>	Indonesian Muslim organisation
<i>Nahdhatul Ulama – NU</i>	Indonesian Muslim organisation
<i>Pancasila</i>	state philosophy
<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia – PKI</i>	Indonesian Communist Party
<i>Pemuda Rakyat – PR</i>	Communist Youth Organisation
<i>SARA – Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar golongan</i>	Ethnicity, Religion, Race and Societal Relations

The History of Violence and the State in Indonesia

By Asvi Warman Adam¹

1. Introduction

When did violence first begin in the region we now know as Indonesia? Indeed it is difficult to determine this. However, in the collective memory of Indonesians, particularly the Javanese, discussions on violence and political intrigue will often refer to the case of Tunggul Ametung and Ken Arok in Java. There are other cases from other kingdoms of the day, however this is the most famous. In the 13th century, when Tunggul Ametung was in power in Java, an intriguing incident took place at the palace of Tumapel. Ken Arok, one of the palace guards known for his history of committing robbery, murdered Tunggul Ametung and walked away from the murder while Kebo Ijo, another palace guard, was punished after being falsely accused of the murder (Saini, 2000:12-13). Violence was not only recorded in Java but also in other kingdoms at the time, including Aceh. Before the Europeans came to the archipelago, rulers and even locals were already familiar with the term which foreign observers call “amok”, such as the case in Banten in 1648, when a person ran amok in the market and murdered several people. It seems, however, that the incidents of violence which took place before the arrival of the Europeans were caused either by the elites or by the citizenry, and thus cannot be described as systematic or state-based violence.

However, this paper argues that systematic acts of violence only began to occur during the time of Dutch colonial rule, and increased in scale in the post-Independence² period, when the number of victims of violence of the events of 1965 was greater than in the entire period prior to Independence. In 1965, mass violence followed what was deemed to be an attempted coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Untung, together with the *Biro Khusus* (special branch) of the communist party (PKI – *Partai Komunis Indonesia*)³. In other words, this paper argues that the 350-year Dutch occupation in Indonesia had fewer casualties than the 35-year period when Indonesia was ruled by the New Order government under Suharto, between 1965 and 1998. The 1965 tragedy which took at least half a million lives was the biggest single act of violence in the history of Indonesia.

This paper reviews the history of violence in Indonesia, with a focus on violence perpetrated by the state. It reviews the background of violence in the post-Independence period, particularly during 1965-66. It also examines the nature of the mass killings of 1965-66 and the various estimates of the number of victims, as well as whether the nature of the violence can be classified as genocide. There is further discussion of the institutionalisation of state-based violence under the New Order as well as concepts of state-based terrorism in the history of violence in Indonesia since Independence. The final sections of this paper discuss the efforts made by victims of violence to restore their rights as citizens and reflects on reconciliation between the perpetrators and victims of violence.

¹ This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the SEASREP-SEPHIS Workshop “The Master Narrative Challenged; Dominant Histories and Emerging Narratives”, University of San Carlos, Cebu City, Philippines, 31 January-2 February 2007. My thanks go to Rachael Diprose and Jo Boyce for their substantive and editorial suggestions.

² Independence was declared by the young nationalists in 1945 and officially recognised by the Dutch in 1949.

³ Also known as the Military Branch (*Biro Militer*), it was renowned for undertaking secret activities to gain support for communist party policies from within the military. This section was directly under the control of the PKI chairperson.

2. The beginnings of state-perpetrated violence in Indonesia

The roots of state-perpetrated violence can be traced to the colonial era. While history textbooks in Indonesia describe the early 20th century as the period of implementation of the "ethical policy" (a new policy of concern for the welfare of Indonesians rather than exploitation) by the Dutch in this archipelago (Ricklefs, 2005), at the same time successive military expeditions were in fact dispatched to Aceh, Lombok, Central and South Sumatra, Borneo, Aceh, Central and South Sulawesi, Seram, Flores, Timor, Bali and again Aceh.

Henk Schulte Nordholt (2002) suggests that the Dutch colonial government contributed a great deal to the emergence of violent action in Indonesia. From 1871 to 1910 the colonial army murdered around 125,000 people (Schulte Nordholt, 2002: 37). Most of the victims were from Aceh where the Dutch had sent police forces. About 75,000, or 15% of the region's inhabitants, were killed during the period (ibid: 36). Acts of violence were carried out by the Dutch as a show of force in regions where there was opposition to the Dutch in order to maintain political stability and security in the Netherlands East Indies territories.

Following Indonesia's independence, various rebellions broke out in the country with a high death toll, though they were eventually stamped out. Many of these were not so much calls for new states as rebellions against centralised rule and hegemony as well as demands for greater autonomy in the regions (Diprose, 2007). The rebel movements included PRRI (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia* – Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia)⁴ in West Sumatra in 1958, Permesta (*Piagam Perjuangan Semesta* – Charter of the Common Struggle⁵) in North Sulawesi in 1958, and *Republik Maluku Selatan* (Republic of South Maluku – RMS), in Ambon in 1950 (Staf Angkatan Bersenjata, 1964: 94-96 and 119-120).

3. Background to violence in the 1960s⁶

However, one of the greatest tragedies of Indonesia's history was the massacres which occurred in 1965. A fair allegory for the period leading up to the outbreak of the G30S (*Gerakan Tiga Puluh September*, 30 September Movement) Affair in 1965 would be '*Ibu Pertiwi* (Mother Indonesia) is Heavily Pregnant'. And what she bore was a tragedy that consumed countless victims and brought about suffering that continued for the next 40 years.

The events of 1965 occurred at the height of the Cold War, with the world split into two mutually opposed camps, the capitalist-liberal camp and the communist camp. The domestic situation in Indonesia was also dire as the country had been in a deep economic crisis since the start of the 1960s. In 1962-1963 there was a protracted drought, the rice crops failed, and a great plague of rats destroyed all the rice plants and stocks, creating famine throughout Java (Onghokham, 2002: 13). Basic goods – not just food, but fuels such as petrol and kerosene – vanished from the marketplace. Sugar and flour became scarce, while the price skyrocketed. Uncertainties about stocks of goods created panic among the public, thereby raising the political temperature (ibid).

In the midst of this economic and social upheaval, there was fierce political agitation in the capital (Onghokham, 2002). The 'Confrontation'⁷ with Malaysia – an anti-Malaysia strategy

⁴ A counter-government proclaimed in February 1958 in Padang, West Sumatra

⁵ A North-Sulawesi based-autonomist revolt that became public in February 1958

⁶ This section draws heavily on Onghokham (2002)

pursued by President Sukarno at the time, protesting against the creation of the federation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 (Ricklefs, 2005: 539) – triggered massive riots in Indonesia. The British Embassy was burned down, homes of British residents were looted, and their cars were torched by mobs (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 1975: 235-236). This ‘*Ganyang Malaysia*’ (Crush Malaysia) movement created the opportunity for all kinds of anti-imperialist demonstrations. Many Americans and Britons left Indonesia. There was also agitation from the left to disband the HMI (Islamic Students Association). Furthermore, the 50th anniversary of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) was celebrated on a grand scale in 1965 and, at the same time, there were rumours that President Sukarno was gravely ill and did not have long to live (Adam, 2004: xiv).

Under these circumstances, there was a power struggle between three forces: President Sukarno, the army and the PKI (Adam, 2004: xiv). Amid this unwieldy balance of power, it seemed that by mid-1965 the PKI was gaining the upper hand (ibid). Non-communist and anti-communist forces within the country, and of course the western nations, were increasingly concerned about the situation in Indonesia, which, it was feared, would soon fall into the hands of the left (ibid). Such concerns were further strengthened by what President Sukarno called the ‘Jakarta-Pyongyang-Beijing-Hanoi Axis’, an alliance of governments across Asia which opposed colonial imperialism (Ricklefs, 2005: 552).

If political power in the capital seemed to be shifting to the left, according to the observations of the historian Onghokham, who was travelling through Central Java, East Java and Madura on an extended tour at the time, youth militancy was rising amongst anti-communist sympathisers (2002: 15). This right-wing youth militancy arose for two reasons.

First, ‘*aksi sepihak*’ (unilateral actions)⁸ were being taken by the BTI (Indonesian Farmers’ Front), the PKI, and *Pemuda Rakyat* (PR – the Communist Youth Organisation). Beginning in 1963, BTI and PKI carried out ‘unilateral actions’ against ‘village devils’, including landlords, village authorities, and moneylenders all over Java (Ricklefs, 2005: 541). These actions in the form of protests, land seizures, and removals of village heads occurred on Java island, where much of the Indonesian population was situated. The unrest was most widespread and intense in villages in Java because the perpetrators were from the poor classes, and their actions were uncontrolled. This chaotic situation drove community members to arm themselves for self-defence (Adam, 2004: xiv).

Second, there were rumours about the formation of a ‘Fifth Force’. This was an idea suggested by the PKI Chairman to President Sukarno of arming the workers and peasants and turning them into the fifth force in addition to the existing four branches of the armed forces of the time; the army, navy, air force, and police (Ricklefs, 2005: 548). However, it was rejected by the army.

Furthermore, a land reform law was enacted in 1959 that, while on the whole not particularly radical, contained certain provisions regarding the sharing of crops between the peasants who

⁷ From the point of view of Indonesia’s international outlook, one might suggest that its opposition to the formation of Malaysia was to be expected as a matter of course and should not have come as a surprise. For Sukarno, the successful termination of Indonesia’s confrontation over West Irian obviously did not mark the completion of its unfinished revolution. He said “...is, with the liberation of West Irian, the Republic of Indonesia already safe and free from the threads of imperialism? No, far from it. ‘Malaysia is still ‘posed’ at the doorstep of the Republic of Indonesia”. Independence Day address, 17 August 1963, in Sukarno, *Bendera Revolusi*, 553, quoted in Djiwandono (1996: 50)..

⁸ These *aksi sepihak* were a series of actions carried out by various interested parties to bring about Land Reform legislation. This involved seizing large parcels of land owned by individuals and handing them over to the state so they would become state-owned land

worked the land and the landowners. The reform was highly advantageous to the peasants and would have recast rural society, much to the fury of the landowners. In the past, landowners had received 60% of the harvest and the peasants only 40% (Onghokham, 2002:15). Under the new law these proportions were reversed.

Then came rumours from the capital that a Council of Generals was being formed and was supposedly planning a coup against Sukarno. In response to this rumour, Lieutenant Colonel Untung planned to arrest the alleged members of the Council of Generals through the G30S movement, which he formed for this purpose, and take them to the president. However, some of the members resisted arrest and were killed, while others who were meant to be taken to the president on October 1 were found to have been killed, although it remains unclear who was responsible for the killings. In total, six alleged members of the Council of Generals and one lower-ranking officer were killed (Onghokham, 2002).

At the same time, on October 1, 1965, Untung dissolved Sukarno's cabinet and created a Revolutionary Council (*Dewan Revolusi*) made up of a list of 45 members (many of whom did not know they were on the list), some of whom were from the PKI, and many from the military (ibid). On the same day, Untung announced that the highest sections of the military would be demoted to the position of Lieutenant Colonel (ibid). Following these tumultuous events which involved factional splits in the army, mutual accusations, confusion over who the perpetrators of killings were and so on, Untung and the PKI were blamed for the killing of the Generals and planning a coup d'etat (ibid). This, together with Suharto's faction of the military taking control of the situation and media depictions of the situation, triggered mass violence against communists and supposed sympathisers. This is discussed further below.

The eruption of violence in 1965 was the result of a culmination of tensions from the previous several years which spurred people to commit extraordinary violence. Mass slaughter took place, mostly in Central Java, East Java and Bali, and North Sumatra.⁹ While some local youths and residents were clearly involved in killing, in many places there were indications that the massacres only began once military units arrived in the regions (Cribb, 1990:21). '*Basmil G30S sampai ke akar-akarnya*' ('Destroy the September 30th Movement down to its roots') was the order for the troops in the field (Dinuth, 1997: 137).

The motivations of those involved in the slaughter varied widely, from soldiers under the control of Suharto's state of emergency military government, who were simply carrying out their orders to destroy the PKI, to individuals who, for any number of reasons, jumped on the bandwagon and defamed their colleagues to the authorities, resulting in their arrest and death (Cribb, 1990). These defamations were mentioned by Sukarno in several of his speeches between 1965 and 1967, which were published in 2003 after the resignation of Suharto (Setiyono and Triyana, 2003). Sukarno referred to the carnage in East Java in a speech to the HMI in Bogor on 18 December 1965. He even asked the HMI to 'go into the field in Central Java and East Java' to stop the killing. Many PKI or PR sympathisers at the time were being massacred. Sukarno went on to say that the killing was being carried out in a sadistic way and the people did not even dare to bury the victims' corpses:

⁹ The killing did not only take place in these four regions. Paul Webb has written about the slaughter in East Nusa Tenggara (Webb, 1986). A thesis by Bonnie Triyana at Diponegoro University Semarang (August 2003) discusses the slaughter in Grobogan, Central Java. Yenny Narny, a history lecturer at Andalas University, Padang, interviewed G30S victims in West Sumatra; the transcript and cassette are at the Lontar Foundation, Jakarta. In 2006 Hasta Mitra published a testimony of Yoseph Tugio Taher about the slaughter in Riau, Sumatra.

“You’d better not try to take care of a corpse, or you’ll get killed yourself. The bodies are simply being abandoned beneath trees, on the river banks, disposed of just like dead dogs” (ibid: 302).

In one incident a car was stopped in East Java and the passengers were given a bundle containing the head of a PR member (ibid: 250-251).

The press coverage at the time reported that *Gerwani* (the women’s wing of the PKI) had defiled the bodies of the six murdered Generals. On 12 December 1965, speaking in Bogor on the anniversary of the Antara press agency, the president said that, according to the autopsies, none of the genitals of the six generals had been cut off in the Lubang Buaya incident, nor had their eyes been gouged out, as had been reported in the press (ibid:239-240). Moreover, the next day, speaking to a group of governors from all of Indonesia’s provinces, Sukarno said the ‘knives’ that such a fuss had been made over because they were labelled as ‘eyeball extractors’ were nothing more than rubber tappers knives (ibid: 246-7).

It is often said the situation at the time was one of ‘kill or be killed’. But it must be recognised that the positions of the left on the one hand, and of the military and the religious groups (Islamic and Christian) on the other hand, were unbalanced in favour of the latter. The communists by that point lacked the strength to kill anyone. Many in the community had only two options at the time: to kill others who were (accused as) PKI, or to be killed by the military or others if they did not carry out such killings (on the basis that they must themselves be PKI sympathisers) (Cribb, 1990:36).

4. The mass killings in 1965

Cribb (2003: 1) states that the 1965 killings were carried out using simple implements such as knives, machetes, and guns. There were no gas chambers such as those that were used by the Nazis in the slaughter of the Jews and many other groups. And those who were executed were not taken far before being killed; usually they were killed near their homes. Another feature of the killings is that they were usually carried out at night. The killings of the PKI were not carried out systematically; the pattern varied from one region to another.

The process of seeking to eradicate PKI members and sympathisers was completed relatively quickly, in just a matter of months. The Nazis needed many years, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia four years, to do their work. Several factors influenced the fact that it was possible to destroy the PKI quickly. First, the conflict between communist and non-communist groups, particularly the *kyai* (Islamic clerics), had been evident since early in the decade (ibid). Second, the military is suspected of playing a role in motivating the masses to commit violence. Third, the mass media, under the control of the military, deliberately provoked the public’s rage¹⁰.

The role of the military’s daily newspapers such as Angkatan Bersenjata (AB) and Berita Yudha (BY) was crucial in inciting violence. It was these newspapers that first carried sadistic reports of the *Gerwani* slicing the Generals’ genitals with razor blades mentioned above¹¹. In fact, according to the autopsies, as quoted by Ben Anderson (1987: 109-134), the bodies had

¹⁰ Thousands of leaflets were distributed in Kediri stating that Muslims were killed in Madiun in 1948.

¹¹ “Sukarelawan-sukarelawan Gerwani telah bermain-main dengan para Jenderal dengan menggosok-gosokkan kemaluan mereka ke kemaluan sendiri” (Gerwani volunteers have been playing around with the Generals, rubbing their genitals against their own) (Angkatan Bersenjata, 11 Oktober 1965). “...tubuh para Jenderal itu telah dirusak, mata dicungkil dan sementara ada yang dipotong kemaluan mereka’ (the bodies of the Generals have been damaged, their eyes have been gouged out while others have had their genitals cut off) (Berita Yudha Minggu, 11 Oktober 1965) , quoted in Stanley (2002: 27).

only gunshot wounds and bruises from rifle butts or from hitting the walls of the well where some of their bodies were found. Yet these reports of the leftist women's sadism spurred the public's anger.

The events of the mass killing of 1965 need to be separated into (1) intercommunal conflict, and (2) violence committed by the state. At the community level, the post-G30S killings were a natural consequence of existing conflicts and tensions at the time, particularly with regard to agrarian matters in the rural areas which resulted in death in some cases. Clearly, there were fewer victims of violence in the period before 1965 (very few in fact) compared with the numbers slaughtered after G30S. But I wish deliberately to compare and relate the pre-1965 and post-1965 periods stating that the mass killings committed by the Islamic community (mostly the *Banser NU*, a paramilitary group formed by Islamic organisation *Nahdhatul Ulama – NU*¹²) in East Java, for example, were simply a reaction to the social conflict that had already developed at the time. That this reaction was far fiercer than the actions that preceded it is understandable because of the climate of violence and fear which erupted with the 1965 political crisis.

In particular, the intercommunal conflicts and tensions between community members/groups could have been settled peacefully if the political events of 1965 had not occurred, and if the state had not created the negative stereotypes and stigma associated with being affiliated with communism. For example, the *Banser NU* and *Kokam Muhammadiyah* (a paramilitary group formed by Islamic organisation *Muhammadiyah*), formed before 1965 as a result of previous political tensions, could have reconciled with the G30S victims had there not been a stigma attached to these victims. But instead, given the climate of fear and distrust promoted by the state, these paramilitary groups were implicated in the mass killings of supposed communists from 1965-66.

According to Cribb (1990: 21), 'in most cases, the killings did not begin until elite military units had arrived in a locality and had sanctioned violence by instruction or example'. In a report by the Army Historical Center (*Pusat Sejarah TNI AD*) it is admitted that the 'RPKAD (the Army Commando Corps) provided basic military training in the use of weapons and in tactics for maintaining village security within the framework of ABRI's (The Indonesian Armed Forces) cooperation with the people in eradicating the remnants of G30S/PKI'. These special troops only returned to Jakarta on 25 December 1965 after serving in Central Java from 17 October 1965 (Cribb, 1990: 167).

With regard to military involvement, according to Cribb (1990: 36), 'Encouraging as wide as possible participation in the massacres was a way of creating complicity, a way of committing fence-sitters to the victory of the anti-communist forces. The more hands which were bloodied by suppression of communism, the more hands which could be depended upon to stand firm against any future PKI resurgence and depended upon not to turn and point in accusation against those who sponsored the massacre'. This statement of Cribb's raises many important questions which need further investigation about the role of different groups in stimulating the violence.

5. The number of victims

¹² Today NU is one of the largest Muslim Associations in Indonesia together with Muhammadiyah

According to Cribb (2001), there are several ways to calculate the number of victims in the mass killings of 1965. The first is to quote the official statements of the government security agencies. According to the Fact Finding Commission formed after these bloody events, the number of victims was 78,000. But this figure is clearly far too low. However, one of the members of the Fact Finding Commission in an interview years later explained that the Commission only interviewed a handful of people in a few cities about the number of deaths and a more accurate figure would be around ten times that (Oei, Toer and Prasetyo 1995: 191). Kopkamtib (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order), in one of its reports, mentioned a figure of 1,000,000 dead (800,000 in Central and East Java 100,000 in Bali and 100,000 in Sumatra)¹³.

The second method is to count the remains of the victims. This could be done by exhuming the mass graves, which are located throughout Indonesia. But this figure would certainly not be accurate, because many of the victims were thrown into the forest and eaten by wild animals, or dumped into rivers or the sea.

A third method is to collect testimony from the victims who were lucky enough to survive, those who witnessed the killing or those who carried them out. This can and should be done in the future, even though it will take some time.

A fourth method is through the use of demographic techniques, by comparing the population of a region before and after the events, taking into account natural birth and death rates. The number of victims can be inferred from the difference in the figures. The weakness of this technique is that the census figures that are available cover a much longer period; censuses were conducted only in 1961 and 1971. Furthermore, not everyone who died was killed; people died of illness or other natural causes. Likewise, those who migrated to other regions during that period would also have to be excluded from the calculation.

The fifth method is to rely on institutional reports. In this way we get a moderate figure, in between the extreme estimates. Cribb (2001) mentions 500,000 as a reasonable figure. This figure is also supported by a sixth technique employed by Iwan Gardono Sudjatmiko (2002) which involved totalling the figures found in 39 articles and books that have discussed the 1965 killings and then dividing by 39. This method gives an average figure of 430,590 victims.

Even so, these statistics are cold numbers and do not represent the emotional impacts of being gripped with fear or the disgust at seeing people killed or raped. The widespread psychological and cultural impacts of the killings have never been measured in any systematic way, despite the long-term consequences of 1965 for Indonesian society. This also stimulates further questioning: why didn't the security forces try to intervene to prevent such widespread slaughter? One certainly gets the impression that the violence was allowed to happen. After all, this meant eliminating the group that had been involved in power struggles with the military.

6. Genocide?

The term *genocide* was first introduced by Raphael Lemkin, an American legal expert of Polish origin, in 1944 (Sémelin 2002). In 1948 the term was adopted by the United Nations in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, it has

¹³ This Kopkamtib report was never published. This information is found in Palmos (1966) as quoted by Cribb (2003: 15).

proved very difficult to apply this convention to many cases of mass slaughter other than the Holocaust during World War II, as the definition of genocide has been limited to the elimination of a certain group (Sémelin, 2002: 490). For this reason, the French expert Jacques Sémelin has tried to re-examine the concept in terms of the process through which the slaughter occurs. Such slaughter must clearly be organised. Thus, the mass deaths from the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant do not fall into this category (Sémelin, 2002: 487). Sémelin categorises slaughter into two types: destruction for submission (*détruire pour soumettre*) and destruction for extermination (*détruire pour éradiquer*) (Sémelin, 2002: 488-490).

In the case of the Khmer Rouge, the intention was not to destroy the entire Cambodian people (with the exception of the Champa ethnic group, who are Muslims). Instead, Cambodians from the bourgeoisie class (one descriptive characteristic of this group was that they were intellectuals and wore glasses) were eliminated in order to bring the rest of society into submission. In Sémelin's analysis (2002: 491), the massacres by Pol Pot and his colleagues in Cambodia can be categorised as genocide as they aimed to exterminate one group in society. By way of analogy, the 1965 massacres in Indonesia were very similar. Those accused of being PKI were slaughtered not only to destroy a group with a certain ideology, but also to intimidate the rest of the community into submitting to the authorities. This opens up the debate as to whether the violence in 1965 can be categorised as genocide. It seems, using the analogy of Cambodia, that it is not out of the question that the violence in 1965 *can* be categorised as genocide.

7. The institutionalisation of violence after 1965

Henk Schulte Nordholt¹⁴ maintains that in Indonesia's history, the intensity of violence increases during a transition of power, to reinforce power, and also amid economic woes. This was the case with the quashing of the regional rebellions by the Dutch, who used violence both during their transition to power and to reinforce their power whenever rebel groups arose, and again by the Sukarno government in the quashing of the regional rebellions of the 1950s. Furthermore, this is exactly what happened throughout the period of the New Order under the Suharto regime, which took power after the violence of 1965. However, while the rebellions prior to the 1960s were relatively short-lived affairs, the G30S movement coup attempt and the consequent violence set off the longest episode of violence since Indonesian independence. Despite the passage of 40 years, the impact of this incident lingers and has had deep and lasting repercussions for Indonesian society up to the present.

The view that communists and communism were the enemy was constantly recycled by the New Order regime under Suharto, especially the New Order military during its reign. The Nazi regime exterminated millions of Jewish people in gas chambers at one juncture in history. But in Indonesia, the torture inflicted on communists or those accused of being sympathisers lasted for decades, and they suffered physical pain followed by mental torment. I share the view of Australian historian Robert Cribb¹⁵ that Indonesia could not have guaranteed the absence of brutality if the communists had risen to power. However, I wish to point out that the slaughter of 500,000 people in 1965 was the gravest tragedy of humanity in Indonesia's history.

¹⁴ At a seminar entitled "The Past, Present and Future of Timor Leste", Lisbon-Coimbra, 10-15 July 2000

¹⁵ Statement by Robert Cribb at the launch of the Indonesian edition of his book "Pembantaian PKI di Jawa dan Bali, 1965-1966" in Yogyakarta, 16 October 2003

The 1965 incident also served as a watershed, marking major changes in economic, political and cultural arenas. The free-and-active, non-aligned foreign policy was changed to a pro-American and pro-western policy. The self-supporting economy shifted to a market economy relying on capital and external loans. The country's entire cultural potential was mustered to ensure successful development, with no more polemics or criticism. Unlike the changes occurring in other periods, those of 1965 were so simultaneous that their reverberations were more alarming. The process and modes of institutionalisation of state violence during the New Order era are discussed below.

The institution formed after the outbreak of G30S had unlimited power. *Kopkamtib* (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order) seized and interrogated people considered dangerous to the government. It also instructed the attorney general to banish B-category political detainees (people indicated to be involved in G30S but against whom there was insufficient evidence) to Buru Island (1969-1979). *Kopkamtib* decided whether somebody was "environmentally clean" (with no family members directly or indirectly implicated in G30S) through special screening in the selection of civil servants and armed forces candidates, or periodical screening in the process of rank/office promotion of servicemen and civil servants (n/a 1988).

Under Admiral Sudomo in the 1970s, *Kopkamtib* prohibited the public from undertaking any activity or publishing anything seen by the government as a potential source of conflict relating to the key areas of ethnicity, religion, race and societal relations, a concept known as SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar golongan*). At the end of the New Order period, this body became the Coordinating Agency to Support the Strengthening of National Stability (Bakorstranas), which was dissolved by then-president Abdurrahman Wahid in 2000.

The 1965 events also led to a diplomatic freeze with the People's Republic of China. Everything suggestive of China was suspect and banned. Parcels of magazines with Chinese characters were examined by immigration personnel; religious and sociocultural activities were considerably restricted if not prohibited. In the various social disturbances arising under the New Order regime, the Chinese often became a target of mass fury (Purdey, 2005: 32). The policy of giving Indonesian names to or renaming citizens of Chinese descent which began in 1966 is worth noting (Lindsey, 2005: 55). It was a form of oppression that affected individuals in the community considerably. A name has its meaning and members of society may also treat each other according to their names, as they indicate the status and position of families.

The 1965 violence was purposely maintained by the New Order regime to perpetuate its power. One of the characteristics of the 1965 developments was the utilisation of history to maintain conflicts. The New Order's orchestration of history took different forms: the Indonesian National History (SNI) school textbooks which clearly mentioned Sukarno's involvement in the G30S coup attempt; Labour Day was annulled and the June 1 Pancasila (state philosophy) anniversary was replaced by the October 1 Pancasila Sanctity Day, which had nothing to do with Pancasila; the killing of the six Generals was commemorated, while the massacre of 500,000 people that happened thereafter was ignored.

The year 1981 marked the introduction of a decree by the minister of domestic affairs which prevented the victims and their families from applying for civil service, military, police and other strategic public positions. Historical vengeance was exacted through film making (depicting those involved in the G30S movement as traitors), the construction of museums and monuments honouring anti-communist and anti-Islamic radicals, and through the teaching of

anti-communist propaganda subjects at school. Making a scapegoat of PKI was in fact a means used by the military authorities and the New Order regime to repress dissident politicians and potential adversaries, and it was also an effort to legitimise the past killings they were responsible for. It was for this reason that in the late 1980s three youths in Yogyakarta were sent to prison for five years for subversion because of the only minor charges of selling books by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (a left-wing writer who was arrested and imprisoned for 10 years and whose books were banned under the New Order), organising discussions and possessing a novel by Iwan Simatupang – a non-communist writer – *Merahnya Merah*.

8. State terrorism

While recent discussions on terrorism in Indonesia mostly concern civil communities and non-state groups, Ariel Heryanto (2006) has investigated state-based terrorism, which was just as brutal and had an enormous impact. State-based terrorism is an effort to establish the identities of contemporary states through the construction of subversion. In Indonesia, it was supported by the Subversion Law (presidential decree of 1963 which was ratified in its entirety as a law in 1969) (Heryanto, 2006:109) which was abolished only after Suharto lost power¹⁶. The law served its purpose of creating a relatively “stable” society, as the government wanted. But that was not enough; other mechanisms were also applied, and one of them was state terrorism. This was a series of state-sponsored campaigns to create terror and spread it among the citizenry. The process began with people’s fears because of acts of violence committed by the state apparatus against certain individuals or groups. The victims were (considered) representatives of larger groups. The government purposely made a display of violence and repeatedly broadcast it to maintain fear and mutual suspicion. People would then spread these horror stories with occasional gruesome details which would intensify the fear (ibid: 19).

If we consider state-based policies against the victims of the violence of 1965, the victimisation of the Chinese, and the persecution of supposed subversive elements, then it is clear that state terrorism was common during the New Order period. Various social groups became victims targeted by the state: criminals in the so-called “mysterious killings” in the 1980s in different parts of Java; and Islamic groups, including the Woyla hijacking case in Bangkok¹⁷, the Tanjung Priok incident, where demonstrators were shot during protests following the entry of a soldier into a mosque wearing shoes, and the Talangsari case, where villages that were Islamic strongholds were attacked in Lampung. However, the longest and most intense episode of terrorism was the one experienced by those believed to have been involved in the 1965 event. Starting with the massacre of half a million people and the arrest of hundreds of thousand of others, this continued with the cancellation of the passports of Indonesian citizens living abroad after the tragedy, banishment to the island of Buru of suspected sympathisers (1968-1979) and further stigmatisation of the 1965 victims and their families discussed in the previous section.

Heryanto (2006) argues that even the concept of “state” itself is problematic. He uses the Weber definition of “a system of authority that has legitimate monopoly over institutionalised violence in a given territory” (2006: 163). However, Heryanto modifies the term using the neo-Marxist concept of hegemony and adds an international dimension, including US support for the Indonesian military during the New Order. Heryanto argues that observers ‘rarely fail to mention’ the contribution of the US government to the development of the New Order’s militarisation and intelligence operations (2006: 166). Contrary to the currently accepted opinion, state terrorism

¹⁶ On 19 May 1999 the Habibie government issued Law No. 26/1999 that annulled the Anti-Subversion Law (Heryanto, 2006: 111)

¹⁷ A DC 9 owned by Garuda Indonesia Airways en route from Palembang in Sumatra to Jakarta and on to Bangkok was hijacked by an Islamic extremist group on March 28, 1981.

occurs not only in communist, socialist and authoritarian countries but also in countries upholding the principle of “liberal democracy”, including the United States, particularly since the 1980s¹⁸. According to Heryanto, we may be able to find examples of it in any country; what differentiates countries is its scope, intensity, duration and style (Heryanto, 2006: 163).

There are at least two aspects here needing further discussion: the relationship between terrorism and its support from community groups; and the connection between terrorism and capitalism.¹⁹ With regard to the 1965 case, state terrorism not only involved the authorities but was also supported by Islamic groups. They were the “perpetrators” behind the 1965 tragedy who became the “victims” in later periods. The root of the conflict can be traced back to the period after Indonesian independence (the 1948 Madiun affair²⁰, political rivalry in the 1955 election, PKI unilateral actions, etc). In Aceh, General Ishak Juarsa asked *ulemas* (Muslim leaders) for their opinion following the G30S. These Aceh Islamic scholars decided that “communism was a forbidden ideology and members of the party were infidels” (a paper by Tgk Abdullah Ujong Rimba, 1965 cf Ambary, 2001). A similar religious decision was made by *Muhammadiyah* in November 1965 (Ambary, 2001). Such religious discourses resulted in people refusing to let the 1965 victims be buried in Temanggung in Central Java. Even though they had been dead for decades, the bodies of these communists were still not accepted in this nation of Pancasila. Terror followed them to the grave.

State terrorism also supported capitalism²¹ as argued in articles by Hilmar Farid (2005) and John Pilger.²² Mass killings, arrests, looting of people’s homes and lands and emasculation of the working class were all integral parts of New Order economic activities. Land could be taken over from the people or could be bought cheaply from those afraid of being called communists. Agrarian experts vanished from IPB (Bogor Agricultural Institute). Issues about land could not be discussed.

The number of farmers who died in the 1965 tragedy was so great that the country saw a drastic decline in agricultural produce. The United States provided food support which started with the 480 Public Law program which subsidised purchases of wheat from the US. It was a multipurpose aid program: first, to establish international markets for US agricultural products; and second, to pull third world countries into the US orbit as the proceeds from the sales of food products that they acquired cheaply were then used to buy weapons from the US (Aditjondro, 2006).

To process this wheat, Bogasari flour mills were built in Tanjung Priok and Tanjung Perak. The wheat monopoly led to the rise of an instant food business empire, Indofood Sukses Makmur which was responsible for a change in the diet of most Indonesians during the New Order regime. Without even a hectare of land sown to wheat, Indonesia has become the storage place for US, Canadian and Australian wheat and the country has been turned into the world’s largest

¹⁸ Heryanto argues that Noam Chomsky (1991 b) and several others make separate but similar arguments to the effect that Western states, especially the USA, have been the most important terrorist states in the world since 1980. Most of these arguments refer to violent American intervention overseas, but Heryanto states “ We must not overlook American state terrorism at home against various minority groups”.(2006:165 and 219).

¹⁹ *Tempo*, 3-9 April 2006

²⁰ On September 18, 1948, a group of communist sympathisers seized several strategic places in Madiun and announced on the radio that they had formed a National Front government. Following this, a debate ensued as to whether these actions constituted a *coup d’etat* or only a “*coup de ville*” in the form of a local movement.

²¹ State terrorism supports capitalism by allowing community land to be seized (or buying it at low prices) and if community members are not compliant they are arrested or portrayed as anti-development. On such sites, golf courses, real estate or state enterprises have been built

²² John Pilger, Globalisation in Indonesia: Spoils of a Massacre, *Guardian Weekend*, 14 July 2001.

consumer and exporter of instant noodles, leaving behind East Asian countries where noodles have been a staple food for hundreds of years.

While making Suharto's family and cronies rich, the Bulog-Bogasari-Indofood cartel kept Indonesia's farmers and labourers in poverty. Instant noodles became an instant food that kept the price of rice at a low level. Such prices helped maintain low wages of labour. In short, New Order capitalism was born with the 1965 mass killings.

9. Efforts made by victims to reclaim their rights

Even in their later years (aged 60 and over), many of the victims of the 1965 events are still being tormented. Former political prisoners, unlike other senior citizens, are not issued with life-long identity cards (KTP). When this has been questioned, reference has frequently been made to MPRS Decree No. XXV of 1966 on 'Dissolution of the Indonesia Communist Party, Declaration of the Indonesian Communist Party as a Prohibited Organisation throughout the Territory of the State of the Republic Indonesia, and Prohibition of All Activities to Propagate or Develop the Ideology or Teachings of Communism/Marxism-Leninism' which is discussed below. However, in fact this has no relationship whatsoever with the issuing of identity cards. This was made clear when in October 2003, after a long struggle, Nani Nurani, aged 62 and formerly a dancer at the Cipanas presidential palace, was declared by the Jakarta State Administrative Court to be eligible to receive a life-long KTP. She had been detained for seven years just because she had danced at the PKI anniversary celebration in June 1965. The question is whether the thousands of other former political prisoners would need to file similar cases with State Administrative Courts throughout Indonesia to gain KTPs.

The August 2003 annual session of the MPR (People's Consultative Assembly) failed to revoke MPRS Decree No. XXV of 1966. This MPRS Decree had served for decades as the 'hook' for various discriminatory regulations that affect millions of Indonesian citizens. The only remaining avenue to try to remove the stigma on those and their families who were involved, directly or indirectly, in the 1965 events is through the KKR – *Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi* (the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), established in 2004 by then-president Megawati Sukarnoputri.

There was a breath of fresh air when the Supreme Court wrote a letter to President Megawati on 12 June 2003, letter number KMA/403/VI/2003, signed by the chief justice, Bagir Manan. The consideration section of this letter states that under Article 37 of Law No. 14 of 1985, the Court may provide legal opinions, whether requested or not, to other high institutions of the state. The Supreme Court has recently received many letters from individuals or groups declaring themselves victims of the New Order and requesting rehabilitation. In fact, the authority for such restoration of rights does not lie with the Supreme Court but is instead a prerogative of the president.

Regarding this granting of rehabilitation, under Article 14, Clause 1, of the 1945 Constitution (as amended), the President of the Republic of Indonesia can now grant rehabilitation, so long as a recommendation has been received from the Supreme Court. Article 14 regarding the president's prerogatives, reads:

Clause 1: The President shall grant pardons and the restoration of rights with due attention to the considered opinions of the Supreme Court.

Clause 2: The President shall grant amnesties and the dropping of indictments with due attention to the considered opinions of the People's Representative Assembly.

The Supreme Court's reasons for sending the letter were first to provide some resolution and legal certainty that could restore the victims' status and dignity as citizens with equal rights, and second to support the spirit of reconciliation within Indonesia. This is why the Supreme Court 'provides this opinion and hopes that the President will faithfully consider it and take concrete steps toward a resolution of these earnestly desired claims' (Adam, 2003).

10. Reconciliation: The case of South Blitar

The Trisula Monument in Blitar, East Java, was erected to commemorate the successful elimination of the PKI in 1968. That military operation captured 850 people, with 33 killed. However, the number of victims was certainly greater, because in a grave exhumed in mid-August 2002 at Luweng Tikus, Bakung, South Blitar, there were at least 41 killed (Adam, 2002: 1). They were not shot, but simply taken to the five-foot-wide mouth of the cave and hit on the head with crowbars until they fell dozens of meters to the bottom of the cave (ibid). During the New Order era, the South Blitar region was considered 'not of a clean background' (ibid). *Pancasila* ideology refresher courses were held intensively, twice a month. People were constantly reminded of the 'latent danger of communism'.

During the reform era, President Abdurrahman Wahid tried to defuse the anti-communist discourse by making a public apology to the families of victims of the 1965 massacres and proposing the annulment of TAP MPRS/XXV/1966 on dissolution of the PKI and prohibition of Communism/Marxism-Leninism. But this proposal ran aground because it was rejected by Muslim groups and the military. Nevertheless, these ideas of reconciliation remained alive, particularly among the youth of the large Muslim association, NU, who felt a need to straighten out their own history. 'We bear a great burden as the children of killers' said one activist (Adam: 2002). This is why they resolved to reconcile with the families of victims of the carnage and former political prisoners from the 1965 events, as can be seen in the South Blitar case.

The question remains how to do this? The NU youth whose parents had been involved in the 1965 killing of PKI started by reopening memories about the period around 1965 (Budiawan, 2002). Before 1965, there was no serious tension between the PKI and NU (this applies specifically to South Blitar in East Java, not the province as a whole). The 'kill or be killed', 'strike first' situation was created once G30S broke out. For example, a leaflet circulated containing a list of NU *kyai* (Islamic clerics) who were to be killed by the PKI while at the same time, among the PKI, there was a similar list of names of PKI figures that Banser NU allegedly planned to eliminate (Budiawan, 2002). However, both sides declare that they never produced these leaflets. According to senior NU *kyai*, the killing occurred spontaneously, and in many cases there was pressure or encouragement from the military (ibid). From these confessions it can be concluded that the pamphlets were deliberately produced and circulated by a third party. Suspicion falls on the military, who were known to have a scenario that aimed to 'destroy the PKI down to its roots'.

By 2002, a new awareness arose among the NU community that they had been used by the military to eliminate the PKI. The *kyai* who are still alive from the period have been troubled by this and have agreed with the idea of 'being on good terms again' with the former PKI/BTI members and their families as their deep feelings of remorse have been hard to allay (ibid). Thus, a number of *kyai* began to support reconciliation in 2002, although they did not say so explicitly. The former PKI/BTI members and their families are enthusiastic about this social reconciliation. They feel that their humanity is being restored (*'diuwongke'*) (ibid). There was an

impression, as mentioned by Budiawan, that the psychological burdens of the past were in fact greater among the 'perpetrators' than amongst the 'victims' (cf Todorov 1999).

Given the psychological burden amongst (some) of the older *kyai*, reconciliation has not taken the form of individual expressions of mutual forgiveness (a custom followed during the Idul Fitri celebrations during Eid in Indonesia), or of 'public confession' as has taken place in South Africa. Instead, reconciliation was organised through a joint cultural performance to commemorate the Birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (*Maulud Nabi Muhammad SAW*) which fell on 25 May 2002, with a joint organising committee. The planning, financing, and execution of the activities were all discussed and carried out together. The choice of collective cultural performances (*kenrung*²³ from the NU, and *campursari*²⁴ from the former political prisoners' families) was a tactic used by a young NU activist to make it easier to get permits from the local authorities to hold the event²⁵. So the message of reconciliation would not be blurred by such tactics and even though it was still difficult to express it in words, the joint cultural performance was deliberately held at the public park of the Trisula Monument where the original monument to the elimination of the PKI stands.

By holding the event at the monument park, these two groups, now sitting side by side, were reminded of their opposing positions in 1968, the PKI/BTI as the target of the military operations, and the NU as the supporters behind the operation. All these years, the monument had triggered traumatic feelings on both sides. After the joint cultural performance the significance of the 'historical site' changed, serving as a witness to social reconciliation. This effort is clearly different from the *ishlah* (settlement) attempted by the generals involved in the Lampung and Tanjung Priok massacre cases in Indonesia of giving money to the victims' families so that they would not press charges and make claims.

Grass-roots reconciliation like that which took place in South Blitar clearly needs to be encouraged elsewhere. At the same time, legal and formal efforts need to continue for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The experiences of several other countries have shown that commissions have had varied aims, mandates, and levels of success. But it is hoped that at least the Commission could reveal the historical facts about the violence. In this way, it is hoped that similar human rights violations will not be repeated in the future, and this will serve as some form of recognition for the sufferers of the violence in the past.

11. Recent developments

On 24 February 2004, a monumental decree was issued by the Constitutional Court. This new institution declared that Article 60 (g) of Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections, which prohibited candidacies of those formerly involved in banned parties such as the PKI, had no legal force. This means that former PKI members can run for legislative positions in 2009. The important aspect of this decision is that it states that every citizen has equal rights before the law. Still, many other discriminatory regulations are yet to be annulled, such as the Law on Election of the President: nobody with PKI involvement may run for president. The same is true for elections to sub-district councils (*Dewan Kelurahan*) and village councils (*Badan Perwakilan Desa*).

²³ A traditional form of music in Java

²⁴ A traditional form of music, usually accompanied by dance in Java (such dances usually tell stories)

²⁵ The local military commander (*Danramil*), police sector chief (*Kapolsek*) and the sub-district head (*Camat*)

12. Conclusion

This paper has argued that systematic acts of violence only began to occur in Indonesia during the time of Dutch colonial rule and increased in scale in the post-Independence period, when the number of victims of the violent events of 1965 was greater than during the whole period prior to Independence. The tragedy which took at least half a million lives was the biggest act of violence in the history of Indonesia and has had widespread repercussions in terms of human rights, the repressive role of the state, and further acts of state-perpetrated violence in the following four decades. It also overlapped with inter-communal violence, where community groups were coerced or willingly assisted in the killing of alleged members of the communist party. According to some definitions, the events of 1965-66 can be considered an act of genocide when interpreted as the partial destruction of a group in society like the killing of intellectual elites in Cambodia. Reconciliation has taken place at local levels in recent times with notable efforts taking place between Muslim groups and the victims of the violence. However, such reconciliation needs to take on national proportions through active investigations as a part of a Truth and Reconciliation commission.

Many obstacles remain, but gradually the negative stigma of communism is being eliminated through efforts towards the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, granting rehabilitation to former political prisoners from 1965, and revising the teaching of history in schools. Hopefully, the trauma experienced by the victims of 1965 and their families can gradually be allayed as well. One means towards this is the publication of confessions or memoirs of the survivors of 1965. Many of their children are now no longer afraid to admit that their parents were involved in the events of 1965. Okki Asokawati, a model and television actress, revealed in a television program that her father, AKBP (*Ajun Komisaris Besar Polisi Anwas – Adjunct Commissioner of Police*), was the Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and was detained for over a decade. More recently, the well-known LIPI political scientist Dr Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, admitted that his father was Asmudji Resodiwiryo, a youth wing figure from the PKI who was exiled to Buru Island, and his mother, Sri Suning, was a member of the Jakarta DPR-GR – Provincial Assembly from the *Gerwani* faction (*Kompas*, 10 April 2004). It was also revealed that the late Professor Dr Lukman Sutrisno, an intellectual who was highly critical of the Suharto government, had in 1965-1966 been a torturer of detainees accused of being communists in Yogyakarta (Sriwahyuntari 2004).

13. Epilogue

I will conclude this paper with what has happened between 2004 and 2007. During the 2004 presidential election campaign, I was contacted by a member of the team of presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was eventually elected. He asked me to set up a meeting between himself and General (Marine) Ali Sadikin, the former Governor of Jakarta. The meeting between the two figures did not take place for various reasons. However, I was glad I had a chance to hear the president's own views on history and resolution of the past from a member of his election support team. He believed that bygones should be bygones and there was no need to rake up the past. The president resolved that he would not commit any violation against human rights and would not let such violence happen again in the country. He promised he would also consistently fight against corruption, collusion and nepotism.

This was evident when he played for time and did not choose 21 names out of the list of 42 candidates for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission membership, the list of which he had received a couple of months earlier. The president did not want the Commission to be formed and function straight away as it would have brought to public attention violence and major

violations of human rights which had occurred in the past. Thus, he vied for time and did not nominate the members of the commission to the courts, despite the fact that the Law on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission signed by President Megawati Sukarnoputri on 6 October 2004 stipulated that the body had to be established no later than six months after its enactment.

The year 2005 saw the publication of three books discrediting Sukarno written by Antoine Dake, Victor Fic and Lambert Giebels. In the same year, "A Thousand Reasons why People Loved Suharto" (*Beribu Alasan Rakyat Mencintai Soeharto*) was published. Meanwhile, Golkar Party, the organisation which supported the Suharto regime, presented General Suharto with a commemorative award.

In 2006, after an extended process which spanned a period of seven years (from the drafting to the enactment of the Law on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), on November 7, 2006, the Constitutional Court finally decided that the Law had no legal force. As a result, the efforts to uncover the truth regarding past violations of human rights and document these as a matter of public record are no longer possible until stronger legislation is passed which forces the government to give such a Commission legal standing and provide adequate funds for such an initiative. The Minister/State Secretary immediately reacted to the decision by stating that following the decision the president would no longer proceed with selection of the commission members. This setback in the revelation of truth and the correction of history at the government level has not prevented the same efforts from playing out at the level of the general public – publication of biographies and memoirs of the coup victims and researches on oral history continue.

Why was it that banners depicting "Beware of Communism Uprising" sprang up all over many cities in Java, starting around 30 September 30 2006 and in the two to three months afterward? Many thought that this was a reflection of the security forces' concern as the 2009 election was drawing near. In this upcoming election, those who were involved in the G30S coup have the right to elect and be elected. But the fact remains that there is no need to be afraid of the communist party. In 1999, the People's Democratic Party (PRD), the allegedly Marxist contestant, took part in the election but won very few votes. None of its candidates became members of the parliament.

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