

# **Factsheet: The 1965-66 mass killings in Indonesia**

## **The anti-communist purge**

On the night of 30 September/1 October 1965, the Indonesian army led by General Suharto aborted a coup attempt against the then-President Sukarno and blamed the Indonesian Communist party.

Backed by the West, General Suharto unleashed a murderous campaign of terror against suspected communists and alleged associates, including leftwing activists, artists and intellectuals, peasant's groups and labour unions. Suharto took over as President and maintained hard-line authoritarian rule in Indonesia for decades to come.

## **The mass killings and detentions**

Victims of the anti-communist purge were killed, disappeared, raped and imprisoned in their hundreds of thousands. Between October 1965 and March 1966, it is reliably estimated that between 500,000 and 1 million people were killed and some 1.7 million more were imprisoned without trial. This was one of the worst mass murders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The perpetrators**

The crimes were committed by the Indonesian army under the command of General Suharto, as well as army-sponsored civilian mobs, gangsters and para-military groups of the kind featured in THE ACT OF KILLING. Not one person has been brought to justice for the massive violations of human rights committed over a sustained period. The killers are instead applauded by the government as national heroes.

## **The victims**

In the late 1970s, the Indonesian government released thousands of remaining 1965 political prisoners, thanks in part to an international campaign led by TAPOL. TAPOL's founder, Carmel Budiardjo, was herself imprisoned without trial by the Suharto regime for three years in the late 1960s. Many convicted prisoners, however, remained in jail until the 1990s.

The surviving victims and their families have received no official apology or compensation for their suffering. On the contrary, they continue to be stigmatized and suffer from legal discrimination as well as physical and mental health problems. It is shown on THE LOOK OF SILENCE. Furthermore, they face difficulties in obtaining jobs and have been prevented from voting or working in professions such as education and the law. A solidarity movement of victims is trying to deal with the past and establish the truth about 1965 through oral history activities, books, documentary films and sharing stories at various events.

**The official findings: Crimes against humanity**

In July 2012, a landmark investigation by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights found evidence of systematic and widespread crimes against humanity, including violence on a massive scale, extra judicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, rape, sexual abuses, enforced disappearances and slavery.

The Commission recommended: (i) a follow-up criminal investigation by the Attorney General and the establishment of a special human rights court to try the alleged perpetrators; and (ii) the establishment by the government of a non-judicial truth and reconciliation commission. The Commission's report has, however, been stonewalled by the Attorney General, who has failed to respond to the findings, and the Government, which has rejected them.

**Why the 65 events still matter**

The events of 1965-66 were one of the darkest periods in the history of the world. Despite this, while the atrocities of Rwanda, Bosnia and Cambodia are well known, Indonesia's mass murders are hardly known about and no-one has been held accountable. The victims continue to suffer from outrageous discrimination and the unpunished crimes against humanity lie at the heart of the ongoing problem of impunity in Indonesia. The country has made substantial progress in its transition to democracy since the downfall of Suharto in 1998, but the perpetrators of other gross violations of human rights in East Timor, Aceh, West Papua and elsewhere have also evaded justice and even occupy prominent positions in authority or public life.

**TAPOL**

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