

31 January 2018

Indonesia: Transgender rights defenders arrested, sexually harassed and subjected to degrading treatment in Aceh

On 27 January 2018, Indonesian police raided, assaulted, and detained [transgender human rights defenders](#) who are members of **Putroe Sejati Aceh** in Aceh province. The defenders were subjected to degrading treatment, sexual harassment and physical assault for more than 24 hours in detention.

[Putroe Sejati Aceh](#) is an organisation operating in Aceh to promote and protect LGBTI rights movements across the province, focusing on the rights, security, and wellbeing of *Waria* transgender women. Putroe Sejati Aceh runs capacity building workshops for activists, economic empowerment programs, socio-emotional support and outreach groups, and conducts advocacy for transgender rights. Human rights defenders from Putroe Sejati Aceh advocate for LGBTI peoples' rights to employment, to live free from violence, to access health care services and facilities, and to access public services such as state issued identity documents which accurately reflect their gender identity and expression.

On 27 January 2018, at approximately 9:00pm, police in Aceh province arrested twelve transwomen, some of whom are human rights defenders, in raids conducted on beauty salons. According to the defenders, civilians known to be affiliated with religious extremist groups in the area participated in the violent raid. After interrogating and removing customers from the salon, police cut the transwomen's hair, forced them to take off their feminine clothing, and physically assaulted them. They were then placed in police trucks and taken to North Aceh Police Station.

At the police station, officers forced the defenders to perform degrading physical activities, including being made to roll on the floor and do “exercises” while being beaten throughout the night. They were not allowed to put their feminine clothes back on and were given men’s clothing to wear as a further form of humiliation. The *Waria* families of the arrested defenders were not allowed to meet them from the time of the arrest until the following evening. All except one were released on 28 January 2018; the last was released on 29 January.

According to a new [report](#) published by Front Line Defenders, violent police raids and sexualised public humiliation are one of the greatest threats to LGBTI organisations across the country. Anti-LGBTI sentiment is increasingly being used as campaign platform ahead of elections. Despite the Constitutional Court’s rejection to criminalise homosexuality in October 2017, the crackdown on LGBTI people and activists has increased. The Interior Minister has referred to LGBTI activism as “worse than a nuclear bomb”. The Aceh provincial government passed two bylaws in September 2014 that afford punishments for “crimes” which do not exist in the Indonesian national criminal code. The bylaws criminalise consensual same-sex acts. This exists in contradiction to the decision of the Constitutional Criminal Court.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arrests and degrading treatment of the human rights defenders, *Waria* community, and members of Putroe Sejati Aceh, which it believes is intended as a threat to cease their activism in Aceh. Front Line Defenders further condemns the ongoing attacks against defenders who continue in their struggle for LGBTI rights despite escalating death threats and violent raids in Indonesia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Indonesia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the degrading treatment, sexual harassment of and physical assault on the human rights defenders, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of all members of Putroe Sejati Aceh and other transgender human rights defenders in Aceh;
3. Immediately cease the violent police raids on LGBTI organisations and gatherings in Aceh and other provinces;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Indonesia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.