

18 September 2017

Indonesia: Legal aid organisation intimidated by police and targeted by protesters for holding discussion on 1965 massacre

On 17 September 2017, thousands of anti-communist demonstrators surrounded and besieged the office of the **Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute (YLBHI)** in Jakarta, on false allegations that a gathering held inside the building was attended by supporters of the former Indonesian Communist Party. On 16 September 2017, police raided the same premises to cancel an event held by **Jakarta Legal Aid** to discuss human rights violations which occurred during the mass killings in 1965-1966, which targeted communist sympathisers. The YLBHI office was sealed by the police on 18 September, and lawyers from Jakarta Legal Aid have been prevented from entering the building.

The [Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute \(Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia - YLBHI\)](#) promotes access to justice and advocates for the rights of structurally poor, marginalised and abandoned communities in Indonesia. Legal aid beneficiaries of the YLBHI include farmers, labourers, urban poor, fishermen and coastal communities, vulnerable women and children, disabled as well as indigenous people. The YLBHI is the national umbrella body of several legal aid offices across the country, and houses Jakarta Legal Aid.

On 17 September 2017, at roughly 9:30pm the headquarters of the Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute were attacked by anti-communist protesters. The protesters wrongly believed that an event at the YLBHI was a gathering of supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party, which was banned in 1966. The YLBHI was holding a discussion and musical performance to protest against the dispersal of the Jakarta Legal Aid event the previous day. Some demonstrators attempted to enter the premises while the mob shouted nationalist slogans and death threats. Around roughly 1:20 am, the protestors began pushing against police and threw bottles and rocks at them. Clashes erupted, which led to several police officers being injured. Several people trapped inside the YLBHI's office suffered panic attacks and one individual was injured by shattered glass caused by large rocks being thrown at the building. Everyone inside the YLBHI office were safely evacuated shortly after 2:00 am, once the protesters had dispersed.

On 16 September 2017, a group of scholars, activists, survivors and families of victims of the 1965-66 massacres gathered for an academic discussion on the human rights violations that occurred between 1965 and 1966. However, this event, which was organised by Jakarta Legal Aid, and attended by members of several human rights organisations, was forcibly broken up by the police. Police raided the headquarters of YLBHI, where the event was taking place without a warrant, removed the banner of the event and intimidated Jakarta Legal Aid's lawyers.

The 1965-66 massacres, which resulted in the death of an estimated 500,000 people associated with the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), remains a controversial topic in Indonesia. Efforts to uncover the truth and seek justice for the mass killings of civilians have repeatedly been hindered, both by the authorities and by pro-nationalist militants.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the attack on the Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute's office, as well as the raid conducted by the police the previous day, which it believes

were solely motivated by their peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in Indonesia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Indonesia to:

1. Condemn the attack on the premises of the Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute;
2. Immediately allow the members of Jakarta Legal Aid and the Foundation of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute to enter their offices and resume their work;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights organisations in Indonesia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.