

INDONESIA**ISSUE**

Despite positive trends in many areas particularly in the increased restraint and professionalism shown by the military in dealing with protest demonstrations, the human rights situation in Indonesia continues to cause concern.

BACKGROUND

The year 1996 was punctuated by riots (most notably the July 27th Jakarta riots), demonstrations throughout the country, regular embassy occupations by East Timorese asylum seekers and hostage-takings in Irian Jaya. Restraint was exercised by the security forces in dealing with both peaceful and more violent (Jakarta riots) public demonstrations. The military showed a new level of professionalism in dealing with these incidents, using recognized crowd control techniques and reducing the use of force.

The Jakarta riots on July 27th were the culmination of a series of incidents, beginning with the government manoeuvring Megawati Sukarnoputri out as PDI leader and ending with the violent takeover of the Indonesian Democratic Party's (PDI) Jakarta headquarters by the newly-elected leader Soejardi and government security forces. The final report of the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) blamed the government for its role in the PDI imbroglio and dismissed the official government version which accused the People's Democratic Party (PDR) of instigating the riots. The Indonesian government has yet to respond to the report. Trials for the 124 arrested in July were held in late November. The 116 people found guilty of resisting an official order to disperse and sentenced to jail terms, were released immediately for time already served. They are appealing their convictions. The court is also considering looking at the role of Soejardi in the events. Labour activist and leader of the Independent Union, SBSI, Muchtar Pakpahan, is being tried for his political activities related to the July riots. As well, the Supreme Court decision acquitting him for his involvement in the 1994 Medan riots was overturned in November 1996.

Social and economic reforms have steadily improved the lot of the average Indonesian, but political and civil reforms are still lacking. The Indonesian constitution (1945) makes little reference to human rights and Indonesia has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights nor the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Indonesian government is still considering the ratification of the Convention on Torture. Indonesia is, however, developing draft legislation to counter discrimination against persons with disabilities; nevertheless, economic barriers to hiring disabled workers, and education and health care systems poorly equipped to deal with special needs, means disabled people in Indonesia are mainly dependent on the support of family and charitable organizations. Homosexuality is illegal according to Koranic law, but is tolerated if discreet.

Indonesian human rights NGOs were active during the year. Following the July 27th riots, however, the government has been subjecting them to closer scrutiny, requiring them to register and reviewing their funding sources. The media continue to level criticism, albeit