

OVERVIEW

On September 20th, 2004, Indonesians completed the second ballot in the country's first ever direct presidential election, bringing to a conclusion one of the longest and most complex electoral exercises in the world today, and choosing Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (or SBY, as he is commonly known) to be the next President of the Republic of Indonesia. This symposium, organized by the Centre for Southeast Asia Research of the University of British Columbia, and Simon Fraser University International, with cooperation and support of Foreign Affairs Canada, the Canadian Embassy in Jakarta, and the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Vancouver, was convened shortly after the election on October 12th, 2004.

The intention in organizing this symposium was, first, to evaluate the current state of Canadian-Indonesian relations in light of ongoing changes in Indonesia, the region, and the world, and, second, to look toward the future in thinking about how bilateral relations may be further strengthened. Panelists representing an array of interests and perspectives - from government, political parties, academe, civil society, and the private sector in both countries - were invited to come together to share their thoughts and hopes for the future. The timing of the symposium was chosen so as to build upon the momentum of the elections and so that recommendations arising from the presentations and discussions could be used as input for policy development in both Ottawa and Jakarta.

As an initial observation in introducing these symposium proceedings, it is important to point out how the current government changes in Indonesia are not just about leadership change. Certainly during an election everyone focuses on the question of leadership - who is to be the next president, what the new cabinet is to be like, and so forth. But potentially of even greater consequence are the fundamental institutional changes that have come into place over the past few years with respect to the governmental system in Indonesia. One could point, first of all, to the increasing power of the Parliament - the People's Representative Assembly (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, or DPR) - as it has now taken on a more critical role vis-à-vis the executive power of the President. A second set of institutional changes of great consequence arise from the processes of decentralization, or the devolution of powers down to the *kabupaten*, or regency, level.