

# **The situation for farmers 10 after the fall of Suharto (1)**

10 Years after the Fall of Suharto - Views from the People's Organisations

Wednesday 6 August 2008, by [Donny](#) (Date first published: May 2008).

**This is the third translation from of a series of 13 interviews with leaders of labour, peasant, fisherpeople, urban and rural poor, environmental, student and social-political organisations in Indonesia around the theme "Ten Years after the Fall of Suharto - Views from the People's Organisations", which appeared in the first edition of Jurnal Bersatu} (Journal of Unity). Earlier interviews in the series can be found under the Focus section at [www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net](http://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net).**

**Additional interviews will be posted as they are translated - James Balowski.**

**[For the complete set of translations as reproduced on ESSF website, see: [10 Years after the Fall of Suharto - Views from the People's Organisations](#) ]**

## **Introduction**

The following discussion was written based on interviews conducted by *Jurnal Bersatu* (Journal of Unity) editorial staff with a number of people's organisations. The spectrum and "political groupings" along with the sectors and class of organisation were several of the considerations in the choice of the groups that were interviewed. Nevertheless there were two organisations - the People's Movement Alliance for Agrarian Reform (AGRA) and the United People's Party (PPR) who on the eve of the publication of this journal were unable to be interviewed.

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## ***Peasant Organisations***

### **1. Donny, National Peasants Union (STN).**

There has been no significant reform in farmers' standard of living since the fall of Suharto. The exchange value has progressively declined because the 'output' paid out by farmers is becoming steadily higher, while the 'input' obtained from agricultural enterprises is becoming progressively smaller. This is in part caused by factors external to agricultural enterprises, such as the policy to increase the price of fuel that has had a huge impact on the cost of the agricultural production and the lack of government guarantees on the price of rice and farm food products.

### **The principle issues facing farmers**

There have been at least three principle themes in the peasants' struggle in the post Suharto period. First, agrarian conflicts, particularly between farmers and traditional communities and the plantation, forestry and mining companies, whether they are private or government owned. Secondly, the market liberalisation of agricultural products, which has been a massive blow to output by Indonesia's peasant class because Indonesian agricultural productivity, which is still lagging behind [other countries] is forced to compete with highly advanced agricultural production. Third, the problem of the agricultural production costs that are increasingly expensive a result of inflation and the fuel price increases, meanwhile there is no guarantee on the price of agricultural produce. Land reform in the sense of the return of land to the people, particularly farmers, in order that it can be used to improve their standard of living is still relevant, because in the post-Suharto period, land is still being monopolised by plantation, forestry and mining companies.

### **The state of the peasant movement**

The STN believes that the state of the peasant movement post the fall of Suharto is relatively encouraging. First, farmers' willingness to organise is growing, which is apparent from the emergence of many peasant organisations, whether they be local or those that already have a national network. Secondly, the people, particularly farmers, are increasingly prepared to retake land that was seized during the Suharto era. Third, many peasant organisations at the local and provincial level have formed alliances at the national level. This represents an advance, because a view already exists

that struggle at the national level is something that is necessary. In addition to this, in relative terms the peasant movement organisations are dominated by groups with a progressive thinking who accept radical methods of struggle, such as mass actions and so forth.

### **Peasant movement unity**

In general the peasant movement outside of STN has a similar theme of struggle, which is the resolution of land conflicts and agrarian reform, opposition to trade liberalisation, particularly in the agricultural field and endeavouring that the government improve the quality of and guarantee the price of basic commodities. Similarly, the struggle at the local level can be taken to the national level, the struggle over land issues being centred on demanding that the government implement the Basic Agrarian Law Number 5/1960. Meaning there is no grounds not to unite and indeed efforts at cooperation on farmers' issues often take place and the results have been quite good, at least the essence of the campaigns reached the relevant party.

But so far, cooperation has indeed only been based on momentum, and is not yet at the strategic or long-term level. Perhaps it would be best if such an alliance were built from below or at the grassroots, because from the STN's own experience, if it is built from below, it is ensured to directly manifest itself in practice and generally endures for quite a long time. Building unity from above, through establishing an agreement among national leaders, usually encounters at dead lock at the grassroots, because there are different realities between those at the top and those at the bottom. For example when there is agreement at the national level, at the local level there is the problem of each organisation making claims over which base of support it controls. So, in the peasant movement, unity must be built from below and at the top limited by communication that is initially non-binding. Those at the top can also call on organisations at the grassroots not to oppose each other in principle, because no principle disagreement exists between peasant organisations at the national level.

### **Aims of the struggle**

The aim of the STN's struggle is to create a social order that is just and prosperous as desired by the

founders of the Indonesian nation. Although some of the basic rights of the people are guaranteed under the 1945 Constitution, they are not implemented by the country's leaders, particularly in the post-New Order regime period. This awakening must start from efforts at developing rural communities in general and the peasant class in particular, because: 1) development requires the existence of food sovereignty; 2) the majority of Indonesian people still live in rural areas; and 3) there are examples in many other countries that development and national industry can be achieved if the country is able to take off from a process of improving the peasant class and rural communities.

### **Political parties**

Struggle at the socio-economic level is obviously not enough and requires struggle at the socio-political level. The STN itself has had the experience of being an initiator in the establishment of POPOR (the Party of United Popular Opposition) and most recently Papernas. But learning from this experience, building a party can be so consuming that the needs and the internal organisation's strength to struggle for the demands of the STN's peasant members can be forgotten. This is a model that is not quite right, because building a political party for the parliamentary movement cannot abandon the building of an extra-parliamentary socio-economic movement. Both have to be undertaken and be mutually supportive.

### **The 2009 elections**

The STN, as one of the initiators of Papernas, had hoped that Papernas could become an alternative party to contest the 2009 elections. But now, because Papernas has been unable to or not successful enough in supporting the mission that was put forward by STN, the STN cannot see anything positive in the existing contestants in the 2009 elections.

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### **P.S.**

\* From Journal of Unity - May 2008.

\* Donny is from the National Peasants Union (STN).