

Indonesian feminists: 'Don't blame the victim!'

Saturday 1 October 2011, by [ARIANE Zely](#), [WIDAYAWATI Vivi](#) (Date first published: 1 October 2011).

Around 100 women and men took part in a rally named Mini Skirt Protest - Women against Rape at Bundaran Hotel Indonesia, Thamrin, Jakarta, on Sunday September 18th 2011. Dozens of women, including several activists from Perempuan Mahardhika, wore miniskirts, as a statement that rape has nothing to do with the way women dress.

The demonstration was a protest against the reaction of Jakarta's Governor Fauzi Bowo (nicknamed Foke) to the recent case of a young female student, Livia, who had been raped and killed in a public transport. He said: "Imagine if someone sits on board of a *mikrolet* (minivan) wearing a mini-skirt, you would get a bit turned on". Women, he said, "must adjust to their environment so that they don't provoke people into committing unwanted acts".

A call for action by dozens of activists under the banner of 'Women Alliance against Rape' was able to gather women from various backgrounds (activist, teacher, student, wife, households, etc) for the demonstration. The protesters shouted and chanted, brandishing posters with slogans as "Don't Tell Us How to Dress, But Tell Them Not to Rape" and "My Mini Skirt, My Right, Foke You", "My Mini Skirt is Not Wrong, but Your Mind is", etc.

The Alliance issued a statement saying, among other things; "Rape is a sexual attack on a citizen, a woman. Rape is never wanted by any woman, no matter the socioeconomic background. Victims of rape need solidarity from the whole of society as well as physical aid and care. The statements of incapable public servants have been providing no support, but rather humiliating and dumping the burden of blame on the victims."

In addition, they demand that law enforcement protect the victims and that officers take all cases of rape seriously. Local governments should ensure the safety of public transportation and public space and improve the transportation system in the capital.

Response by National Commission on Violence against Women

Three cases of rape in public transport have been reported during a single week before the protest. The National Commission on Violence against Woman (KOMNASPER) has recorded 3753 rapes in 2011, while the Jakarta police has received 41 complaints so far, compared to 40 for all of 2010. KOMNASPER has also received 105,103 complaints of violence against women. In response to the protest the commission outlined recommendations on Friday, 23rd September 2011, that ranged from improving security for women on public transportation to harsher punishment for sexual assault under the Criminal Code.

The head of public participation section at the commission, Andy Yentriyani said the legal system did not provide sufficient protection against sexual assault for women. "[The law] is insufficient, because sexual assault is categorized as a social misconduct" Andy said. "In one clause, [the penalty] can be 12 years. In another, it can be two years, eight months," she said. "For children, it is only classified as abuse, which reduces the degree of seriousness. "Sexual assault is not a specific crime under

Indonesian law, and is only treated as an "unpleasant act," with an accordingly mild law enforcement response. Komnas Perempuan hopes their initiative will help fix this with new legislation.

Komnas Perempuan's data shows that from 1998 to 2010, a quarter of the total of 295,836 cases of violence against women involved sexual assault. These are only the reported cases, many more are probably left unreported. Every day, 28 women are sexually assaulted in Indonesia, the agency said. "The solution is not to allocate special women-only spaces, such as on trains—which has been done already, because there is no guarantee that segregation will prevent assaults," Andy said.

She also voiced concern that if a woman was assaulted while traveling in a mixed space, she could be accused of looking for trouble. "It also feeds into the idea that men can't control themselves," she said. "That assumption is just as bad as the assumption that women's actions or dress are the cause of violence against them."

From misogyny to questioning class and gender

Fauzi Bowo's statement followed similar statements by other public officials in different parts of the country, including one by a local administrative head in West Aceh who stated that women who did not dress according to religious norms could only blame themselves if they were raped. These statements sparked outrage among activists because they are nothing but misogynist accusations of the victims and are a form of verbal violence against women. They are the product of a way of thinking rooted in patriarchy.

In 'Atas Nama—On Behalf', a documentary movie made by Komnasper one woman from Aceh - wearing a scarf herself - put it well: "in general I don't think any woman likes to be thought how to dress". This is in our view the basic idea of the Miniskirt protest: women have right to their own body, to express themselves and feel good, it free from prejudices, stereotyping, discrimination, and violence. This is a principal foundation of women liberation.

Several far left activists (mostly men) in Jakarta felt somewhat uneasy with the statement or the way shape of the protest, which they considered to be advocating the wearing of miniskirts. Objections were made that the protest 'too liberal', 'had insufficient class content', and might provoke 'antipathy from the majority of women who are still conservative—the ones who feminist activists should try to reach'. Some even went as far as suggesting the choice was "class struggle or sex struggle". Still, these comments were somehow better than the major parts the far left who didn't say anything at all. Indeed the campaign was supported only by handful of male left activists.

This lack of attention is not very surprising since there have been very few left movements and organizations that take issues of sexuality and gender. We can safely say that most of the left groups in Indonesia subordinate issue of women's oppression to the so called 'class' issue, which is basically defined as the purely economic side of class oppression, such as wages, poverty etc. That is why, so far, they are still unfamiliar with issues as a women's right to her body, sexuality, LGBTI, and so forth. Our own experience of building the socialist-feminist women's group Mahardhika confirms this view.

We would argue, like we did when responding to some of the comments that we should fight against class oppression, patriarchy and sexism, since in class based societies have patriarchy and sexism play an important role in the reproduction of the social system. History shows there is no socialism without women's liberation, and no true class consciousness without really understanding and considering the very complex nature of patriarchy and sexuality and its relation to class. If somehow the 18th September protest, particularly on the issue of "miniskirt", was considered as merely liberal, this means we have even more responsibility to intervene the campaign and that so the aim will not

be the end in itself —that is merely freedom of each individual but rather the freedom of each individual as the foundation for the freedom of all.

The fact that many Indonesian women —religious or not— agree with the demands and slogans of the protest, particularly on the fact that rape has nothing to do with dress—is something encouraging amidst difficult political circumstances. Circumstance that continue to worsen with 154 shari'a laws and a growing intolerance fueled by several reactionary religious groups.

We are happy to have taken part in this campaign—and also happy to wear miniskirt! Because most of the time we are defensive and forget to challenge the minds of men.

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P.S.

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