

Indonesian party defies intimidation by police and thugs

Tuesday 23 January 2007, by [BOYLE Peter](#) (Date first published: 20 January 2007).

Yogyakarta,

Intimidation by armed right-wing thugs and police harassment failed to disperse the January 18-20 founding congress of Indonesia's new National Liberation Party of Unity (Papernas) at Kaliurang, near Yogyakarta in Indonesia.

About 100 black-uniformed thugs from Front Anti Komunis Indonesia (FAKI) turned up to the conference site on the eve of the congress and demanded that it be dispersed.

Initially the local police refused to protect the conference participants' rights of assembly and instead tried to deny that the conference had the right to proceed. However, lawyers from the Legal Aid Institute insisted that the congress organisers had fulfilled all the legal requirements and informed the police of the conference two weeks before.

The police then tried to argue that the problem was with the draft program of Papernas, which calls for the repudiation of foreign debt, nationalisation of the mining industry and for a national industrialisation program.

"But since when is giving solutions to this country's problems a crime?", asked Katarina Pujiastuti, one of the congress organisers.

The congress proceeded with 380 participants from all around Indonesia. Several international guests, who had intended to observe the congress, were asked by the organisers to stay away for their own safety.

"We continued the negotiations with FAKI and the local community and at the same time kept running the congress. We were determined to defend our political rights as citizens of this country", explained Pujiastuti.

On the morning of January 19, the police stated that they would not issue a permit for the conference to proceed, due to pressure from the right-wing thugs. They added that they had information that 500 people from FAKI would be coming to attack the conference later that day.

About 300 thugs, some armed with knives and staves, turned out that afternoon and threatened to attack the conference if it was not dispersed by 9pm. The conference participants decided to stay to exercise their democratic rights, and continued with their program.

The police blocked the road outside the conference site and had reinforcements waiting in nearby streets.

At about 9pm the FAKI thugs re-gathered around the corner from the venue, forcing a sleepless night on conference participants. As media coverage of the intimidation increased, it appeared that the police were coming under more pressure to allow the conference to continue at least for another

half day, which the organisers proposed as a compromise to save the local community from further disruption.

In response to calls for assistance, some 200 students came up from Yogyakarta to help defend the congress overnight. The conference proceeded under constant threat and the stress caused one participant, a pregnant woman, to miscarry.

The congress elected Agus Jabo as chairperson, Haris Sitorus as general secretary, and prominent trade union leader Dita Indah Sari as its candidate for the 2009 presidential elections.

“We are trying to build a new party of democracy under repressive conditions”, Jabo explained in a briefing after the conference. “We are confident that all undemocratic barriers can be defeated. This includes the new electoral laws, which try to exclude smaller parties from participating in elections.”

He explained that while the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) was the initiator of Papernas, the new party is open to anyone who agrees with its “three banners”.

“We need a new party to express the large but fragmented opposition to imperialism. We also need to build it to overcome the widespread cynicism and apathy about politics.”

General secretary Haris Sitorus said that Papernas members would be setting up many more branches and holding rallies and forums around the country to build the new party. It was also open to any alliances and coalitions that would advance its objectives.

An international conference on globalisation organised by the PRD in Jakarta in 2001 was forcibly disbanded by police working together with right-wing thugs, and 32 foreign guests were detained by police. Last year, a meeting organised by Papernas in Surabaya was disrupted by right-wing thugs. But this time the intimidation was resisted successfully.

Messages of solidarity flooded in from around the world [See on ESSF website: [PAPERNAS Congress: The Latest News and solidarity initiatives](#)]. To send a message of support, email . For updates visit .

P.S.

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