

Indonesia: 938 protesters arrested on pretext of violating health protocols: Kontras

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Jakarta — The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) has recorded that 938 demonstrators have been arrested on the grounds of violating health protocols since the corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic began early last year.

Kontras also found 300 cases of alleged violence suffered by demonstrators protesting during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“In the era of Covid-19, 938 people were arrested on the grounds of violating health protocols because they were holding actions. Between December and November 2020 there were 300 incidences of violence or attacks related to freedom of expression”, said Kontras Coordinator Fatia Maulidiyanti during a discussion broadcast on the ICJRID YouTube channel on Thursday June 10.

Maulidiyanti said that the largest number of cases was recorded in October 2020. That time, she added, was the climax of the protests by civil society and workers against Law Number 11/2020 on Job Creation.

Initially, she thought that the government would only violating health protocols as a pretext to prohibiting protest actions during the pandemic. She is now concerned however that this will be perpetuated if the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP) is enacted into law.

This concern arises from Article 273 which prohibits the holding of parades, protest actions or demonstrations without prior notification, which result in disrupting the public interest or give rise to commotion or riots. Violators are subject to one year in prison or a fine of 10 million rupiah.

“When such a prohibition (on the freedom to demonstrate) is established by the state, Indonesia can no longer be said to be a democratic country. Because there is a prohibition on freedom of public expression”, said Maulidiyanti.

Maulidiyanti emphasised that the freedom to hold protest actions is one of the most important elements of democracy in a democratic country. With the existence of such an article in the RKUHP, she believes such a situation further supports a decline in civil space.

She also addressed several other articles which are considered problematic in the RKUHP, such as the articles on insulting the president and the government. According to Maulidiyanti these articles are an attempt by the government to protect itself from public criticism.

“If it is said that we have returned to the New Order era [of the Suharto dictatorship], actually we have never left the New Order era. Where today Jokowi [President Joko Widodo] and his officials make use of New Order methods which have been adapted and modernised. Through digital attacks, repeated patterns of police repression”, she added.

Earlier, the government again attempted to push through the enactment of the RKUHP through a discourse on including the law in the 2021 National Legislation Priority program.

The RKUHP itself has attracted massive opposition from the public. In late 2019 the parliamentary complex in Jakarta was filled with demonstrators, most of whom came from student and civil society groups. The upheaval resulted in the RKUHP failing to be ratified. (fry/bmw)

CNN Indonesia

Translated by James Balowski. The original title of the article was “KontraS: 938 Pedemo Ditangkap dengan Dalih Langgar Prokes”.

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