

Indonesia: Father of missing activist dismayed by promotion of ex-Rose Team member as Jakarta commander

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Jakarta — Payan Siahaan, the father of Ukok Munandar Siahaan, a victim of the 1997-98 abduction of activists by the Rose Team (Tim Mawar), says he felt like his self-respect had been trampled on upon hearing the news that Major General Untung Budiharto had been promoted to Jakarta military commander.

The news that the former team member had been promoted also injured the feelings of the other families of the victims.

Siahaan had hoped that with the start of 2022 the families of the victims of the forced disappearances in 1997-98 would receive some good news. Instead however, they found that one of the 11 members of the Rose Team had been promoted to commander of the Jakarta regional military command (Kodam).

Siahaan conveyed this during a virtual press conference held by the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) ON Friday January 7.

“This does of course, for us the families of the victims, further trample on our self-respect. I am very concerned and this also deeply torments our spirits, the victims’ families, with the promotion of Untung Budiharto as the commander (of Kodam) in Jakarta”, said Siahaan.

According to Siahaan, Budiharto’s promotion shows that no concern is being paid to the feelings of the families of the victims.

Yet, said Siahaan, the feelings of the victims’ families should be of concern because President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo twice summoned them to the State Palace [to discuss the issue].

Siahaan believes that the administration of President Widodo and Vice President Ma’ruf Amin have no intention of resolving the 1997-98 abductions.

“We have spoken out about our pain, how sick [at heart] we have been after almost 24 years of asking for justice for the abduction of our family [members] and our children”, said Siahaan.

Siahaan recalled that one of the pledges in Widodo’s Nawa Cita nine point program was resolving cases of past gross human rights violations, including the 1997-98 cases of abductions and forced disappearances.

Siahaan said that one of the saddest things for the families of the victims is that the status of the victims is still unknown and this will continue to be the case until the whereabouts of the victims, including their children, are revealed.

“The abductions will continue stay with us until the status of our children are known, and this is the (thing) which causes us pain, we who have every single day sought justice”, said Siahaan.

Siahaan admitted that he does not know what else he has to say. He just hopes that President Widodo will be willing to implement the recommendations of National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) on the case.

On the other hand, the families of the victims feel that the Widodo administration is not offering any direction in resolving human rights cases. Siahaan admitted that he cannot stop thinking about Budiharto’s promotion.

“How is it that he has committed a crime but can still be accepted as a TNI [Indonesian military] member and be given such a magnificent post in our country. I just can’t stop thinking about it”, said Siahaan.

The Rose Team was a small team originating from the Army’s Group IV Special Forces (Kopassus). The team was comprised of 10 members and established by Major Bambang Kristiono in July 1997.

Aside from Budiharto, the other members of Rose Team were Infantry Captains Fausani Syahril Multhazar, Nugroho Sulisty Budi, Yulius Selvanus, Dadang Hendrayudha, Djaka Budi Utama and Fauka Noor, Chief Sergeants Sunaryo and Sigit Sugianto and First Sergeant Sukadi.

The Rose Team was tasked with hunting down and capturing pro-democracy activists prior to the fall of former president Suharto’s military regime, after which it was disbanded. Kristiono and 10 other Rose Team members were charged over the abductions and tried by the High Military Tribunal II in April 1999.

The court found Budiharto guilty and he was sentenced to 20 months in prison and dismissed from the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) as it was then known. Following an appeal in 2000, Budiharto was sentenced to two years and six months prison but not dismissed from the military.

Prior to being promoted to Jakarta military commander, Budiharto was a special staff member to the TNI commander until October 2021. (iam/DAL)

Notes

Between 1997 and 1998 as many as 23 pro-democracy activists were abducted by members of the Army’s Special Forces (Kopassus). After extended periods of detention — in many cases the victims were severely tortured — most were released although 13 remain missing and are presumed dead. Former Kopassus commander Lieutenant General Prabowo Subianto (now Indonesia’s Defence Minister) who was at the time President Suharto’s son-in-law, has admitted to ordering the abductions but denies ordering their torture and claims they were all released alive and well. In April 1999, 11 low-ranking Kopassus officers were tried by a military court for the kidnappings and given sentences of between a year and 22 months in prison, although six of them were allowed to remain in the army. Prabowo himself was discharged from the military for ordering the abductions but has never been tried in court.

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