

ACHEH-SUMATRA NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues:
Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities
Twelfth Session 28-29 November 2019
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Human rights and minority language education

(Item 2: Thursday, 28 November 2019, 9-13 am)

Thank you, Mr Chairman, (Madam chair)
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the forum for this opportunity. My name is Zainuddin Daud and I am from Aceh-Sumatra. I represent the Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF).

Speaking on item 2, I would like to draw your attention about minority languages, education system and human rights in Indonesia.

Local languages

As a sprawling archipelago, stretching from Aceh-Sumatra in the West, West Papua in the East and Moluccas and Borneo in between, Indonesia is the size of European continent and consists hundreds of ethnic minorities with different histories, cultures and languages.

Indonesia ranks second in the number of languages spoken. It is one of the world linguistic hotspots, with over 400 distinct languages and dialects. Only neighbouring Papua New Guinea has more. One of the main problems is that Indonesia has only one language which is functionally alive – called Bahasa Indonesia, a modernised Malay tongue (we called it a pidgin Malay or a language killer that exterminates other languages).

After independence in 1949, “Unity in Diversity” was adopted as a national slogan and Bahasa was imposed on everyone as a national language, through a persistent government propaganda: one nation, one flag and one language.

As a new entity, Indonesia is obsessed in unifying the nation, anything else deemed to weaken the state are either discouraged or totally forbidden, such as traditional flags. But many ethnic groups have never felt part of, or represented by the Java-based government. As a result, dozens of linguistic minorities e.g. in West Papua and the Moluccas are already extinct, and many are severely endangered and in need of protection.

ASNLF proposes that each minority language needs to be included in school curriculum. The government should encourage millennials to use their mother tongues in every day's communication as well as in writing.

Education system

Speaking about education system, Indonesia has such a woeful system: poor education funding, arbitrarily changing of curricula, political favouritism etc.

In Indonesia, there are two different classes of teachers: civil servants called PNS and many others who are simply honorary teachers. Civil servants are paid by the state monthly with relatively good salaries, pensions, and job security until death while temporary teachers, there is no such thing as salaries, no pension funds etc.

“Honorary” teachers are one of the big problems in education system. They are paid virtually nothing while waiting for civil service position. Often, they must take another extra job to make ends meet.

The OECD reports that one in ten teachers in Indonesia are often absent during teaching periods. In Aceh, where I came from, teachers who did not come to school for a year still received their salaries. The schools are powerless because teachers often have family or other personal relationships with local officials.

The education budget allocated 20 percent, which is mostly spent on teachers (64 percent). But Indonesia’s dilemma is not only allocation of budget, but there are also other conundrums such as bribes and corruption. Its schools and universities are plagued by corruption, poor quality teaching and staff absenteeism, to say the least.

Indonesia is well known for its KKN acronym: Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism. This acronym is deeply rooted in the way of life of civil service authorities, with no exception of education system. That has made Indonesia a pariah state and the country is almost impossible to govern properly.

As a result, Indonesia’s education quality is lowest compared to neighbouring Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam etc. And still far behind even when compared with the country’s best Institutions.

Indonesia’s education system is too complex; it evolves and involves almost everything: from corruption, collusion, nepotism to bribery and favouritism. In short, it is all about politics and power.

Sydney-based Lowy Institute research 2018 made this conclusion:

Improving the education system in Indonesia is not only about increasing resources and teacher training but requires a *“fundamental shift in the underlying political and social relationships that have characterised Indonesia’s political economy and shaped the evolution of its education system. Until then, the country’s students will continue to suffer at the hands of politics and power”*.

Human rights

In this opportunity, I would also like to briefly draw the attention of the forum on human rights situation of the post conflict in Aceh.

For almost three decades Aceh had become a killing field for the Indonesian armed forces. In its efforts to contain the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), thousands of Acehese civilians had been killed, including extra judicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and 'disappearances'. But in August 2015 GAM and Indonesia signed a peace accord in Helsinki. Thus, one of the longest armed conflicts in South East Asia eventually ended.

Just two months ago, Aceh marked the fourteen-year anniversary of the conflict's end. But despite promises by the government, this has been a lost decade for tens of thousands affected by the conflict. Fourteen years on, and the authorities have shown little interest in addressing past crimes. This is due to one single factor: IMPUNITY.

Today, Aceh is still a dangerous place to live in. Peace accord has been largely disappointed, and that has led former combatants to resort to violence again. Today Aceh is among the poorest in Indonesia and ranked number one in Sumatra. Despite the current agreement promised that Aceh would retain 70 percent of its share, our abundant resources are still unlimitedly exploited by Jakarta.

In the post MoU Helsinki, the Aceh issue is often considered as a closed chapter. And this assumption has led to a very dangerous development. The peace agreement per se is not to be blamed, but the disgraceful behavior of the government, particularly its military, is part of the reason for concern.

From that perspective, the resolving of past human rights abuses by the military has become more and more distant. And this should be the real concern for international communities and other stakeholders, if another war is to be avoided.

Mr. Chairman (Madam chair)

In finding a durable solution to the complexity of the problem, Indonesia should review its old "divide and rule" policy towards Aceh, particularly about fundamental freedoms such as civil, political, especially freedom of expression and the right to self-determination of the people of Aceh.

Therefore, ASNLF calls upon international communities, especially the EU and the UN, to closely monitor the situation in Aceh and put pressure on Indonesia to end impunity by resolving the past gross human rights violations during thirty-year armed conflicts.

ASNLF urges Indonesia to protect human rights defenders against intimidation and reprisals and to ensure respect for freedom of expression and peaceful protest, including the right to self-determination of minorities.

Thank you for your attention

Brief History and Chronology of Aceh

Aceh is located at the northern tip of the island Sumatra, bordered by the Malacca Straits on the North and the Indian Ocean on the South and has around 6 million inhabitants. Aceh was the centre of a powerful empire for several centuries and has a long and impressive history of resistance to outside domination. Aceh is also abundantly rich in natural resources: oil, gas, gold, platinum, tin, rubber, etc.

For hundreds of years before the arrival of the European powers to South-east Asia and for many centuries thereafter, Aceh remained an internationally recognized independent sovereign state having diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. Larousse Grand Dictionnaire Universelle described the Kingdom of Aceh as *"the most dominant nation in the East Indies towards the end of the sixteenth and until the first half of the seventeenth century."* (Larousse Grand Dictionnaire, Volume 1, p.70, Paris 1886)

When most part of the Malay Archipelago was incorporated into the Dutch colonial empire, Aceh happened to be one of the most difficult areas for the Dutch to subdue. In 1903, after 30 years of war, the Dutch more or less managed to pacify Aceh but resistance continued until 1942. During the second World War, the Japanese took over the Dutch Administration in Aceh, but not without resistance movement. However, in August 1945 the Japanese forces capitulated to the allied powers. The Dutch attempted to restore their former colonial empire, but Aceh was the only place where they did not even try to return.

In 1949, seven years after their withdrawal from Aceh, the Dutch who had neither de facto control, nor de jure power over Aceh, illegally transferred "sovereignty" which they did not possess over Aceh to Indonesia without referendum of the people of Aceh, and against all principles of decolonization of the UN. The Dutch obviously denied the people's right to self-determination and independence, after such a long war which the colonialist did not really win. This is how Aceh was illegally made part of Indonesia.

On the basis of this Dutch fraudulent transfer of "sovereignty", the fabricated nation "Indonesian" took over Aceh by force and intimidation and they perpetuate colonialism over the people of Aceh.

Early History - Aceh was a Buddhist state that flourished about AD 500 in northern Sumatra, was visited by Arab, Indian, and Chinese merchants and pilgrims. According to some historians, Islam first entered the Malay archipelago through Aceh sometime around the year 700. The first Islamic kingdom is Perlak, established in the year 804.

1496–1528 - Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah, the first Sultan and founder of the Kingdom of Aceh. He is regarded as the father of Aceh's unification.

1607–1636 - Sultan Iskandar Muda. The era of Iskandar Muda is regarded as the Golden Age of Aceh. Aceh's power reached its height under his reign. In that period there were frequent wars with the Portuguese at Malacca, and the Portuguese fleet was defeated at Bintan in 1614.

1641 – 1699 - Aceh ruled consecutively by four queens

1819 - The Aceh-England Friendship Treaty was signed, firmly stating mutual defense and that an attack against one is considered an attack against the other. This treaty has never been

revoked and under international law the United Kingdom is still obliged to defend Aceh from any foreign aggression.

1824 - London Treaty (also referred to as the Anglo-Dutch treaty) was signed. Through this instrument, the Dutch gained control of all the British possessions on the Island of Sumatra, including Aceh. In exchange, the Dutch surrendered their possessions in India, Gold Coast (present Ghana) and withdrew all claims in Singapore.

26 March 1873 - Dutch Invasion: The Netherlands began efforts to colonize Aceh, which had been an independent sultanate for some 500 years. After a bloody 30-year struggle, the Dutch gained control but never fully conquered Aceh.

1874–1903 - Tuanku Sultan Mohammad Daud Syah, the last Sultan of an independent Aceh

1942 – 1945 - Japanese Interregnum: The Japanese occupied Aceh during World War II.

1945 – 1949 - Lost Period:

1949 - On December 27, the Dutch East Indies ceased to exist and became the Republic of Indonesia. Aceh was forcibly made part of the new Republic despite the fact that it had never been formally incorporated into the Dutch colonial possession. In other words, the Dutch had illegally transferred sovereignty over Aceh to Indonesia.

1953-1962 - Darul Islam Movement

4 December 1976 – Aceh Sumatra National Liberation - ASNLF established and the once independent and sovereign Aceh redeclared independent again

1989-1998: Aceh is designated as Military Operational Area – DOM (1989-1998). The Indonesian military launched Operation Red Net, a counterinsurgency campaign. Ten of thousands Acehnese civilians killed during that period and many more tortured and disappeared.

2003 - Martial law was imposed in Aceh. Some 50,000 military and police forces launched “Operasi Terpadu” (unified operation) to eradicate GAM.

19 May 2004 - Martial law ended, replaced by a state of civil emergency. This made almost no difference to the situation as violence and repression continued.

26 Dec. 2004 - The devastating Tsunami hit Aceh, and about 200,000 Acehnese perished, while another 500,000 were displaced.

15 August 2005 - Helsinki Peace Accord called MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) signed between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)

April 2011 – Aceh Sumatra Liberation Front (ASNLF) reactivated/rekindled at a world-wide Acehnese meeting in Denmark to continue the struggle for an independent Aceh.