

INDONESIA: ATTEMPTS TO INTIMIDATE LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS IN NORTH SUMATRA

Introduction and Background

On February 10-12, 1992, workers in the Medan [North Sumatra] Canning Company, which cans fish, went on strike. They demanded higher wages, a day off on Sundays, menstruation leave for women in accordance with Indonesia's labor law, and the establishment in the factory of a unit of the national labor federation, SPSI. More than half the company's 500 workers took part, after members of a Medan-based non-governmental organization, the Kelompok Pelita Sejahtera (KPS), helped them organize. The strike was successful, and wages were raised after labor and management agreed on a settlement with the Ministry of Manpower.

After the settlement, however, on February 16, five women involved in the strike were taken by the district military command (KODIM 0201) and held overnight. On February 29, four men, including two workers and two KPS members, were arrested and held for questioning until March 7, when they were released. Their heads were shaved while they were detained, as a kind of gratuitous indignity.

The strike also led to harassment and intimidation of other NGOs around Medan, including Wahana Informasi Masyarakat or WIM, an NGO coalition which includes KPS. The harassment included the arrest of three NGO activists associated with WIM, accused of holding an illegal meeting, and their interrogation by the military's internal security apparatus. The three are Osmar Tanjung, 29, a staff member of the Legal Aid Institute in Medan; Ahmad Taufan Demanik, 26, an instructor at the University of North Sumatra in Medan; and Sri Muharani, 26, an administrative employee of WIM. They have since been released. The Executive Secretary of WIM, Wahyudhi, issued a detailed chronology of the interrogation which gives an idea of the kind of control the Indonesian military tries to exert over non-governmental organizations. The incident came at a time when senior officials in the government and military are suggesting that a 1985 law regulating mass-based social organizations should be expanded to control the activities of organizations such as WIM -- and to greatly restrict freedom of association in Indonesia. The WIM chronology, issued on March 11, 1992, follows:

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ARREST OF WIM STAFF BY KODIM 0201/BS MEDAN

March 4, 1992:

The WIM secretariat planned to hold a discussion to discuss the implementation of an anti-pollution, "clean river" program called PROKASIH, and a paralegal training program for students, carried out in cooperation with the Legal Aid Institute (LBH)-Medan. The invitation to participants had been signed by Osmar, as coordinator of KKD, the regional working group of the environmental organization, WALHI.

At 10:00, participants began to arrive and about 11:00, the discussion began. There were 11 people present, including students, environmental activists, and representatives from a variety of NGOs in Medan.

At about 14:00, three staff members arrived from KPS, a coalition supported by KSPPM which helps workers in Medan.¹ They reported that four of their colleagues had been arrested by KODIM after holding a meeting with some workers on February 28. These arrests were considered completely arbitrary because there was no warrant and at that point, no idea of what happened to them afterward. The KPS members asked that the issue of these arrests be discussed by participants and that they sign a statement of solidarity.

WIM staff told the three to be patient, since the meeting had not yet covered the main points of discussion. Perhaps because they had other things to do, the three then left, saying they would return in about an hour.

At 14:10, the discussion on PROKASIH was almost finished, and the meeting broke for lunch. At this point, two men in uniform came in, Captain S. Pardede and Sergeant Ahmadsyah, from the subdistrict military command (KORAMIL) No.05, Medan Baru. In a loud voice, they asked why these people had gathered, whose idea was it, who was involved, what had been discussed, what results had come out, and did they have a permit to hold such a discussion?

Sergeant Ahmadsyah then took down the names of all those in the room. Then the two officers asked Osmar (a WIM member) to go with them to the KORAMIL to give a formal explanation. Two others were also asked to go along, Taufan, who represented the participants in the meeting, and Sri, to represent WIM. But the three, Osmar, Taufan and Sri, refused, because in addition to the fact that they did not feel they had done anything wrong, the officers also did not present a formal summons. After they refused to go, the meeting was broken up.

March 5, 1992:

At 14:30, Wahyudhi, Executive Secretary of WIM, returned from Jakarta. As he was looking through the material on his desk, he found three summonses for Osmar, Taufan and Sri respectively to go to the KODIM's intelligence office on Jalan Pengadilan No.8 (No.8 Court Street), Medan, to provide an explanation and give other information as requested. The letters were signed by Captain Pardede, commander of KORAMIL 05, Medan Baru.

Wahyudhi then went to look for Osmar, Taufan and Sri to give them the summonses as well as to find out why they had been issued.

¹ Harassment of KSPPM for its work on behalf of villagers affected by a pulp and rayon plant in North Sumatra is described in News From Asia Watch, "Indonesia: Ban on Sumatran Organizations," October 15, 1990.

March 6, 1992:

At 9:30, Sergeant Ahmadsyah together with a friend and a driver picked up Osmar, Taufan and Sri in a red Suzuki car and took them to KODIM headquarters where they were interrogated. Osmar was interrogated by Sergeant Lubis, Taufan by Sergeant Hasibuan, and Sri by Sergeant Surbakti. Almost all of their questions focused on the holding of the March 4 meeting (what, why, for what, how about the permit, and so on.) They eventually concluded that an illegal meeting had taken place.

This interrogation led to a new line of questioning about what was WIM, who were its directors, where was their funding from. They began to link WIM to various actions by workers, peasants and small traders that had taken place in recent months in and around Medan. As a network of NGOs, WIM had links to KPS which had organized workers [of Medan Canning Company] to stage a protest against the owners. WIM also had links to YPMP and a few other NGOs suspected of being behind these actions. The interrogators then began to identify WIM as the command center for all these actions.

After they signed their interrogation depositions, around 17:30, Osmar, Taufan and Sri were brought to BAKORSTRANASDA (the military's internal security apparatus) in a patrol car, with arrest warrant No.K/33/III/1992 dated March 6, 1992, signed by Lt.Col. Inf. K.A. Ralahalu, KODIM commander. The warrant said the three were suspected of being the organizers of an illegal meeting.

It was already dusk when they arrived at BAKORSTRANASDA. The three were given food and drink to break the Ramadan fast. After evening prayers, they were stripped of all items on their persons such as watches, bracelets and shoes. Their purses and pockets were emptied, and the contents noted and turned over to a registrar. Osmar and Taufan were then thrown in a cell while Sri was just held at the main desk. In the cell, Osmar and Taufan met the four workers and KPS personnel whose general condition was worrisome, as they were bruised and still had injuries from being beaten.

At 23:00, Osmar, Taufan and Sri were allowed to leave but were ordered to return the next day.

March 7, 1992:

At 10:00, Osmar, Taufan and Sri returned to BAKORSTRANASDA. They were interrogated separately, Osmar by Zul Fadly, Taufan by Imam Kurniadi and Sri by someone of unknown rank who wore civilian clothes. Osmar was asked to explain the illegal meeting: the linkage between KKD and WIM, why they needed a coalition, what it was for, who were its members, how did it work and so on. Taufan was asked about WIM as a network of NGOs: what was it, why was it founded, how did it go about its activities, who were the participants, what kind of programs did it have, how much funding did it get, what were the sources and so on down to the smallest detail. Sri was not interrogated in such depth because it was thought she did not really understand the workings of WIM. The officers finally understood that Sri was only an administrative staff who did not know very much about WIM.

After mid-day prayers, interrogation started again. This time the questions were sharper, and focused on the linkage between WIM, as an NGO network, and several "people's actions" in which NGOs had taken part. Most of the questions were directed toward the labor protest in which KPS was involved. There were also questions linking the actions of farmers and traders. It seemed as though the interrogators had concluded that WIM was the main organizer of every popular protest. But there was an element of concern that these actions were backed by a third party

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Asia Watch

(according to them, the Batak Protestant church organization, HKBP) for its own interests.

Osmar, Taufan and Sri were given permission to go home at 16:00, but they still had to report back.

March 8, 1992:

Sunday was a free day.

March 9, 1992:

At 10:00, Osmar, Taufan and Sri came again to BAKORSTRANASDA. They were interrogated by the same people. Osmar was asked for a more in-depth explanation of WIM: who were the directors, what were the programs, how were they planned, who was involved in the planning, was WIM's role in popular actions, what targets were they trying to achieve, why was it necessary to have a coalition, what was the function of a coalition, why did they have to engage in advocacy, what issues had WIM handled within the coalition, what was the role of the board in planning WIM programs, how was each member of the coalition funded, where did they get the funds and so on.

Taufan was bombarded with questions about how many NGOs were in the coalition, what were the primary activities of the members, where did they get the funding from. Then the interrogation narrowed down to WIM itself: what year was WIM founded, what was its target, what were its sources of funding, how much did it get per year, how did it raise funds, what attracted the funding agencies to an organization like WIM, how did WIM negotiate with its donors, what was its system of reporting to donors, what did it report, why did they need a network, what were its targets, why was there a political dialogue and what was it for, why did NGOs support PDI,² what were the relations between WIM and KPS, what were the links between WIM, YPMP, KSPPM and the church, had WIM ever received funding from Bread for the World, what NGOs received funding from Bread for the World,³ how much did they get and so on. In the end, Taufan was asked to draft a proposal for funding the way an NGO would if it wanted a grant.

The interrogation of Sri concentrated on administrative issues such as how many letters came to WIM, what were the contents, how frequently did they come, how did WIM allocate its funds, how much did it spend a year, on what, what was the salary of each WIM member, and other matters.

Osmar, Taufan and Sri were allowed to leave around 16:00.

March 10, 1992:

The three returned at 10:00. The interrogation was not as intensive and turned into a discussion on the NGO movement and its goals and ideals. The discussion touched on democratization and other issues of concern to NGOs. The officers spoke of the need for security, stability, the need to obey procedures (such as obtaining permits), the coordination of activities and so on.

² PDI is the acronym for Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (Indonesian Democratic Party), one of three political parties allowed by the Indonesian government. In Indonesia's tightly controlled political system, it is considered a kind of opposition party although its representatives are government-approved, and there is speculation that in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in June 1992, it will attract widespread support among disaffected members of the military.

³ Bread for the World is a private German funding agency active in developing countries.

In essence, they said that they understood why NGOs acted the way they did and acknowledged that their objectives were good; they just shouldn't sell information to outside elements.) As long as NGOs coordinated their activities with them (the military) and followed established procedures, their activities would not be interfered with.

After signing their interrogation depositions, Osmar, Taufan and Sri were allowed to go home. They were declared to be free. The officers said they hoped to have better relations in the future.

Signed,
Wahyudhi, March 11, 1992

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For More Information
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Asia Watch was founded in 1985 to monitor and promote internationally recognized human rights in Asia. The Chair is Jack Greenberg and the Vice Chairs are Harriet Rabb and Orville Schell. The Executive Director is Sidney Jones and the Washington Director is Mike Jendrzeczyk.

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