

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: IDN30015
Country: Indonesia
Date: 22 March 2006

Keywords: Indonesia – PKI – Party leadership – Party membership – Arrests

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

1. What is the status of the PKI in Indonesia today?
2. Does the PKI still exist as a political party in Indonesia?
3. If so, could you provide details about the party, e.g. the current leader, number of members?
4. Are there any reports on the party from 2002-2005?
5. Are there any reports on party members from 2002-2005?
6. Are there any reports about the arrest of PKI members in September 2005?

RESPONSE

1. What is the status of the PKI in Indonesia today?
2. Does the PKI still exist as a political party in Indonesia?
3. If so, could you provide details about the party, e.g. the current leader, number of members?

The *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, (PKI), or Communist Party of Indonesia is presently banned in Indonesia and as such, information regarding recent or present activities of the PKI underground or otherwise is scarce. Several academics were contacted throughout the course of research for this Response in order to obtain expert information in reference to the PKI in Indonesia today. The Member will be advised if there is any information that may be forthcoming that further assists in determining the present status of the PKI in Indonesia.

No information was located in the sources consulted confirming the PKI presently exists as an official or as an underground political party in Indonesia. As the following article from Amnesty International confirms:

During the rule of former President Suharto, political opponents were regularly accused of being communist and imprisoned. The Indonesian Communist Party,

(Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) was banned after it was accused of being behind an alleged coup attempt in 1965. Thousands of alleged communists were killed and detained during the following years. Despite the political reforms since 1998, the communist label continues to have strong negative implications in Indonesia and the PKI remains banned (Amnesty International 2003, *Indonesia: Old laws, new prisoners of conscience* <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa210272003> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 1).

The events surrounding the banning of the PKI is elaborated in the *Background Notes* for Indonesia from the US Department of State. Country information describes the coup of 1965 which brought Suharto to power and resulted in the banning of the PKI or Communist Party of Indonesia:

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, President Soekarno moved closer to Asian communist states and toward the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in domestic affairs. Though the PKI represented the largest communist party outside the Soviet Union and China, its mass support base never demonstrated an ideological adherence typical of communist parties in other countries...

...Under circumstances that have never been fully explained, on October 1, 1965, PKI sympathizers within the military, including elements from Soekarno's palace guard, occupied key locations in Jakarta and kidnapped and murdered six senior generals. Major General Soeharto, the commander of the Army Strategic Reserve, rallied army troops opposed to the PKI to re-establish control over the city. Violence swept throughout Indonesia in the aftermath of the October 1 events, and unsettled conditions persisted through 1966. Rightist gangs killed tens of thousands of alleged communists in rural areas. Estimates of the number of deaths range between 160,000 and 500,000. The violence was especially brutal in Java and Bali. **During this period, PKI members by the tens of thousands turned in their membership cards. The emotions and fears of instability created by this crisis persisted for many years; the communist party remains banned from Indonesia** (US Department of State 2005, 'Background Notes – Indonesia' <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2748.htm> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 2).

Country information regarding the PKI is scarce and no reports were located in the available sources identifying the present existence of the Party or the identification of PKI Members and current leaders.

However, a report in *The Jakarta Post* states that **PKI pamphlets had been displayed in the village of Kupang as recently as March 2004, and that “Kupang police precinct personnel tore to shreds several pamphlets bearing the symbol of the banned Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) along Kupang's main roads.** Those pamphlets, with the picture of party's (sic), famous symbols – the hammer and sickle – were cleaned up by dawn on Tuesday. They were found glued to the walls of buildings along Jl. Sudirman, Jl. Achmad Yani and Jl. Timor Raya.” ('PKI pamphlets appear in Kupang' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 18 March <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040318.B07> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 3). The display of such pamphlets may suggest the existence of an underground PKI group.

The official account of what occurred during the coup is that a pro-Communist movement calling itself the September 30 Movement attempted to seize power murdering five generals on the night of September 30. The extent of the PKI's involvement in the coup is unclear and

country information indicates that while “the official accounts promulgated by the military describe the communists as having a “puppetmaster” role, some foreign scholars have suggested that PKI involvement was minimal and that the coup was the result of rivalry between military factions. Although evidence presented at trials of coup leaders by the military implicated the PKI, the testimony of witnesses may have been coerced” (‘The Coup’ No date, *Indonesia – Country Studies*, Library of Congress website <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/21.htm> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 4).

Whilst Communism is still banned, country information indicates that reforms have taken place during the last eighteen months which have resulted in an outcome where **“Former members of the banned Indonesian Communist Party are allowed to vote, and, following a Constitutional Court ruling during the year, they may now run for office.** This ruling marked an important step forward in restoring the basic rights of victims of Suharto’s New Order regime” Country information from March 2006 states that “by law, communist teachings cannot be disseminated or developed; however, on February 4, with no government interference, former president Abdurrahman Wahid launched the publication of an Indonesian-language version of Karl Marx’s *Capital*.” (US Department of State 2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 – Indonesia*, February – Attachment 5; US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – Indonesia*, March – Attachment 6).

Country information indicates that Indonesians are still feeling the effects of the 1965 riots and that “in Indonesia, communism has become a ghost or a tool, which is still effective to terrorise citizens. Up until August at least, pamphlets were readily available in many cities of Central Java that warned of ‘the latent threat of communism’” (‘Ignoring the rights of victims of the 1965 massacre’ 2004, *The Jakarta Post* <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040930.E02> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 7).

In April 2000, more than 5,000 Indonesians protested against a lifting of the ban on Communism which may suggest that many Indonesians do indeed fear the return of Communism (‘Thousands protest end to Indonesia communist ban’ 2000, *Reuters*, 8 April – Attachment 8).

4. Are there any reports on the party from 2002-2005?

Information regarding an underground party of the PKI was found in country information from 1995 to 1996 and in the abovementioned March 2004 article from *The Jakarta Post* (‘PKI pamphlets appear in Kupang’ 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 18 March <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040318.B07> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 3).

There is information in a 1996 article from *Reuters* stating that the PKI has “gone underground” (Della-Giacoma, J 1996, ‘Indonesia group blamed for riots goes underground’, Hartford Web Publishing website, Source: *Reuters*, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/54b/030.html> – Accessed 9 March 2006 – Attachment 9).

A 1995 article from *The Jakarta Post* makes reference to “underground communist supporters”:

Abu Hasan Sazili from the ruling Golkar faction at the House stressed that the release

of the prisoners should not be considered a victory for underground communist supporters ('Indonesia: 'Prisoners' release no threat to security' 1995, *The Jakarta Post*, 31 July – Accessed 22 July 1995 – Attachment 10).

Country information indicates that there are many supporters in Indonesian political circles stressing the need for reconciliation with former PKI members and their families. In an interview in *Inside Indonesia* Pak Imam Aziz, Program Coordinator, Syarikat is quoted as saying:

We would like to see an end to the discriminatory laws against former Communist Party members. We have come up against a real lack of leadership on the issue of overturning the ban on communism. Members of Parliament recognise the need to address the issue of 1966, and keep saying that they are not 'anti-communist', but they have not been willing to change the legislation that discriminates against former PKI members and their families. They still ban Communism in Indonesia. This is discrimination, even though discrimination is both illegal and unjust ('Reconciling NU and the PKI' 2004, *Inside Indonesia*, No. 77, Jan-Mar 2004 <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit77/p24-25olliver.html> – Accessed 9 March 2006 – Attachment 11).

5. Are there any reports on party members from 2002-2005?

A report from July 2005 states that a village called Argosari, located in the deep forests of East Kalimantan is also known as the PKI village as many ex-prisoners accused of being PKI members live there ('Ex-PKI detainees live in remote village' 2005, *The Jakarta Post*, 17 July – Attachment 12)

A *Jakarta Post* article from August 2005 Provides information suggesting that discrimination against former members of the PKI still exists and refers to a "special mark" that is included on the identity cards, as evidence of association with the PKI :

For the suspected members of the outlawed Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and their families, the country's anniversary celebration has always been a bitter time, bringing back old memories.

Tjahjono, 70, could not control his emotions and broke down into tears as he recalled the time last year when his daughter was denied an application to become a teacher in an elementary school in Pontianak simply because of the "special mark" on her identity card.

The card bears the code 001, a "scarlet letter" that was forced upon everybody related to PKI's accused members. And his daughter was not the only one who suffered. Tjahjono's three other children also were turned down by private and state institutions, and now are all unemployed ('Former PKI prisoners still waiting for freedom' 2005, *The Jakarta Post*, 16 August – Attachment 13).

An article from 2004 states that discrimination against former suspected PKI members and their families is still very much evident in Indonesia ('Ex-PKI relatives not hopeful after ruling' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 5 March – Attachment 14).

There are also claims that families of suspected PKI members are still seeking answers to the disappearance of family members they have lost contact with. A September 2004 report from *The Jakarta Post* states:

The families of alleged PKI members were treated like pariah during the Soeharto era. Only a few cases were taken to court, as most alleged members were killed or detained for years without trial. Their families were put under the military's microscope. Government doors were virtually closed to them.

Many massacre victims were innocent. They were registered as members of the PKI or affiliated organizations without their knowledge, or they were forced to join by their superiors at work. Farmers could only receive fertilizer when they became PKI members ('Ignoring the rights of the victims of the 1965 massacre' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 30 September <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040930.E02> – Accessed 8 March 2006 – Attachment 7).

A February 2004 report from *The Jakarta Post* states that despite an historic court ruling outlawing the prevention of former members of the outlawed Indonesia Communist Party (PKI), or their relatives, from contesting legislative elections in Indonesia, "Minister of Justice and Human Rights Yusril Ihza Mahendra said the government had no plan to scrap discriminatory laws, or governmental regulations imposed against PKI members" ('No plan to revive rights of ex-PKI cadres' 2004 *The Jakarta Post*, 28 February – Attachment 15).

6. Are there any reports about the arrest of PKI members in September 2005?

Information stating that there were arrests of PKI members in September 2005 was not located.

An article published in September 2005 on the website of the Indonesian human rights NGO Tapol refers to the discrimination still faced by ex-PKI members:

The Stigma Persists

This deplorable situation, with so many discriminatory laws still in force, means that the stigma attached to being an ex-tapol persists against people who were held without due process and imprisoned for years without ever being tried and found guilty of anything.

During the past few months, there have been many stories in the Indonesian press about continued stigmatisation. The following cases give but a taster of the true scale of the problem.

Tjahyono, chair of his local Institute of the Struggle for the Rehabilitation of Victims of the New Order, who spent ten years in Nusakambangan Island prison and on Buru, says he won't feel free until he is rehabilitated and the historical record is rectified.

His children who, as infants, spent time in a juvenile detention centre, still suffer the consequences of his past. One daughter has 001 (distinguishing her as the child of a 1965 victim) marked on her ID. As a result, she has been denied any teaching jobs, so makes a living as a dressmaker. His son has been refused a job in the civil service. Gusti, now 85 years, has been forced, along with 175 other ex-tapols, to relocate to Argosari, an isolated village in East Kalimantan.

Oentung, another ex-tapol in Argosari, spent ten years in a string of prisons. The reason for his incarceration was his devotion to the Javanese traditional drama, ludruk, that led him to join the cultural organisation, LEKRA, which had close ties with the PKI. Another inmate of Argosari is Kasran, 81, located there because he joined the peasants' organisation, BTI. His children were taunted as 'PKI children' and 'children of a murderer' by their schoolmates, forcing them to quit their school ('Forty years on, justice and comprehensive rehabilitation for the 1965 victims' 2005, Tapol – The Indonesian Human Rights campaign website, 26 September <http://tapol.gn.apc.org/news/files/1965ann.htm> – Accessed 13 March 2006 – Attachment 16).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Government Information & Reports

United States Library of Congress Country Reports <http://countrystudies.us>

United Nations (UN)

UNHCR www.unhcr.org

Non-Government Organisations

International News & Politics

The Jakarta Post <http://www.thejakartapost.com>

Reuters <http://today.reuters.com/news/home.aspx>

Region Specific Links

Inside Indonesia <http://www.insideindonesia.org>

Topic Specific Links

Sejarah Indonesia <http://www.gimonca.com/sejarah/sejarah10.shtml>

Marxists.com website <http://www.marxist.com>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Yahoo Search Engine <http://www.yahoo.com/>

Online Subscription Services

Janes Intelligence Review <http://jir.janes.com/public/jir/index.shtml>

Library Networks

State Library of New South Wales <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/>

University Sites

University of Texas Library <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Databases:

Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
DIMIA	<i>BACIS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.</i>
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. Amnesty International 2003, *Indonesia: Old laws, new prisoners of conscience* <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa210272003> – Accessed 8 March 2006.
2. US Department of State 2005, 'Background Notes – Indonesia' <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2748.htm> – Accessed 8 March 2006.
3. 'PKI pamphlets appear in Kupang' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 18 March <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040318.B07> – Accessed 8 March 2006.
4. 'The Coup' (undated), *Indonesia – Country Studies*, Library of Congress website <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/21.htm> – Accessed 8 March 2006.
5. US Department of State 2005, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 – Indonesia*, February.
6. US Department of State 2006, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005 – Indonesia*, March.
7. 'Ignoring the rights of victims of the 1965 massacre' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 30 September <http://www.thejakartapost.com/yesterdaydetail.asp?fileid=20040930.E02> – Accessed 8 March 2006.
8. 'Thousands protest end to Indonesia communist ban' 2000, *Reuters*, 8 April. (FACTIVA)
9. Della-Giacoma, J 1996, 'Indonesia group blamed for riots goes underground', Hartford Web Publishing website, Source: *Reuters*, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/54b/030.html> – Accessed 9 March 2006.
10. 'Indonesia: 'Prisoners' release no threat to security' 1995, *The Jakarta Post*, 31 July.
11. 'Reconciling NU and the PKI' 2004, *Inside Indonesia*, No. 77, Jan-Mar 2004 <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit77/p24-25olliver.html> – Accessed 9 March 2006.
12. 'Ex-PKI detainees live in remote village' 2005, *The Jakarta Post*, 17 July. (FACTIVA)
13. 'Former PKI prisoners still waiting for freedom' 2005, *The Jakarta Post*, 16 August 2005. (FACTIVA)
14. 'Ex-PKI relatives not hopeful after ruling' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 5 March 2004.
15. 'No plan to revive rights of ex-PKI cadres' 2004, *The Jakarta Post*, 28 February. (FACTIVA)
16. 'Forty years on, justice and comprehensive rehabilitation for the 1965 victims' 2005, Tapol – The Indonesian Human Rights campaign website, 26 September <http://tapol.gn.apc.org/news/files/1965ann.htm> – Accessed 13 March 2006.