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## A Year of Truth and the Possibilities for Reconciliation in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Since the end of the New Order military regime in 1998, successive Indonesian administrations have yet to deal with crimes against humanity perpetrated by the old regime, particularly the 1965–1966 massacres. Attempts for reconciliation have mainly come from grass-roots organizations which employ oral historical methods to both document these crimes and to serve as the basis for claims of truth-telling about the past. In this paper, I examine the work of some of these grass-roots organizations and, in particular, the ‘Year of Truth’ initiative. I outline the ‘Hearing Testimony’ forum held in November 2013 and contrast this work with the failed attempts at the national level to deal with this past.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, 1965-66 massacres, truth-telling, reconciliation

### Introduction

Truth-telling and reconciliation remain unsettled and troubled issues in Indonesia. In the nearly twenty years since the end of the military regime, General Suharto’s authoritarian “New Order” (1966–1998), dealing with the many atrocities committed by that regime has never been seriously attempted by the Indonesian government. Mass atrocities committed by the regime date from the beginning of the New Order (when an estimated half a million people were killed in the anti-Leftist massacres of 1965–1966), span the widespread violations committed during the twenty-four year occupation of Timor Leste (1975–1999), and include the years of military campaigns against communities in areas such as Aceh and Papua in which thousands of civilians died.<sup>1</sup> These state-sponsored atrocities also include the disappearing of activists and critics of the regime and the numerous “incidents” whereby local civilians were tortured and killed during army crackdowns.<sup>2</sup>

Not one of the five Presidents who has ruled since Suharto’s fall in 1998 has made dealing with the past a priority. During this time, there have been a few abortive attempts at official investigations into or redress of some of the state crimes committed under the New Order but all have failed.<sup>3</sup> Overwhelmingly, amongst the many communities of survivors and their advocates, there is a feeling of justice delayed is justice denied. The regime’s many victims of gross human rights violations have seen the initial promises of democratic reform, justice for past crimes and reconciliation stumble and fail. As the years have passed, the older generation of survivors has almost all passed on without seeing any substantial measure of justice or reconciliation.<sup>4</sup>

The only sustained attempts to reconcile communities riven by past crimes have come from grassroots organizations which mostly employ oral historical methods to both document these crimes and to serve as the basis for claims of truth-telling about the past.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I examine the oral testimony work of some of these grass-roots organizations which have

<sup>1</sup> On these mass atrocities, see Robert Cribb, “Genocide in Indonesia,” *Journal of Genocide Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001), 219-239; Geoffrey Robinson, “*Rawan* Is as *Rawan* Does: The Origins of Disorder in New Order Aceh,” *Indonesia* 66 (1998), 127-157; Human Rights Watch, *Out of Sight: Endemic Abuse and Impunity in Papua’s Central Highlands* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007); and Richard Tanter, Gerry van Klinken and Dennis Ball, eds., *Masters of Terror: Indonesia’s Military and Violence in East Timor* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> On some of these cases, see Elizabeth Fuller Collins, “Indonesia: A Violent Culture?” *Asian Survey* 42, no. 4 (2002), 582-604; and Freek Colombijn, “What is so Indonesian about Violence?” in *Violence in Indonesia*, ed. Ingrid Wessel and Georgia Wimböfer (Hamburg: Abera, 2001), 25-46.

<sup>3</sup> International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the Commission for Disappeared Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS), *Derailed: Transitional Justice in Indonesia since the Fall of Soeharto – A Joint Report by ICTJ and KontraS* (Jakarta: ICTJ and KontraS, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> On these sentiments by survivor groups and communities, see, for example, ICTJ and KontraS, *Derailed*, 83-87; Kimura Ehito, “The Struggle for Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” *Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015), 73-93.

<sup>5</sup> See Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem, “Seducing for Truth and Justice: Civil Society Initiatives for the 1965 Mass Violence in Indonesia,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2013), 115-142.

investigated the 1965–1966 massacres. Specifically, I examine the oral-historical work of a large coalition of non-government and victim advocacy organizations, the KKP (the Coalition for Justice and the Disclosure of Truth, *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran*), which organised the Year of Truth (*Tahun Kebenaran*) campaign in Indonesia. First, I briefly outline the state-sponsored atrocities committed during the 1965–1966 massacres and their lasting impact on Indonesian society. To examine the work of this campaign, I then outline the Hearing Testimony five-day forum held in Jakarta in November 2013 and some of the campaign's online testimonial artifacts. Lastly, I contrast this work with the failed attempts at the national level to deal with this past. These include the defunct truth and reconciliation commission legislation, the failed investigation into the massacres by the state's human rights body, and the non-apologies for the 1965–1966 massacres and other atrocities committed under the New Order regime by the former President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and the current President, Joko (Jokowi) Widodo.

This discussion examines the Year of Truth campaign within the context of stalled efforts for reconciliation in contemporary Indonesia. Scholars and activists alike in Indonesia have pointed to the utter failure of successive administrations since the end of the New Order “to deal with past human rights violations and to encourage the reconciliation process.”<sup>6</sup> Many have also pointed to Indonesia's lack of investigation into or redress of past mass atrocities and human rights violations as sustaining an ingrained culture of impunity.<sup>7</sup> Within broader understandings of restorative justice after the end of authoritarianism, Indonesia stands out as an example of how new regimes sacrifice any attempt at restoration or justice for the short-term goals of securing elite support for democratisation.<sup>8</sup> This support, however, has come at a high price: a low-quality democracy, the capture of the newly built democratic institutions by oligarchic elites, and now swift back stepping on hard-won reforms to ensure human rights.<sup>9</sup>

The Year of Truth campaign was a collective effort by forty-seven of Indonesia's leading human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and legal aid bodies to challenge the country's culture of impunity.<sup>10</sup> Their aim was for the testimonies given by survivors as part of the campaign to “become a source of enlightenment for the nation in the long struggle towards truth and justice.”<sup>11</sup> For the NGOs involved in the KKP coalition, the Year of Truth campaign explicitly linked truth-telling to demands for action by the Indonesian government nationally. Specifically, those involved in the campaign held events and created online and other media which were intended primarily for a domestic Indonesian audience and which unequivocally posited survivors' testimonies about past atrocities as political claims of truth about Indonesia's past. In this paper, I highlight one of the survivor's stories used in this online media campaign (the testimony of Ibu Bendelina) and one of the national events held as part of the Year of Truth (the Hearing Testimony event in November 2013). These survivors' testimonies and witness forums, according to the KKP coalition, had a clear political purpose: by “providing a space for victims to speak truth... [they]

<sup>6</sup> Priyambudi Sulistiyanto and Sentot Setyasiswanto, “Still Seeking Truth and Reconciliation for the 1965 Victims: Is It Possible?” in *Asia-Pacific Between Conflict and Reconciliation*, ed. Philip Tolliday, Maria Pame and Dong-Choon Kim (Göttingen: Vandenoek and Ruprecht, 2016), 69.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Suzannah Linton, “Accounting for Atrocities in Indonesia,” *Singapore Year Book of International Law* 10 (2006), 199-231; and Martha Meijer, *The Scope of Impunity in Indonesia* (Utrecht: The Netherlands Humanist Committee of Human Rights, HOM, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Jon Elster, ed., *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> On this, see Edward Aspinall, “The Irony of Success,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 2 (2010), 20-34; and Annie Pohlman, “Indonesia and Post-New Order Reforms: Challenges and Opportunities for Promoting the Responsibility to Protect,” *Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, Research Report, July 2010.

<sup>10</sup> For the full list of all forty-seven members of the KKP, go to their website, *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran*, “Tentang KKP,” accessed February 12, 2016, <http://kkpk.org/tentang-kkpk/>.

<sup>11</sup> Putu Oka Sukanta, “Pengantar Editor [Editor's Introduction],” in *Menemukan Kembali Indonesia: Suara Korban Membebaskan Belunggu Kekerasan Masa Lalu [Redefining Indonesia: Survivors' Voices Breaking the Chains of the Violent Past]*, ed. Putu Oka Sukanta (Jakarta: *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran*, 2014), vi (my translation).

demand that the [Indonesian] State take concrete steps to restore human rights [and investigate] abuses in the past."<sup>12</sup>

By juxtaposing the memory work of survivors and their advocates at the grassroots level with the willful amnesia of successive national level administrations, I argue that these local campaigns make significant contributions to dealing with the past but that they do so in the face of the almost insurmountable challenge of entrenched impunity in Indonesia for past atrocities.<sup>13</sup> As Budi Hernawan and Pat Walsh have shown, this "impenetrable" climate of impunity means that the massacres of 1965–1966 are but one of many in "the silent history of [...] state-sponsored Indonesian atrocities that have been misrepresented or suppressed and rendered invisible."<sup>14</sup> Given this ingrained culture of impunity and lack of redress by official means, campaigns such as the Year of Truth and others organized by Indonesia's many victim advocacy groups are likely to remain the only means available for survivors to speak their truths about historical traumas in Indonesia for the foreseeable future.

### Background: The 30 September Coup and the 1965–1966 Massacres in Indonesia

An attempted coup on the night of 30 September 1965 began a series of violent events which affected the lives of tens of millions of Indonesians. They also forever changed the political and social landscape of Indonesia. On that night, six top-ranking generals and one general's aide were kidnapped and murdered by a group of middle-ranking Army officers proclaiming themselves "the 30 September Movement."<sup>15</sup> Numerous conspiracy theories have spread over the years as to who carried out the coup, for what purpose and who was ultimately responsible.<sup>16</sup> Whoever may have been ultimately responsible for the coup, the Indonesian Army leadership seized the opportunity presented by the upheaval to wipe out its long-standing political rivals, the supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, *Partai Komunis Indonesia*).<sup>17</sup>

Within days of putting down the 30 September Movement, the upper echelons of the remaining army leadership had blamed the coup on the PKI and claimed that members of Communist organizations, including the Communist-aligned People's Youth (*Pemuda Rakyat*) and women's movement (*Gerwani*), had played key roles in the kidnapping and murder of the generals.<sup>18</sup> The military then embarked upon a propaganda campaign which was designed to incite anti-Communist hatred and violence throughout the Indonesian population. The propaganda created the image of the PKI and Communism in general as being a dangerous enemy. This, in turn, encouraged those who would eliminate the PKI to see themselves as defenders of the nation, purging the Communist pollutant from Indonesia in order to save it.<sup>19</sup>

These massacres were carried out principally in the closing months of 1965 and the early months of 1966 by the Indonesian military with the active participation of various militia groups drawn mostly from the ranks of religious and nationalist organizations. In each region of Indonesia, the local militia groups which participated were different. They included, for example, *Banser*, a

<sup>12</sup> Putu Oka Sukanta, "Penjelasan Metode [Explanation of Methods]", in *Menemukan Kembali Indonesia: Suara Korban Membebaskan Belenggu Kekerasan Masa Lalu [Redefining Indonesia: Survivors' Voices Breaking the Chains of the Violent Past]*, ed. Putu Oka Sukanta (Jakarta: Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran, 2014), ix-x (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> See Jiwon Suh, "The Politics of Transitional Justice in Post-Suharto Indonesia" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Budi Hernawan and Pat Walsh, *Inconvenient Truths: The Fate of the Chega! And Per Memoriam Ad Spem Reports on Timor-Leste* (Jakarta: Asia Justice and Rights, August 2015), 3.

<sup>15</sup> John Roosa, "The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement: The Aporias of the Official Narrative," in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965–68*, eds. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 25-49.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1971); and John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Cribb, "Genocide in Indonesia," 219-225.

<sup>18</sup> Saskia Wieringa, "The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia: Sexual Politics and Nationalism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003), 70-91.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Drakeley, "Lubang Buaya: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre," *Nebula* 4, no. 4 (2007), 11-35; Cribb, "Genocide in Indonesia"; and Annie Pohlman, "Incitement to Genocide against a Political Group: The Anti-Communist Killings in Indonesia," *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 11, no. 1 (2014), 1-22.

paramilitary brigade set up by one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, which began hunting down Communists by the second week of October in parts of East Java.<sup>20</sup> Another militia was the *Tameng* mobile killing squad made up primarily of youths and thugs associated with the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI, *Partai Nasionalis Indonesia*) in Bali.<sup>21</sup> Other militias were made up of the various Protestant and Catholic student groups who participated in the killings across the south-eastern island province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT).<sup>22</sup>

While the massacre of an estimated 500,000 men, women and children for their association with the PKI was being carried out, the military – by then under the command of General Suharto – conducted continuous waves of arrests against an estimated million more who were rounded up and put into political detention.<sup>23</sup> The majority of those arrested, known as *tapols* (an abbreviation of *tahanan politik* or political prisoner), were detained without trial and imprisoned. Many were subjected to interrogation, torture, starvation and forced labor in overcrowded and substandard prisons and labor camps.<sup>24</sup>

Most of those killed during the 1965–1966 massacres were murdered in executions, rather than in general or localized killings of civilians, with the often secretive nature of the executions limiting the number of witnesses. For many of the victims of the killings, death was preceded by capture. Once in detention, the outcome for many detainees was torture and mistreatment followed either by removal and execution in some remote place or else by months if not years of imprisonment. Most victims were rounded up from a particular area, spend a short time in detention, then were taken to a nearby site that was convenient for the disposal of many bodies, and executed en masse.<sup>25</sup>

The stigma of being related to political prisoners or those killed during the massacres later developed into institutionalized policies in the 1980s, whereby those tainted by association with the PKI were marked as “unclean” with family members said to be from an “unclean environment”. For unclean people and their relatives, the government imposed numerous restraints on their rights, supposedly to help protect the wider community from the latent danger of communism.<sup>26</sup>

The killings, arrests and stigmatization of all those connected with the Left created the foundation for Suharto's long-lasting authoritarian New Order. Anti-Communism was, as Ariel Heryanto has argued, the basis for the regime, for “Indonesia's New Order authoritarianism would not have existed nor survived so well without the magic power of the discursive phantom of the ‘Communist threat’.”<sup>27</sup> As other researchers have shown, the regime's efforts to maintain legitimacy were, in part, based both upon its success at having eradicated the Communist scourge and upon perpetuating the fantasy of a Communist resurgence.<sup>28</sup> When the New Order ended in 1998, however, the spectre of anti-Communism did not die with the regime, but rather remained a powerful tool to discredit political opponents and evoke fear. As numerous scholars have highlighted, despite a period of initial liberalization and challenges to the New Order's hegemonic

<sup>20</sup> See Greg Fealy and Katharine McGregor, “East Java and the Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in the 1965–66 Anti-Communist Violence,” in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965–68*, eds. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 104–130.

<sup>21</sup> On the *Tameng* groups, see Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Steven Farram, “The PKI in West Timor and Nusa Tenggara Timur: 1965 and Beyond,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 166, no. 4 (2010), 381–403.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Cribb, “Introduction: Problems in the Historiography of the Killings in Indonesia”, in *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), 1–44.

<sup>24</sup> Julie Southwood and Patrick Flanagan, *Indonesia: Law, Propaganda and Terror* (London: Zed Books, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Kammen and Katharine E McGregor, ed., *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965–68* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> *Tapol, Indonesia: The Prison State* (London: Tapol, 1976); and Amnesty International, *Indonesia: An Amnesty International Report* (London: Amnesty International, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> Ariel Heryanto, “Where Communism Never Dies: Violence, Trauma and Narration in the Last Cold War Capitalist Authoritarian State,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999), 151.

<sup>28</sup> On this, see, for example, Robert Goodfellow, *Api Dalam Sekam: The New Order and the Ideology of Anti-Communism* (Clayton: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995).

narration of history, the discourse of anti-Communism remains strong in contemporary Indonesia, and is invoked with alarming regularity in political debates and campaigns.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, after 1998, survivors of the 1965–1966 killings and political imprisonment, often with the encouragement and support of emerging human rights and victim advocacy organizations, began speaking out about their experiences.

### The Year of Truth Initiative: Testimony as Truth-Telling

When the New Order finally fell in May 1998, the prospects of democratic reform and redress for the abuses committed by the regime initially opened a space for victims and their advocates to speak out about their experiences. As Ann Laura Stoler has noted, there was, at least in the first few years after 1998, an unprecedented “explosion of interest” in talking about the 1965–1966 events and other state-sponsored crimes.<sup>30</sup> This initial opening of space for talking about these events soon gave way to the re-silencing, or purposeful amnesia, which has characterised Indonesian public discourse about the former regime’s crimes over the last decade and which has been in itself a product of the stagnation of democracy in contemporary Indonesian politics.<sup>31</sup> As various scholars have noted, whatever initial space for open debate about past events there was in the immediate post-Suharto period, this ended by approximately 2004 with the election of SBY, a former military commander with little interest in pursuing the early reform period’s agenda for redressing past crimes under, in particular, former Presidents B.J. Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid.<sup>32</sup>

It is within this climate of amnesia and impunity for past atrocities that survivors, their advocates and civil society groups in Indonesia conduct the task of speaking their own truths about the past. Many survivor organizations were set up in the early-to-mid 2000s with the explicit goal of collecting the testimonies of people who had experienced state-sponsored atrocities so that these truths would either counter-act the New Order’s blanket denial of responsibility for these acts of violence or else deny the regime’s hegemonic version of the history of these events.<sup>33</sup> This has certainly been the case for the survivor groups and advocacy organizations set up over the past two decades which deal with the 1965–1966 mass violence. Some of these organisations which were set up in the early 2000s with the specific aim of documenting the histories of survivors and victims of the killings include Syarikat (the Islamic Society for People’s Advocacy, based in Yogyakarta) and the YPKP65 (Foundation for Research into Victims of the 1965-1966 Killings, based in Jakarta). These and many other organizations have collected thousands of survivor testimonies in the last two decades.<sup>34</sup> In addition, these organizations carried out other projects, most aimed at collecting surviving historical documentation of past atrocities, including by conducting a small number of exhumations of mass graves in Java.<sup>35</sup>

Ten years after the end of the New Order, a large group of these organizations began to work together, and the Year of Truth campaign grew out of this collaboration. This group of

<sup>29</sup> On the discourse of anti-Communism in contemporary Indonesian political debates, see, for example, Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Katharine E. McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia’s Past* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “On the Uses and Abuses of the Past in Indonesia,” *Asian Survey* 42, no. 4 (2002), 642.

<sup>31</sup> On this topic, see, Budiawan and Walsh, *Inconvenient Truths*, 10-12; ICTJ and KontraS, *Derailed*.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, ICTJ and KontraS, *Derailed*, 11-17; and Suh, “The Politics of Transitional Justice,” 90-103.

<sup>33</sup> Annie Pohlman, “Documentation: Reports by Human Rights and Victim Advocacy Organizations in Indonesia: Reconciling the Violence of 1965,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2013), 143-165; and Wahyuningroem, “Seducing for Truth and Justice,” 122-125.

<sup>34</sup> On some of these groups, see Pohlman, “Documentation,” 143-165. Some of the outputs from these various projects include KontraS, *Menyusun Puzzle Pelanggaran HAM 1965: Sebuah Upaya Pendokumentasian [Figuring out the Puzzle of Human Rights Violations in 1965: An Effort at Documentation]* (Jakarta: KontraS, 2012); John Roosa, Ayu Ratih and Hilmar Farid, ed., *Tahun yang Tak Pernah Berakhir: Memahami Pengalaman Korban ‘65 [The Year that Never Ended: Understanding the Experiences of the Victims of ‘65]* (Jakarta: ELSAM, TRuK and ISSI, 2004); and Haryo Sasongko and Melani Budianta, ed., *Menembus Tirai Asap: Kesaksian Tahanan Politik 1965 [Piercing the Smoke Screen: Testimonies by Political Prisoners from 1965]* (Jakarta: Amanah Foundation, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> See Katharine McGregor, “Mass Graves and Memories of the 1965 Indonesian Killings,” in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965–68*, ed. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 234–262.

organizations formed a coordinating body in 2008, which was an alliance of individuals and forty-seven non-government and victim advocacy groups, and was named the KKP (Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran), or the Coalition for Justice and Disclosure of Truth. The slogan of the Year of Truth initiative was “truth is the future” (*kebenaran adalah masa depan*).<sup>36</sup> Amongst these forty-seven groups which make up the KKP are many of Indonesia’s foremost human rights organizations, including ELSAM (the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy), KontraS (the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) and Imparsial (the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor), in addition to several of the leading Legal Aid Foundations across Indonesia, and a range of groups which advocate on specific human rights issues, such as IKOHI (Association for the Families of the Disappeared). Furthermore, individual survivors and victim advocacy groups which campaign for an official investigation into, and redress of, the massacres of 1965–1966 also form part of the KKP coalition, including SKP-HAM of Central Sulawesi (Solidarity with Victims of Human Rights Violations), SekBer’65 (Joint Secretariat for 1965) from Solo in Central Java, and Syarikat (the Islamic Society for People’s Advocacy), based in Yogyakarta.<sup>37</sup>

In the first few years after forming in 2008, the KKP’s member organizations sought to bring coherence and structure to the numerous efforts being carried out across various parts of Indonesia to collect survivors’ testimonies. Individually, these organizations had amassed large numbers of oral histories by survivors, as well as compiled volumes of historical documentation data, such as surveys with survivors and their family members.<sup>38</sup> One of the aims of setting up the KKP as a coordinating body for these numerous organizations, therefore, was to pool the resources and strengths of these various groups to build a national campaign for truth and reconciliation. After some years of negotiation, the Year of Truth campaign was announced. The campaign was structured so that it drew on the testimonial work of the KKP’s constituent member organizations and their mostly oral historical accounts by survivors which formed the core of the Year of Truth.<sup>39</sup>

The Year of Truth campaign itself was held between December 2012 and December 2013, overlapping the fifteen-year anniversary of the 1998 end of the New Order. While the campaign focused on hearing and disseminating the oral testimonies of survivors of serious human rights violations committed under the New Order regime, such as the 1965–1966 massacres, the organizing committee also highlighted more recent violations, such as in Papua and West Papua provinces, and the 2004 assassination of human rights defender, Munir.<sup>40</sup> A variety of events was held before, during and after the twelve-month campaign across several regions of Indonesia, including forums for hearing testimony by survivors of human rights abuses from Aceh in the northwest to the easternmost province, Papua. These events had the clearly stated aim of supporting survivors through providing them with a forum to give testimony about their experiences and through counselling and other forms of financial and educational support.<sup>41</sup> Attendance and participation in these events varied from less than one hundred to approximately one thousand people.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Information on the Year of Truth campaign can be found, in Indonesian, on the KKP’s main website. For information on the Year of Truth, see *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran (KKP)*, “Tahun Kebenaran [The Year of Truth],” KKP, accessed January 28, 2016, <http://kkpk.org/tahun-kebenaran>.

<sup>37</sup> The Coalition recently published a book with highlights and individuals’ stories from the Year of Truth campaign: *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran (KKP)*, *Menemukan Kembali Indonesia: Suara Korban Membebaskan Belenggu Kekerasan Masa Lalu [Redefining Indonesia: The Voices of Survivors Freeing the Chains of Past Violence]* (Jakarta: KKP, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Organizations such as Syarikat, the YPKP’65 and Sekber’65 (amongst others) have compiled thousands of such histories, most of which remain uncatalogued and in accessible to those outside these organisations.

<sup>39</sup> See Sukanta, “Pengantar Editor,” vi (author’s translation).

<sup>40</sup> Sayed, “Culture of Impunity in Indonesia Lives on Nine Years after the Assassination of Munir,” *Human Rights First*, September 9, 2013, accessed May 10, 2014, [www.humanrightsfirst.org/2013/09/09/culture-of-impunity-in-indonesia-lives-on-nine-years-after-the-assassination-of-munir](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/2013/09/09/culture-of-impunity-in-indonesia-lives-on-nine-years-after-the-assassination-of-munir).

<sup>41</sup> The KKP’s website ([www.kkpk.org](http://www.kkpk.org)) provides descriptions of their events, aims of their work, and information about the coalition. See “Tentang KKP [About the KKP],” *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran*, accessed June 12, 2015, <http://kkpk.org/tentang-kkpk/>.

<sup>42</sup> The exact numbers of participants and those who attended the forums across Indonesia is unknown, though these forums are discussed in the KKP’s report on the Year of Truth campaign. This includes discussions on the individual events. See Putu Oka Sukanta, ed., *Menemukan Kembali Indonesia: Suara Korban Membebaskan Belenggu Kekerasan*



### Testimony as Artefact: Ibu Bendelina's Story

For the organizations which make up the KKKPK, truth-telling and the right to truth are central to the campaign.<sup>43</sup> In the various promotional media created by the KKKPK, such as YouTube clips and a wide range of products for social media, these claims to truth-telling are evident. The Twitter hashtag #bicarabenaar (#speaktruth) tags and connects the many media on display. Visitors to the KKKPK website or Facebook page can view numerous video files, some are promotional materials created for awareness-raising while others are video testimonies by survivors filmed at the various forums across Indonesia.<sup>44</sup>

These video testimonies are edited and stylized, most lasting between five and six minutes. Each begins with soft piano music, played in a minor key, and the testimony is introduced with a map of Indonesia, locating where the testimony was recorded, and a title given for the testimony. In one of these videos, the testimony by Ibu Bendelina, the title is "A teacher, a member of Gerwani." In the information given beneath the YouTube clip, it states that Ibu Bendelina "gave testimony about the 1965 Tragedy as part of the Hearing Testimony forum in Eastern Nusa Tenggara province, held in Kupang city on 27 April 2013."<sup>45</sup> The opening sequence fades into scenes of Ibu Bendelina's village on Sabu (Sawu) Island, then shows her caring for her grandchildren. She states where and when she was born, and talks briefly about her family growing up, her marriage and children. The recording of her testimony plays while the video moves between close-ups on Ibu Bendelina's face as she speaks and images which show her cleaning in her home and moving about the village.

As a member of the Communist Party-aligned mass women's organization, *Gerwani*, Ibu Bendelina was one of hundreds of thousands arrested and detained following the coup across Indonesia. During her video testimony, two locations connected to these events are highlighted. The first is Jariwala, a local women's detention camp. In the film, Ibu Bendelina stands looking across at a large, old hut, its grass roof damaged and neglected. As the observer, we stand behind Ibu Bendelina, and watch her as she looks at the old camp building. While watching, we hear as Ibu Bendelina describes her time in the camp; about how she was interrogated, beaten, and how her hair was shaved off, likely as a method of humiliation.<sup>46</sup>

Halfway through the video, a second location is introduced: Ibu Bendelina is shown squatting in an open field, crying. A brief section of text appears on the screen, naming the location: Hanga Loko Pedae, beneath that, *Tempat Pembantaian dan Keburan Massal*, meaning "Site of Massacre and Mass Grave." At the end of Ibu Bendelina's testimony, the screen fades to black, the music falls silent and the following text offered in Indonesian:

"According to the results of the research undertaken by JPIT [Eastern Indonesian Women's Network, one of the organizations involved in the KKKPK], more than sixty teachers were arrested and detained on Sabu Island because they were accused of being PKI [members]. Twenty-six amongst them were executed, including Bendelina's husband, Kola Raga. The victims who were executed were buried in a mass grave in a field at Hanga Loko Pedae."<sup>47</sup>

The audience for Ibu Bendelina's video testimony, as with the other media produced for the KKKPK campaign, is clearly a domestic one. All media files and accompanying texts are produced in Indonesian; the only non-Indonesian materials are from newspaper stories printed in

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*Masa Lalu [Redefining Indonesia: Survivors' Voices Breaking the Chains of the Violent Past]*, (Jakarta: Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> For a statement on the aims of the campaign by one of the main organizers of the KKKPK, see Sukanta, "Pengantar Editor," v-vi (my translation).

<sup>44</sup> KKKPK Kebenaran Facebook page, accessed June 12, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/kkpk.kebenaran?ref=ts&fref=ts>.

<sup>45</sup> To view Ibu Bendelina's testimony, go to: "Dengar Kesaksian Kupang, NTT: 'Guru Anggota Gerwani' [Hear the Testimony from Kupang, NTT: 'A Teacher and Member of Gerwani']," YouTube video, 5:30, posted by "Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran," April 29, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AywAqfhUx94>.

<sup>46</sup> See Annie Pohlman, *Women, Sexual Violence and the Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966* (London: Routledge, 2015), 130-152.

<sup>47</sup> "Dengar Kesaksian Kupang, NTT: 'Guru Anggota Gerwani' [Hear the Testimony from Kupang, NTT: 'A Teacher and Member of Gerwani']," YouTube video, 5:30, posted by "Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran," April 29, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AywAqfhUx94>.

English-language Indonesian outlets (e.g. *The Jakarta Post*) which have been scrap-booked into the collection of news stories, and the section of the KKPCK website which lists expressions of international support, including from former directors and commissioners of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in other parts of the world.<sup>48</sup> For a non-Indonesian watching any of these video testimonies, while it may be clear that the older man or woman on the screen is telling a story of some kind, and there are emotive cues to be drawn from the sombre music and images shown, nothing more can be discerned. In Ibu Bendelina's video testimony, her words are soft and difficult to discern; there are no sub-titles and very few textual aids given to help the viewer aside from the one or two pieces of text which give location names. The appeal to an Indonesian domestic audience is also evident in that she speaks in Indonesian, not her local language (*Bahasa Sabu* or *Bahasa Hawu*) on her island, Sabu (often written as Savu or Sawu) to the west of Timor island in Savu-Raijua regency, Eastern Nusa Tenggara province.

Ibu Bendelina and the other men and women survivors who gave oral testimony as part of the KKPCK's initiative perform testimony as acts of witnessing. Within broader understandings of testimonial witnessing of atrocity, the oral testimonies given by Ibu Bendelina and others lie at the heart of social and cultural projects for social change. The survivor's role as witness is a complex one, not least of all because acts of performative witnessing to past atrocities demand, though may never attain, an ethical engagement and response from those who hear testimony.<sup>49</sup> As Anne Cubilié has argued, "survivors of atrocity become deeply uncomfortable signifiers for the post-atrocity societies within which they live, excessive to structures of normality that privilege forgetting, getting over and getting on with things through the denial of the terror of death."<sup>50</sup>

The testimonies given by Ibu Bendelina and the many other survivors who took part in the Year of Truth campaign are stories of individual and community suffering. These stories become testimonial artefacts and are consciously and emotively stylized and reproduced for an imagined national audience, one which has compassion for and the will to support their truth-telling claims. This testimonial artefact created from the oral history of Ibu Bendelina was one of many similar media productions by the KKPCK for the Year of Truth campaign. These online testimonies were taken primarily, as in the case of Ibu Bendelina's testimony, from the oral histories of those who participated in the regional testimony-hearing forums held throughout the 2012–2013 campaign in various cities across Indonesia. Yet in the production and circulation of texts and testimonial objects, which clearly seek an emotional and empathetic engagement, how do these objects of testimony and claims to truth-telling operate in present-day Indonesia? To what effect does the KKPCK's Year of Truth campaign create and use these social forms of testimony to elicit a compassionate, and politically engaged, response thereby constituting Indonesians as a witnessing public? And, perhaps the most pressing question, can such campaigns have any impact on Indonesia's impenetrable impunity for past atrocities?

### Hearing Testimony: "Speaking the Truth, Breaking the Cycle"

One of the main events during the Year of Truth campaign was the national Hearing Testimony forum, held 25–29 November 2013 at the national library in central Jakarta. This forum was the

<sup>48</sup> To view these messages of support, go to KKPCK, "Dukung Internasional [International Support]," *Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran*, accessed August 10, 2015, <http://kkpk.org/dukungan-internasional/> (viewed on 10 August 2015). It should also be noted that on the websites of some of the organizations which form part of the KKPCK coalition, there is information available in languages other than Indonesian. See, for example, the Asia Justice and Rights' page (AJAR), which has programs across the Asia-Pacific and publishes mostly in English. See Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), "The Year of Truth," AJAR, accessed August 10, 2015, <http://asia-ajar.org/ajar-work-year-of-truth.html>.

<sup>49</sup> For works on testimonial acts of witnessing and their demands for ethical response, see, for example, Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights," *Biography* 27, no. 1 (2004), 1–24; Yvonne S. Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Literature of Trauma under Pinochet in Chile* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Anne Cubilié, *Women Witnessing Terror: Testimony and the Cultural Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), xii.

culmination of the Year of Truth campaign and came at the end of the series of regional testimony forums held across Indonesia. Each of the five days had a specific theme. On day one, after the opening address, the theme for the hearing testimony was violence against women. The second day was devoted to hearing testimony about violence during military operations (such as in Aceh, Timor Leste and Papua), and the third to violence connected to freedom of religion and belief (including against religious minorities). The final two days explored violence associated with natural resource extraction and violence against human rights defenders. Organized thematically rather than chronologically (that is, by incident of serious human rights violation), each theme incorporated personal testimonies from survivors of human rights abuses over the past fifty years and from across Indonesia.<sup>51</sup>

The format for the five-day Hearing Testimony forum was a familiar one for the survivors who took part and for the organizations and individuals making up the KKPCK coalition. This oral testimony and truth-speaking forum, like that of the regional forums that had taken place earlier across Indonesia as part of the Year of Truth campaign, followed and built upon a strong history of oral historical practices amongst survivor and human rights groups in Indonesia over the past two decades. Many amongst these organizations, most of them members of the KKPCK, have conducted extensive oral history research with survivors of and eyewitnesses to human rights violations (for example, ELSAM, Syarikat, SKP-HAM and Sekber'65).<sup>52</sup> The primacy of individual testimony about experiences of traumatic suffering is foregrounded in the KKPCK's forums and in the testimony-giving oral history projects of the coalition's constituent organizations. In these testimonial and oral historical formats, an individual survivor gives testimony as both a personal story of survival and as a witness account for the suffering of others for whom s/he may claim (explicitly or implicitly) to represent.<sup>53</sup>

At the various KKPCK forums across Indonesia and at the Hearing Testimony national forum in November 2013, the format for testimony tends to involve a solitary survivor with a microphone delivering his or her testimony as a long narrative, uninterrupted by questions or prompts. These individual testimonies vary in length, most lasting between twenty minutes and one hour.<sup>54</sup> These testimonies themselves are performative events with very clear political purposes. This genre of testimonial performance has a tradition in Indonesia, certainly amongst civil society and political groups: the survivor comes to speak truth as testimony, endowing that speech act with political function, in many cases as the unmediated representation of both personal and community historical experiences of suffering. Often told in a more chronological or life-history format, these testimonies also foreground harm in particular events, emphasizing the experience of individual and communal violence, leaving out broader structural concerns that shaped those events.<sup>55</sup>

As in other cross-cultural contexts, giving testimony through these truth-telling forums, such as the Hearing Testimony five-day forum, explicitly links performed acts of witnessing to

<sup>51</sup> A description of this five-day event, and the topics for each day, can be found on the KKPCK's website, see Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran (KKPK), "Tahun Kebenaran [The Year of Truth]," KKPCK, accessed January 28, 2016, <http://kkpk.org/tahun-kebenaran>.

<sup>52</sup> On the oral-historical work of these organizations, see Pohlman, "Documentation," 143-165.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-147. See also Mery Kolimon and Lilya Wetangterah, ed., *Memori-memori Terlarang Perempuan Korban dan Penyintas Tragedi '65 di Nusa Tenggara Timur [Forbidden Memories of Women Victims and the '65 Tragedy in East Nusa Tenggara]* (Kupang: Yayasan Bonet Pinggupir, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> To see an example of this from the national Hearing Testimony forum in November 2013, view the testimonies given by Ibu Muji and Bapak Mudjayen, in relation to their experiences following the 1965 coup. All testimonies given, in addition to other events, at the national Hearing Testimony forum were recorded and are available on YouTube. To see these testimonies, go to: "Kesaksian Ibu Muji dan Bapak Mudjayen, Terkait Kasus 1965 [Testimonies of Ibu Muji and Bapak Mudjayen, in Relation to the Case of 1965]," YouTube video, 49:09, posted by "Koalisi Keadilan dan Pengungkapan Kebenaran," November 26, 2013, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBOZpAG\\_xaA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBOZpAG_xaA).

<sup>55</sup> See Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, "Mayan Women Survivors Speak: The Gendered Relations of Truth Telling in Postwar Guatemala," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5, no. 3 (2011), 456-476.

atrocities with calls for political action.<sup>56</sup> As Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith explain, life narratives become central to the political goals of social justice and human rights movements because they are critical for “seeding local acts of remembering ‘otherwise,’ offering members new or newly valued subject positions from which to speak and to address members of their own community in acts of solidarity.”<sup>57</sup> In the case of the Year of Truth campaign, the Hearing Testimony forum and other platforms for testimonial performance are central to the KKPK’s political aims in calling for redress and reconciliation in Indonesia. The KKPK, as with its constituent organizations, position survivor testimonies at the centre of their campaigns to perform specific political functions, that of “denouncing and challenging an official representation of history, while [serving] as a socio-political agent in promoting a (trans)formation of a socio-political conscious and continuing their call for truth and justice.”<sup>58</sup>

The goal of this testimonial genre of truth-telling at the KKPK forums, and in the work of that coalition’s many survivor organizations, is therefore one of redemptive politics.<sup>59</sup> The stated aim of the Hearing Testimony forum and, indeed, of the activities of the Year of Truth more generally, was “speaking the truth, breaking the cycle.”<sup>60</sup> As reified accounts of survivors’ lived experiences of trauma, these narratives, as testimonial artefacts, are consciously positioned as the means for claiming truth and thereby displacing and negating the Indonesian state’s official narrative. Listening to these testimonies by survivors of serious human rights violations committed predominantly during the thirty-three years of the New Order regime, survivors often explicitly speak their truths in noted opposition to the regime’s discourse. For example, women who were members of Gerwani articulate clearly that they were not and are not the treacherous whores who were depicted in the military government’s propaganda about the 1965 coup.<sup>61</sup> Almost fifty years after these events, survivors spoke their truths about their pasts to reject New Order discourses of history.<sup>62</sup> The men and women who gave testimony at the KKPK forums also spoke their truths with purpose: to evoke a compassionate, and politically engaged, response from a domestic Indonesian audience.

### The Many Failures of Restorative Justice in Jakarta

While human rights and survivor advocacy organizations have been very active in collecting evidence about serious violations of human rights in the Indonesian past, attempts at reconciliation and restorative justice for historical injustices have failed repeatedly at the national level in Indonesia over the past decade and a half. As Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem has argued, the weakness of democratic political institutions in Indonesia means that political leaders in Jakarta are unwilling to pursue issues of historical injustice, particularly given the power of conservative factions which are a legacy of the military government.<sup>63</sup> As she writes, stability is “a condition for political figures to maintain their power by avoiding any opposition among different factions, including the majority factions that oppose the seeking out of truth and justice in the cases from 1965 and 1966.”<sup>64</sup> In this section, I discuss three vexatious issues related to achieving some measure of recognition of and justice for the victims of the 1965 massacres, all of which demonstrate the

<sup>56</sup> A clear cross-cultural comparison can be made with the genre of *testimonio* in Latin America. On this “resistance” genre of testimony and its specific links to political claims see, for example, John Beverley, “The Margin at the Centre: On *Testimonio*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989), 11-28; Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Georg M. Gugelberger, ed., *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Schaffer and Smith, “Conjunctions,” 4.

<sup>58</sup> Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Cubilié and Carl Good, “Introduction: The Future of Testimony,” *Discourse* 25, nos.1 and 2 (2003), 4-18.

<sup>60</sup> Sukanta, “Pengantar Editor,” vi (my translation).

<sup>61</sup> On this state mythology around Gerwani and its members, see Drakeley, “*Lubang Buaya*,” 11-35; Wieringa, “The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia” 70-91.

<sup>62</sup> Annie Pohlman, “*Testimonio* and Telling Women’s Narratives of Genocide, Torture and Political Imprisonment in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” *Life Writing* 5, no. 1 (2008), 47-60.

<sup>63</sup> Wahyuningroem, “Seducing for Truth and Justice,” 125-130.

<sup>64</sup> Wahyuningroem, “Seducing for Truth and Justice,” 131.

challenges for transitional justice in Indonesia. It is in the face of this continuing political turpitude at the national level that human rights organizations and victim advocates work to seek and disseminate the truths of survivors.

#### *Attempts to Establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

One way to deal with the issue of redress for serious violations which was debated earlier in the *Reformasi* period was the creation of the KKR (*Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission). More than fifteen years on, hope that these past injustices would be redressed through a KKR has faded. This loss of hope comes after numerous attempts for successive early *Reformasi* governments to deal with the issue of impunity for past gross human rights abuses. Indonesia's fourth President, Abdurrahman Wahid, called for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be mandated in a decree of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR, one of the parliamentary houses) in 2000.<sup>65</sup> In 2001, the MPR passed a resolution that the President and the parliament should create the KKR.<sup>66</sup> During the administration of Wahid's successor, President Megawati Sukarnoputri, a draft of the KKR was again submitted in 2002 and, subsequent to significant delays in voting on the legislation, finally passed through the parliament in 2004 (Law no. 27/2004).<sup>67</sup> After further significant delays in implementation, less than two years later the newly established Constitutional Court annulled the KKR law, ruling vaguely that it was "contrary to the Constitution", due to its provisions for amnesty. One of the Court justices, Jimly Asshidiqie, further added that, "we thought we should just scrap the whole law."<sup>68</sup>

Since then, there have been a number of events which give cause for hope that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Indonesia is not entirely out of the question. In 2009, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) worked together with the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights and the Director-General Office regarding a draft for a new national law to establish the KKR.<sup>69</sup> The new TRC draft law was submitted to the Parliament by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights for discussion sometime during the 2010-2014 parliamentary period. This draft, however, was withdrawn from the parliamentary legislation agenda and was returned for "further consideration" by the Coordinating Ministry for Legal, Political and Security Affairs.<sup>70</sup> At the time that this article was completed, the draft had again been returned to the parliamentary legislation agenda for 2015-2016.<sup>71</sup> How long the new draft law will remain on the agenda, or even if it will make it to parliamentary consideration and discussion during this first term of President Joko Widodo's administration, is uncertain. The significant delays in dealing with this legislation in the past mean that most civil society groups do not hold high hopes for a swift resolution. Thus,

<sup>65</sup> See McGregor, *History in Uniform*, 212-213.

<sup>66</sup> Philip Eldridge, "Human Rights in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Journal of World Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2002): 131; Jiwon Suh, "Pre-emptive Transitional Justice Policies in Aceh, Indonesia," *Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 99.

<sup>67</sup> For a critique of the 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission law, see Dedy Ardian Prasetyo, "Indonesia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a Mechanism for Dealing with Gross Violations of Human Rights," (LLM Diss., University of Hong Kong, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Constitutional Court ruling no. 006/PUU-IV/2006. Tony Hotland, "Law Annulment Raises Questions about Aceh," *The Jakarta Post*, December 9, 2006, accessed September 9, 2014, [www.thejakartapost.com/news/2006/12/09/law-annulment-raises-questions-about-aceh.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2006/12/09/law-annulment-raises-questions-about-aceh.html). See also Paul van Zyl, "Dealing with the Past: Reflections on South Africa, East Timor and Indonesia," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary S. Zurbuchen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 324-342.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Development Program, "Dealing with the Past: UNDP Indonesia Supports Multi-stakeholder Consultations on the Draft National Law to Establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Indonesia," *UNDP Press Release*, December 22, 2009, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.undp.or.id/press/view.asp?FileID=20091222-1&lang=en>.

<sup>70</sup> Wahyuningroem, "Seducing for Truth," 128.

<sup>71</sup> The most recent draft, it should be noted, also has significant weaknesses, as discussed by KontraS (the Commission for Disappeared Persons and Victims of Violence), "Siaran Pers: Delapan Kelemahan Rancangan Undang-Undang Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi 2015 – Sebuah Catatan Kritis Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan (KontraS) [Press Release: Eight Weaknesses in the Planned Law on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 – A Critical Appraisal by KontraS]," *KontraS*, Press Release, March 23, 2015, accessed June 10, 2015, <http://kontras.org/home/index.php?module=pers&id=2018>.

how this new proposal will fare once it does eventually reach the Parliament is unknown, but the fact that it exists means that the possibility of a Commission has not been entirely discounted.

#### *Komnas HAM's 1965 Investigation*

One of the most significant, though ultimately failing, official attempts to investigate the mass atrocities committed by the Indonesian state during 1965 – 1966 was conducted by the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) between 2008 and 2012. This body is an independent commission of the Indonesian state enabled to investigate and monitor human rights. If an initial investigation finds that a gross violation has occurred (e.g. crimes against humanity), Komnas HAM have the power to carry out a further, more extensive *pro-justicia* enquiry into the matter. In carrying out these inquiries, Komnas HAM has only limited enforcement powers; for example, it only has limited subpoena powers and has been unable to compel some witnesses, particularly those from the military, to give evidence for previous investigations.<sup>72</sup> Yet these are not the most significant challenges facing these investigations into past abuses. If Komnas HAM's *pro-justicia* enquiry finds that gross human rights abuses have in fact occurred, the next step for further investigation is referral of the case by the Commission to the Attorney-General's Office (AGO), which is the only body that can seek prosecutions of these cases. Once the Attorney-General receives the case, his office is then supposed to carry out its own inquiry. The next step, enacted by the President after a recommendation from the parliament (DPR), should then be the creation of an Ad Hoc Human Rights Court to try alleged perpetrators.<sup>73</sup> So far, out of the numerous cases investigated and referred to the AGO, only two have been continued by the Attorney-General, namely the East Timor 1999 and Tanjung Priok 1984 cases.<sup>74</sup>

The East Timor trials became a farce and have been criticized by a great many human rights' advocates, international monitors and civil society organizations.<sup>75</sup> The Tanjung Priok Ad Hoc Court was held to try those connected to an incident in 1984 in which a crowd of mostly Muslim protestors were fired upon by police. The Tanjung Priok Ad Hoc Court began shortly after the East Timor Ad Hoc Court, and was also farcical.<sup>76</sup> Senior military officials identified for prosecution by the two Komnas HAM reports were never put on trial; in both courts, all defendants were acquitted either at the original trials or on appeal.<sup>77</sup>

Since the East Timor and Tanjung Priok Ad Hoc trials, the Attorney-General's Office has failed to pursue any of the cases of grave human rights abuses investigated and recommended by Komnas HAM. To date, the Attorney-General has failed to follow the recommendations made by Komnas HAM to pursue investigations into the cases of Trisakti 1998, Semanggi 1998, Semanggi 1999, the May riots of 1998, the enforced disappearances of persons during 1997-1998, Wasior 2001-2002; Wamena 2003; the "Petrus" killings of the early 1980s and, more recently, the 1965-1966 killings and mass political detentions.<sup>78</sup> The Komnas HAM report into the 1965-1966 killings which took four years to complete and which drew upon hundreds of testimonies was given to the AGO in July 2012. The report detailed substantial evidence of crimes against humanity. The AGO rejected the report, stating that it was "insufficient" and that it had failed to "satisfy the requirements" for a legal inquiry.<sup>79</sup> To date, the AGO has resisted all calls by human rights and legal aid bodies

<sup>72</sup> Jeffery Herbert, "The Legal Framework of Human Rights in Indonesia," in *Indonesia: Law and Society*, ed. Tim Lindsey (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2008), 454-467.

<sup>73</sup> Herbert, "The Legal Framework of Human Rights," 461-469.

<sup>74</sup> See ICTJ and KontraS, *Derailed*, 48-49.

<sup>75</sup> Suzannah Linton, "Unravelling the First Three Trails at Jakarta's Ad Hoc Court for Human Rights Violations in East Timor," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 17, no. 2 (2004), 303-361.

<sup>76</sup> ICTJ and KontraS, *Derailed*, 37-49.

<sup>77</sup> Tapol, "Tanjung Priok Acquittals a Travesty of Justice," *Tapol*, Press release, July 14, 2005, accessed on September 19, 2014, <http://tapol.gn.apc.org/press/files/pr050714.htm>; and David Cohen, "Intended to Fail: The Trials before the Ad Hoc Human Rights Court in Jakarta," *International Center for Transitional Justice*, Occasional Paper Series, August 2003, accessed on September 9, 2014, <http://www.ictj.org/images/content/0/9/098.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> See Suh, "Pre-emptive Transitional Justice," 105-108.

<sup>79</sup> Ranga Prakoso, Ezra Sihite, Bayu Marhaenjati and Firdha Novialita, "AGO Rejects Komnas HAM Report on 1965 Massacres," *The Jakarta Globe*, November 10, 2012, accessed on December 12, 2014, [www.thejakartaglobe.com/archive/](http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/archive/)

in Indonesia, including by the forty-seven organizations which make up the KKPK, to accept the Komnas HAM's report on 1965–1966 (and the other rejected reports) and conduct further inquiries for criminal prosecutions. The lack of political will and intimidation by the military shown in the only two cases to be brought to trial as a result of Komnas HAM's investigations are evidence of the very high level of dysfunction between what has been promised by human rights' reforms and their implementation.

*The Non-Apologies for Victims of Human Rights Abuses*

During a national television talk-show programme in March 2000, the late President Abdurrahman Wahid, who was both a long-time leader of Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, and an advocate of human rights and religious plurality, apologized to the victims of the 1965-1966 massacres.<sup>80</sup> This seemingly impromptu personal apology, though it caused great controversy at the time, was by no means an official apology.<sup>81</sup> It was, however, the only apology made by a President of Indonesia to date.

During the two terms of former President SBY (2004–2014), there was little political will, or leadership from the executive, to deal with the past in Indonesia. After approximately eighteen months of ad hoc meetings with members of Komnas HAM, in 2011 SBY tasked one of the members of his Advisory Council with setting up a program to organize a national apology to victims of past human rights abuses. Various stakeholders, including victims' groups, were invited to discuss the national apology plan.<sup>82</sup> The reaction against the planned apology from conservative and Islamic organizations in Indonesia was fierce. Prominent members of parliament, such as the deputy head of the legislative assembly, Priyo Budi Santoso, came out against the plan, saying that it was better to forget the past and to focus on the future.<sup>83</sup> While the national apology was never officially ruled out by SBY, the president finished his second term in 2014: no apology was ever offered.

SBY's successor, Joko (Jokowi) Widodo, who came to office in late 2014 with high levels of popular support, has also shown little readiness to offer any such apology.<sup>84</sup> In early 2015, there were reports that Jokowi would make an apology at the annual state of the nation address in August to the victims of the 1965–1966 massacres. In the lead-up to the speech, hard-line conservative and Islamic groups again protested loudly.<sup>85</sup> During his address, Jokowi made no mention of an apology.<sup>86</sup>

In May 2015, there was a further concerning development. The Attorney General, HM Prasetyo, announced that the government would form a "Team for Uncovering the Truth" about past human rights abuses (*Tim Penungkap Kebenaran*). As more details about the Team have come to light, it has become clear that it is not being set up to achieve any measure of justice for survivors of past state-sponsored atrocities. The team members include high level officials from many of the state bodies seen as most responsible for perpetrating these atrocities: the police, the National Intelligence

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[ago-rejects-komnas-ham-report-on-1965-massacres/](#).

<sup>80</sup> Douglas Kammien, "Counterrevolutionary Violence in Indonesia," in *State Violence in East Asia*, ed. N. Ganesan and Sung Chull Kim (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 178.

<sup>81</sup> Adrian Vickers and Katharine McGregor, "Public Debates about History: Comparative Notes from Indonesia," *History Australia* 2, no. 2 (2005), 1-13.

<sup>82</sup> Wahyuningroem, "Seducing for Truth," 128-129.

<sup>83</sup> Anwar Siswadi, "SBY Diminta Tak Minta Maaf pada Korban 1965 [SBY Asked to Say Sorry to the Victims of 1965]," *Tempo*, August 5, 2012, accessed on December 12, 2014, [www.tempo.co/read/news/2012/08/05/078421412/SBY-Diminta-Tak-Minta-Maaf-pada-Korban-1965](http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2012/08/05/078421412/SBY-Diminta-Tak-Minta-Maaf-pada-Korban-1965).

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the results of a workshop on reconciliation held shortly after Widodo took office, Andyala Waluyo, "Pemerintahan Jokowi-JK Siap Jajaki Pembentukan Pengadilan HAM Ad Hoc [Jokowi-JK Government Reading to Set Up an Ad Hoc Human Rights Court]," *VOA Indonesia*, December 10, 2014, accessed on January 12, 2015, [www.voaindonesia.com/content/pemerintahan-jokowi-jk-siap-jajaki-pembentukan-pengadilan-ham-ad-hoc/2552957.html](http://www.voaindonesia.com/content/pemerintahan-jokowi-jk-siap-jajaki-pembentukan-pengadilan-ham-ad-hoc/2552957.html).

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Ronald, "FPI Minta Jokowi Tak Minta Maaf ke PKI [The FPI Askes Jokowi not to Say Sorry to the PKI]," *Merdeka*, August 12, 2015, accessed August 25, 2015, [www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/fpi-minta-jokowi-tak-minta-maaf-ke-pki.html](http://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/fpi-minta-jokowi-tak-minta-maaf-ke-pki.html).

<sup>86</sup> See Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem, "'Apology for PKI': Sorry is Not the Point," *The Jakarta Post*, August 28, 2015, accessed August 30, 2015, [www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/28/apology-pki-sorry-not-point.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/28/apology-pki-sorry-not-point.html).

Body (BIN) and the military.<sup>87</sup> Survivor advocacy and civil society groups across Indonesia in July combined to criticize the government's team, issuing a joint statement which denounced both its aims and make-up, and urged Jokowi to take leadership in the issue of justice for past atrocities.<sup>88</sup> Thus far, Jokowi has remained silent on what role this Team might play in determining any future forms of justice or reconciliation for the crimes of the New Order.

### Conclusion: Truth-telling and an Indonesian Witnessing Public

The Year of Truth testimony-hearing forums held in 2012 and 2013 across Indonesia and in the national forum in November 2013 built upon the oral historical formats of many of the KKPK's coalition member organizations. In these forums, as in the oral history work of these many NGOs and survivor advocate organizations, it is clear that these testimonies are given to an imagined Indonesian (and, in some cases, international) audience, but that they also demand an active, empathetic response and affirmation from that audience. The narrative exchange, between the survivor giving testimony and the witness receiving that testimony (both individually and as a community of witnesses, be they Indonesians or an international community) is a relational, even transactional one.

In the absence of access to any kind of formal judicial mechanisms or forms of transitional justice, survivors of human rights abuses, supported by organizations and coalitions such as the KKPK, attempt through events and campaigns such as the Year of Truth initiative and the Hearing Testimony forums, to appeal to a community of witnesses. Their appeal for social recognition and validation of their truths, however, also demands a political response; they want, and demand, an official acknowledgement of the harm done to them and their communities, as well as some form of restorative justice from the state which persecuted them.

The Year of Truth campaign, the KKPK's broader work, and indeed, the work of many of the forty-seven organizations that make up this coalition, is premised on this political agenda which explicitly links claims of truth-telling by survivors to a demand for the investigation into, and redress of, historical traumas by the Indonesian state. In their appeal to a wide, though mostly domestic audience, through online campaigns and staged hearing testimony events, the organizers and participants are clearly seeking to harness the support of Indonesians to their cause.

The KKPK is by no means the only group in Indonesia using these strategies to appeal to wider audiences for support. Indeed, a more recent example would be the International People's Tribunal for 1965 (IPT'65). This people's tribunal brought together academics, prosecutors, activists and survivors from Indonesia and from several other countries to charge the Indonesian state with crimes against humanity committed during 1965–1966.<sup>89</sup> The Tribunal's public hearings were held at The Hague on 10–13 November 2015, with the live stream broadcast and recorded. In the year leading up to the hearings in The Hague, however, the organisers also harnessed individual testimonies by survivors to create online-based media packages and held a number of events mainly in Jakarta.<sup>90</sup> Again, the intended audience of the Tribunal's materials was primarily a domestic one, though as an international people's court, there was also a focus on raising awareness about the IPT'65 and the killings of 1965–1966 in several other countries, particularly the Netherlands, the UK, the US and Australia.

<sup>87</sup> Agnes Theodora Wolkh Wagunu, "Penyelesaian Pelanggaran Hak Asasi Manusia Harus Komprehensif [The Resolution of Past Human Rights Abuses Must be Comprehensive]," *Kompas*, August 21, 2015, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://print.kompas.com/baca/2015/08/21/Penyelesaian-Pelanggaran-Hak-Asasi-Manusia-Harus-K>.

<sup>88</sup> Dedy Istanto, "Deklarasi Keadilan Hakiki Bukan Rekonsiliasi Penyelesaian Kasus HAM [A Declaration of Real Justice is Not Reconciliation for Human Rights Cases]," *Satu Harapan*, July 9, 2015, accessed August 30, 2015, [www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/deklarasi-keadilan-hakiki-bukan-rekonsiliasi-penyelesaian-kasus.ham](http://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/deklarasi-keadilan-hakiki-bukan-rekonsiliasi-penyelesaian-kasus.ham).

<sup>89</sup> The final report of the IPT'65 committee was not yet published at the time of writing, and the judgement by the panels of judges is not expected until the end of 2016. For information about the Tribunal, including their associated media outputs, go to: International People's Tribunal for 1965, "The International People's Tribunal," accessed on February 28, 2016, <http://1965tribunal.org>.

<sup>90</sup> Via the IPT'65's website (<http://1965tribunal.org>), there is a range of downloadable content. There is also a link on this page to the recordings of the Tribunal hearings held on 10–13 November 2015.



Media productions such as these and the appeals which they make are familiar in Indonesia and elsewhere around the world. In the twenty-first century “era of the witness,” testimony-based media initiatives created and used by individuals and organisations for political goals are part of a globalising discourse which attempts to bring testifiers and witnesses together through an ever-growing range of audio-visual interfaces.<sup>91</sup> In the era of the witness, testimonial artefacts, like those made for the Year of Truth campaign, are produced, disseminated and circulated rapidly, and with little knowable or measurable effects.

A few years after the end of the KKPK’s Year of Truth campaign, can we say that the truth is any clearer, or that the cycle of violence has broken? If the intended audience of the testimony-hearing forums, and the associated media produced by the KKPK, was a witnessing Indonesian public, has that audience heard this truth, and will they act upon it? The Year of Truth events were performed, as intended, for a national Indonesian audience and received high levels of social, online, and print media coverage. Yet, as is perhaps borne out here in the Indonesian case, rarely is speaking truth enough to ensure empathic engagement and compassionate support.

Thus far, none of the campaigns organized by the KKPK or any of its constituent member organizations, nor indeed any international activist campaign such as the International People’s Tribunal for 1965, has succeeded in garnering enough social support, domestically or internationally, to pressure the Indonesian national government to act on past atrocities, least of all the 1965–1966 mass killings. With the current President seemingly unwilling to show leadership for reconciliation, as the survivors grow older and the past recedes further into the background, both socially and politically, is there space in Indonesia today for truth-speaking about past atrocities and, indeed, for social witnessing in response to the truth-speakers? Perhaps what can best be hoped for is a cumulative effect; that the combined efforts of survivors and activists over time, including through the Year of Truth campaign and other programs, will lead to an eventual acknowledgement of the harm done, as well as to the first steps for reconciliation in Indonesia. The alternative is far worse; to do nothing, to remain silent, and to give up the possibility of political support through social witnessing. Thus, the work of survivors and activists in Indonesia and elsewhere will continue.

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<sup>91</sup> See Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). On remembering genocide and witnessing through produced testimony, see, for example, Frank Möller, “Rwanda Revisualized: Genocide, Photography, and the Era of the Witness,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35, no. 2 (2010), 113-136; and Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker, ed., *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

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