

Indonesia blocks aid to its NGOs

by Lydia Cherry

A great hue and cry has arisen from high-profile international human rights organizations over the Suharto government's decision to ban Indonesia's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from accepting aid from the Netherlands. The Dutch, Indonesia's former colonial rulers, prior to last month funded most of the NGOs operating on Indonesian soil—at least 24 different organizations.

The ban came a month after Indonesia first announced in late March it would no longer accept Dutch economic aid due to "the persistent effort by The Hague to use aid as a tool of intimidation and intervention into Indonesia's domestic affairs." The Suharto government made clear it wanted to maintain ties with the Dutch in fields other than economic assistance. Jakarta demanded the dissolution of the 24-year-old Intergovernmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI), the donor consortium led by the Dutch. Then, on April 24, Minister of Interior Rudini clarified that funding to the NGOs would be stopped, and that this was one Dutch "project" that Indonesia will not fund. "I insist on the ban. . . . We will take action against those who are found receiving it."

Battering ram for environmentalists

The action by Indonesia, soon to head the Non-Aligned Movement, is not inconsequential. Human rights and environmental "conditionalities" are increasingly being forced on Third World countries to overturn governments, break up countries, and stop development. Some officials view the plethora of NGOs—both within their countries and without—as battering rams for this effort. Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad noted in a meeting with Indian journalists recently that he had no choice but to go to the upcoming "Earth Summit" because NGOs were so solidly lined up against Malaysia, he must go to Rio to face them down. The same week, Malaysian Primary Industries Minister Dr. Lim Keng Yaik revealed that the British-based NGO, Earth First! at a conference in Brighton had "predicted" that environmentalists will soon use explosives to attack tropical timber depots and stores.

The idea of giving NGOs more power, rather than less, draws support from high places. The elite U.S. think-tank, the Council on Foreign Relations, has published a book that calls for the U.S. to cease funding African governments, and instead fund NGOs. *Free At Last* says: "No less than 50% of all official U.S. aid to Africa must be channeled through U.S.

non-government organizations," and that in the case where "basic civil liberties are not guaranteed, all official U.S. assistance must be channeled through independent non-government organizations." In areas such as Africa there is no reason for the U.S. to now have any geopolitical interests, it says. It adds that "The end of the Cold War will increase the influence of issue-oriented constituencies" such as human rights and the environment. These are particularly important "because a sophisticated network of global relationships links them with other private groups and international organizations." *Free at Last* is written by CFR Senior Fellow Michael Clough who is also a member of the board of the high-powered human rights organization, Africa Watch. The idea for the book came from a project Clough organized for the Rockefeller Foundation.

The U.S.-based Asia Watch was one of the first U.S. outfits to condemn Indonesia for putting its NGOs on the unemployment lines. (The Washington headquarters of Asia Watch also houses Africa Watch.) In a statement released April 27, Asia Watch "calls upon the American embassy in Jakarta and the U.S. State Department to make clear to the Indonesian government that it strongly supports the work of NGOs like the Legal Aid Foundation; WALHI (Indonesian Environmental Forum), and INGI (International NGO Forum on Indonesia)." It asserts, "the statement by Minister Rudini is clearly an attack on the NGOs which have been most critical of the Indonesian government, including the Legal Aid Foundation of Indonesia." It threatens, "The Bush administration should seriously reconsider its willingness to take part in the new donor consortium meeting in Paris."

Excerpts from an "Aide-Mémoire" signed by Indonesia's 24 NGOs from the Eighth INGI Conference held March 21-23 in Odawara, Japan, give clues to the kind of opposition to its national sovereignty Jakarta faces in trying to develop this nation of 13,677 islands that stretches 3,200 miles across the equator. INGI's advice to donor countries providing development aid to Indonesia included: 1) "The current commercially oriented system of managing Indonesia's natural resources fails to give adequate consideration to ecological sustainability. The forest management system should be re-oriented to a decentralized community-based approach." 2) "Large-scale, centralized power generation installations—nuclear, hydroelectric, etc.—are characterized by unacceptably high financial, social and ecological costs." 3) INGI criticizes the proposed Koto Panjang Dam in the provinces of Riau and West Sumatra, to be financed by the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund. 4) "INGI deplors the provisions of a new draft immigration law under which Indonesians who . . . endanger national security are prevented from leaving or returning to Indonesia." 5) On East Timor, the INGI recognizes that Indonesian government "human rights violations" are "rooted in a fundamental difference of views between the Indonesian government and the people of East Timor and the international community."