

Indonesian Democracy Challenged

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If we followed the Indonesian media during the last eight months, we would get the impression that Indonesia's democracy is in crisis. This impression is not completely wrong. The not ending spectacle of corruption of the police and state prosecutors offices, ongoing attempts to castrate the corruption eradication commission, the whole mess around the bail-out of the Century bank, the unconvincing way the national leadership handled this situation, the shameful theatre played before the eyes of the nation by commission 3 in investigating this sham, the reluctance of persecuting big tax debtors, the Lapindo Mudd scandal, the unwillingness to investigate further how come 40 members of parliament received Rp 500 billion each after they voted for Miranda Gultom as Deputy Governor of Bank Indonesia, this whole mess gives ample reason to worry.

A kind of moral corruption permeates our political system: Government administration, especially the tax office, police, the attorney general's office, the whole judicial system, national and local parliaments, all areas of public life or corrupted by money politics. The shameful proposal of 12 billion rupiah as “aspiration money” for every single national parliamentarian – obviously, they got the idea from the notoriously corrupt Philippine parliament – only confirms the gangster mentality of parts of our parliamentary. It really stinks. Besides, no one has any vision of the future of the nation. Our political life has degenerated, becoming a mix of pragmatic short term problem handling and horse-trading. At the same time an attitude of hedonistic focusing of one's own interests and that of one's family while not getting mixed up with questions of national responsibility seems to spread within civil society, while, on the other hand, religious obscurantism and narrowmindedness are not diminishing but increasing.

Many Indonesians worry about this situation, and with good reasons. But this is the most critical point I want to stress here; this bleak situation is not the whole picture. Yes, we are in a whole lot of crises, but one cannot say, at least not yet, that the country is in a real crisis.

Look at this: Poverty at least is not growing, the employment situation is improving, our national economy is booming,

foreign capital pores in again, our international standing is quite good.

The same holds for our national leadership. There is no disputing serious weaknesses, but we should not underestimate existing strength. The national leadership seems weak and hesitating, but it would be a grave mistake to underestimate the strength of the president. There is competence in the government, there are national policies implemented. And there will be further improvements, f. l., as regards regional autonomy and its excesses.

Thus, we should not allow our eyes to be blinded by the scandalous situation at the surface of political life in Indonesia. Indonesia's democracy is still on track. But, indeed, it needs the support of all of us. Our democracy will not flourish on its own. It depends on us. Therefore, civil education and, reflecting the unstoppable progress of globalization, transnational cooperation are crucial elements in our support for the future of Indonesia's democracy.

On this background, please allow me, in this introductory speech, to make the following points:

- **My first point:** There can be no compromise on the fundamental issue: This state is based on Pancasila and Pancasila must give all Indonesian politics their basic orientation.

- Then I want to show that Pancasila implies full support for five basic elements of post-traditional political ethics.
- In a third point I invite you to join a quick travel back into history to look on how these basic elements fared during the 64 years of the Republic of Indonesia.

I want to close my presentation by pointing to what I see as the most serious challenges to our young democracy which we have to face and to overcome.

1. PANCASILA

What is the essence of Pancasila? The essence of Pancasila becomes clear if we look at the problem that was to be solved by Pancasila as first formulated by Sukarno on June 1, 1945. It was the question whether Indonesia should become an Islamic or a secular nationalistic state. Pancasila got its final form in the introduction of the constitution of 1945 on August 18, 1945. By Pancasila, the founding fathers answered the above question. Thus, Pancasila is the national consensus that Indonesia belongs to all Indonesians without discrimination. Its states that the Indonesian people want to enter into a common state, the Republic of Indonesia, because they agree that this state will belong equally to all Indonesians, of all religious adherences. Thus, Indonesia would not become an Islamic state. But Indonesia would be a religious state in the sense that religiosity was a fundamental quality of the culture and

character of the Indonesian people, thus this state cannot be neutral to religion; in this sense it was based on the belief in God.

This consensus was made possible because Indonesians were united in five fundamental values which would become what the Indonesian people and state would strive for:

1. Belief in One God
2. Just civilized humanism
3. Indonesia's Unity
4. People's power, lead by the guidance of wisdom in common deliberation/representation
5. Social justice for the whole Indonesian people

These principles or values have never been disputed and since the Indonesian people proclaim them, they constitute a solid basis for the "Unity in Diversity" which is Indonesia.

2. PANCASILA AND POST-TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ETHICS

But and this is important, to have meaning for the Indonesia of the 21 century these principles have to translated into the language of contemporary political ethics. Otherwise, what happened under Suharto will happen again: that Pancasila is misused as legitimation of a paternalistic-feudal regime. Let us go through the five principles.

1. **Belief in One God** never meant to state anything about individual beliefs of Indonesians. It stated two things: That Indonesia saw her religions as positive values, and that

there was to be no discrimination on religious grounds. Today this principle demands full respect for religious freedom.

2. **Just and civilized humanism** implies nothing less than full recognition, without any ‘ifs,’ “in case” or “in-so-fars”, of the entire range of human rights. Therefore, the amendments to our constitution putting human rights into it, including a broad formulation of religious freedom, were a huge step forward in our political life.
3. **Indonesia’s Unity**, the third principle, stressed what only some religious fanatics deny, that we Indonesians do not live only for ourselves and our families, but should have a deep, loving commitment to our country. It may be said, especially for European ears where nationalism is often seen in a negative light, that for a country like Indonesia a healthy (non-chauvinistic) nationalism is the most potent anti-dote against religious absolutism and regionlistic and tribalistic tendencies.
4. The fourth principle, **people’s power**, lead by the guidance of wisdom in common deliberation/representation (a formulation that clearly shows the deep differences about democracy among the founding fathers) today demands a unequivocal commitment to democracy.
5. **Social justice** for the whole Indonesian people, the fifth principle, is quite clear. It expresses a national duty to

solidarity among us all. It shows how far we still are from what we obliged ourselves to. That more than 30 million people of this naturally rich country still live in abject poverty, that more than one hundred million still live precariously from day to day is a huge debt on the shoulders of the other, more fortunate part of the Indonesian people.

3. A GLANCE BACK INTO HISTORY

Having seen to what the founding fathers of Indonesia bound their country; it might be useful to take a look back into history. Of these five points only one has never been controversy, the duty of solidarity. Even point 3, the commitment to a united Indonesia, has been challenged several times. But the founding fathers, of course, were of one spirit regarding solidarity and unity.

But this was not the case as regards the other three points. Religious freedom was on principle accepted through Pancasila and put into the constitution of 1945 (§ 29, 2). Nevertheless, that religious freedom also means that a religion can not force its members to obey their religious laws, thus the question of the state making obedience to shariah law obligatory, has been in dispute up to this date although mainstream Islam in Indonesia has accepted that the Indonesian state has no mandate to enforce shariah. But the situation of religious freedom is still precarious. Not only does the state

not give full protection of the law to the right of minorities to worship. More serious is the fact, that religions outside the six so called acknowledged religions have no rights at all. Only last April an attempt to have the respective law, the anti-blasphemy law, revised the Constitutional Court was rejected. This is a serious break of religious freedom itself.

Democracy and human rights have been finally firmly established after the fall of Suharto. This, hopefully, ends a dispute that went on before Independence in 1945. Sukarno, Supomo and their friends rejected individual human and civil rights as expressions of individualism and opposed to social justice, while Hatta insisted on limitations to the power of the state. Today we should realize that putting human rights into the same pot as individualism is a crass misunderstanding. The recognition of human rights is in fact an act of solidarity with those members of society that cannot fight for themselves, whose interests are, politically, negligible in comparison with "the interests of the state" or of the "community". Human rights are the formal declaration of a society that it stands in solidarity with all its members, that it respects human dignity also those who have no power. Recognition of human rights is the measuring rod of how civilized a society is.

In an equivalent way democracy was regarded with suspicion by part of the political class. Thus, Sukarno was against multi-party democracy; together with Supomo he opposed

constitutional safeguards against the misuse of power (in this context Supomo spoke of the *"integrality idea"* of Indonesian statehood). At first Sukarno lost out. In November 1945 Hatta and Sjahrir introduced multi-party democracy and a parliamentary system. But 12 years later Sukarno renewed his attacks against democracy and finally replaced it with Guided Democracy (1959) which was a populist dictatorship (The essence of populism is manipulation of masses without any control of, and accountability by, the government). Suharto's "Pancasila Democracy" or "not-this-nor-that-democracy" was certainly no democracy. The experience of more than 30 years of "New Order" finally resulted in a national consensus on democracy.

CHALLENGES TO INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY

Our democracy seems, at least for the moment, firmly established. But challenges remain in a more indirect way. On the one hand, the morass of corruption, money politics, and cheap opportunism we witness in our political elite turns many young people away from any idealistic commitment. Over time this can lead to a silent erosion of our democracy.

Challenges come, on the other hand, from religious fundamentalism, which does not recognize the value of our national state. But the most dangerous people there are not outspoken fundamentalists which anyhow constitute only a small

minority. The real danger comes from narrow-mindedness and dull suspicion of pluralism and free thinking still endemic in parts of the people. Listen to what our minister of religion recently said to cadres of Muhammadiyah. According to a report in Kompas from May 21 this year minister Suryadarma Ali "admonished them to be on alert for radical movements." So far so good. But listen to what his Excellency had in mind. Intimidation, threats, religiously motivated violence, terrorism, bomb throwing, attacks on churches and on minorities like Achmadiyah? No, the "radical movements" the minister had in mind "base themselves on democracy, freedom and human rights." Which are, precisely the three cornerstones of civilized living together of people in post-traditional society! Pfui! Sometimes the difference between simple stupidity and criminality blurs. This kind of narrow-minded stupid normality is the greatest danger we face.

In the face of these challenges to our democracy there seems to me three paramount tasks facing the present generation of Indonesians:

1. The first: To make our democracy work.
2. The second: To fight any attempts to water down our Indonesian pluralism, our freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of criticizing.

3. The third – which will be decisive for the future of Indonesia: To make real solidarity and social justice for all Indonesians.

And, on the bottom of all this there is one fundamental task: **wiping out corruption.**

These are heavy tasks, but Indonesia has, in her history, overcome much more serious challenges. If we want, we will overcome it.

