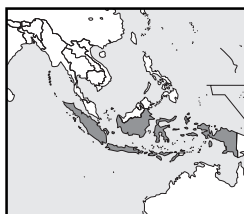


## Searching for the new Indonesia

NANI ZULMINARNI<sup>1</sup>



The Wachid's government failed to keep its promise of economic recovery. There was no improvement in living standard of approximately 40% of the population who were living below the poverty line. Many serious social problems remain unsolved, including political instability, unrest and armed conflict, human rights violations, corruption, nepotism, collusion, scandal, and poverty. Critical awareness of people and the availability of space for people to express their ideas are promising for the new Indonesia.

Data on 2001 is lacking, but data used to write last year's *Social Watch* report is still valid because there have been no significant and dramatic changes in social conditions in Indonesia. This report focuses on the burning issues of refugees and violence against women, as well as decentralisation policy and women in decision-making. Information used to prepare this report was gathered from different sources, including the daily newspapers, NGOs, and the author's first-hand experience working at the grassroots level throughout the country.

### Economic problems and a presidential impeachment

The year 2001 was a critical time for Indonesia. It was a time when people lost patience with living in poverty. The government under Wachid's leadership failed to keep its promise of economic recovery. Inflation reached 12.55%, much higher than the previous year when it was 9.35%. Income from the export of goods and from tourism declined.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there was no improvement in living standard of the approximately 40% of the population who were living below the poverty line.

The political system has remained unstable. Politicians have shown their political immaturity by quarreling among themselves. As the result, they paid more attention to political interests than to socio-economic recovery. Many serious social problems remain unsolved, including unrest and conflict in some areas of Indonesia, human rights violations, corruption, nepotism, collusion, scandal, and poverty. This situation has brought sadness and frustration to the people of Indonesia.

The peak of confusion came when parliament impeached the president in July 2001 and replaced him with Megawati as the fifth Indonesian president. Since she is the first woman president of Indonesia, people have high expectations, especially with regard to economic recovery and conflict resolution. It will not be easy for the new president, however, since she faces a complicated situation and many problems. She has now been president for one-half year, and there is no significant improvement in socio-economic and political conditions.

### Still struggling for basic needs<sup>3</sup>

The population has reached 195.1 million (excluding two provinces—Aceh and Maluku), with 57.69% living in rural areas. More than half are women. Statistics show that over 65% of the population is in the productively active age category of 15-64 years. More than 49% of the population spends on average less than IDR 200,000 or approx. USD 20 per month on basic necessities, indicating that the number of people living below the poverty line is still high.

Education remains a serious problem: 10.25% of the population is illiterate and only about 1.29% attends university. In general, the number of women who are illiterate with only a low level of education is twice that of men. Many children drop out of school at a very early age both in rural and urban areas. Some become street children and perform child labour for family survival. Although there is no official data released regarding street children and child labour, NGO activists working on child issues say there are currently more street children and more child labourers.

### Unresolved conflicts and refugee problems

A major concern in Indonesia is unresolved conflict and its impacts, in particular the increasing number of people living in refugee camps. Conflicts occurring in several regions have complex causes, including history, wrong development policy, oppressive previous governmental systems, and access to natural resources. Unfair distribution of wealth by the centralised government in the New Order era created huge gaps among regions in terms of welfare, development and accessibility.

During 2001, about 1.3 million people—over half of them women and children—lived in inadequate refugee camps spread across 19 provinces in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> They are victims of several conflict areas including West and Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, Aceh, Maluku and others. At this time, there appears no way to solve the refugee problem. The government has allocated special funds for refugees and tries to re-locate them, but problems are too complex. Many refugees have been living in camps for over two years—*eg*, in West Kalimantan—without certainty.

<sup>1</sup> Chairperson of The Center for Women's Resources Development (PPSW).

<sup>2</sup> *Kompas* Daily Newspaper, January 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Data from Welfare Statistics 2000 by the National Social Economic Survey of BPS.

<sup>4</sup> *Kompas* Daily Newspaper, December 2001.

The number of refugees may increase, not only because of the endless conflict, but also because of natural disasters such as floods and typhoons. This will increase the government's homework and its burden.

### **Violence against women**

As a domino effect of social economic problems, violence against women increased dramatically in 2001. The National Commission for Women recorded at least 3,169 cases handled in 14 areas of Indonesia. The commission believes the actual number may be ten times higher since people tend to cover up domestic violence. Approximately 40% of women experiences violence perpetrated by a close relative such as a husband or by a neighbour, and 32% gets raped in their own neighbourhood. The violence happens in conflict areas, in big cities, and in poor areas where many people live below the poverty line. Women, especially those who are migrant workers, also experience violence in their work places (17%).

Trafficking in women, especially girl children, is increasing. Poverty leads people to sell their girl children to sex and entertainment industries in Indonesia but also abroad. The National Commission for Women has not been able to put an official number on this clandestine trade, but many cases were recorded by NGOs in their working areas.

### **Decentralisation and the struggle for women's rights**

To solve some of the problems related to conflict and poverty, the government has begun a process of decentralisation. This process is supposed to give each region greater power and autonomy to manage and control their own area and resources. It is also meant to give people more power to control their own government. The road is still long, however, since not every region is ready for self-government. In addition, decentralisation is interpreted and translated differently from one region to another.

The decentralisation law suggests that each region explore its own traditional and customary laws and use them as the basis for local regulation and law. In some cases, the implementation of customary law may benefit people, but, in many cases, it will put women at a disadvantage, since most customary law is rooted in strong patriarchal values. Women will be marginalised and excluded from decision-making processes in many areas.

Women will be pushed backwards when their position and status is determined by obviously discriminatory systems. One example is in West Sumatra, where a customary law has been adopted determining that village decision-makers will consist of three parties—religious leaders, intellectuals and government officials, all of whom are understood to be men.

### **A woman president and women decision-makers**

Although Indonesia now has a woman president, there are no strong women politicians to support the women's movement at national and regional levels. There are few women in decision-making positions compared with men. For example, women make up only 8.9% of parliament, there is no single woman among 32 heads of province, only five women among 266 district heads, and women hold less than 10% of high-level positions in the government structure.

This shortage of women decision-makers is responsible for gender-blind policy and development concepts and strategies. Political education for women is done only by a few NGOs. Indonesia will soon be conducting an election. An effective strategy for political education and leadership training for women will be critical in preparation for that moment.

### **Conclusion**

Although Indonesia has a long way to go on its road to renewal, there is hope to keep Indonesia moving. Critical awareness of people and the availability of space for people to express their ideas are promising for the new Indonesia. The next election will be very important and challenging for Indonesia. Effective economic strategy is required to cure Indonesia and prevent its fall into bankruptcy. This will require collaboration of all parties including civil society, government and private sector. The people of Indonesia have high expectations that their politicians will have the political will to put public concerns above their own private interests. ■

Centre for Women's Resources Development  
<naniz@centrin.net.id>