Rape is rape

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Sandyawan Sumardi c1998 / Stanley

A new movement resists the terror and expresses solidarity with the Chinese Indonesian women who were raped in Jakarta in May

> About 11:30am I saw some people in the crowd stopping a car. They forced the passengers to get out, and then dragged two girls out of the car. They took off the girls' clothes and pack-raped them. The two girls tried to fight back, but in vain (Eyewitness, Muara Angke, 14 May, 1998).

This is only one of hundreds of rapes that happened during the Jakarta riots in May 1998. After the riots came the statements denying the rapes had occurred. Well, the answer is clear: they did.

> After the two girls managed to get away from the savage rapists, I came to them and embraced them. They begged me to help them find a safe way home. Since I live in that district, I knew a shortcut to the main road. At the Cengkareng corner, I saw several dead women, naked, their faces covered with newspapers. They must have been raped, for I could see dried blood around their vaginas, swarming with flies. After helping the two girls home, I returned the same way. The corpses at the corner were gone. Where were they? Who took them? (Same eyewitness).

Members of the Volunteer Team for Humanity ('Tim Relawan'), who were being contacted by numerous victims and eyewitnesses, repeatedly received warnings and threats to stop 'listening to' and 'helping' the victims.

Dangerous

In this country, even in the midst of the spirit of 'reformation', to tell about and listen with complete sympathy to the victims of mass rapes was regarded as dangerous.

A single act of rape is barbaric. Hundreds of rapes, all with similar brutal modus operandi, is organised barbarism on a massive scale. The modus operandi were similar to those used to instigate the riots at the same time.

Rape is rape. It destroys the woman's life as a part of society. Rape is not acceptable for anyone, neither Chinese nor Javanese nor Dayak nor Irianese. Any government in this country with a conscience cannot avoid the urgent agenda to repair this total destruction.

For the victims, the rapes destroyed their lives. But even for the eyewitnesses, they have become unbearable memories.

> Ever since I saw it, I have been deeply distressed. Whenever I close my eyes, I see the corpses of those women before my eyes. I feel very depressed. Since I cannot bear my own feelings of anxiety and fear, I decided to go home to my village (Same eyewitness)

For many eyewitnesses, the border between 'seeing' and 'experiencing' is obscured, and so is the difference between 'self' and 'victim'.

> After accidentally seeing a Chinese girl raped by many people, my little sister has been frightened and stressed. She talks incoherently and her body trembles whenever anyone comes near her. For two weeks she was in hospital. I almost wonder whether she only saw someone being raped or if she herself was also raped. (Story from a girl's sibling, June 1998).

The extent of the rapes is no fantasy. A pattern of similarities emerges that indicates strongly that the mass rapes involved a network, planners and executors in a systematic and organised way.

After hard work and under huge pressure of threats and terror, we present our data. It is based only on the reports of victims and eyewitnesses, not on rumour or the newspapers. In order to respect and safeguard them, their exact identities have been kept confidential.

Whereas the riot, the massive destruction and burning in May 1998 happened in all areas of Jakarta, the rapes only happened in West Jakarta, North Jakarta, and other areas where many Chinese live and work. The rapes and the riots happened at the same time. The patterns of the rapes were very similar to those used in the riot. The similarity suggests there must be a relationship between the two.

> A number of unknown persons entered the shop-house and began looting it. Others among them stripped R naked and then forced her to watch her two younger sisters being raped. After raping them, they threw the two girls down to the ground floor, which was already on fire. They died, but R survived because some people came to help her. (Incident on 14 May 14, 1998, as told by the family of R, L, and M).

Not locals

The actors in these incidents were of unknown origin, different from the locals in that part of the city. On several occasions victims survived because other locals came to help.

> On 13 May the crowds came from three directions. Four youths on motorcycles gave the order: 'Burn, charge!' and a group of shabbily dressed youths began to break things. The victim came down from an upper floor as their shop-house was being wrecked and looted. Among

> the youths someone yelled 'bloody Chinese, they're the ruin of this nation', and he grabbed the woman and her little girl and tried to rip off her clothes. Among the four youths on motorcycles one yelled out: 'Separate the girls and take them to the school'. The victims escaped from the attempted rape because locals came and rescued them. (Volunteer Team documentation based on victim and eyewitness accounts).

In all, twenty of the victims died. Most of the others are in a serious physical and psychological condition. We have confidential reports and stories up until 3 July 1998 of 168 victims of pack rape or other sexual abuse. Of these, 152 are from Jakarta and environs, while 16 are from Solo, Medan, Palembang, and Surabaya. This is by no means the full total of victims, but only those who have reported to us.

These statistics are just a numerical abstraction. They do not reveal the vicious shouting, the threats and terror, the torture of rape, the horrible way of dying, the running blood, the wrecked bodies and ruined dignity, the destruction of a future and of hope, nor the hot tears and the unbearable silence of memory.

And just when many volunteers began to extend their sympathy, their help and a listening ear to lighten the burden of the victims, those volunteers were pursued by terror and threats. How then will we find justice and truth in this country? The terror came to the victims and their families, to many other citizens of Chinese descent, to nurses and doctors who cared for them, and to the volunteers themselves.

That the very search for truth has become the target of terror and threats shows clearer than anything just how real the destruction of our common life has become. It shows how the change in political leadership on 21 May 1998 was just a 'forced drama', performed on the surface of our political life. Deep below the political turbulence we still find the old pattern of terror and threats: brutal, systematic, violent, using racketeers and gangsters, the military and hired thugs, paid with money and weapons.

> This movement to look for victims - it must stop. If you carry it on, you will know the result. Remember friend, you have a family. If you love yourself or your family, you have to do as I say. Watch out, I'm not kidding! (Extract from an anonymous letter to the volunteers, June 1998).

Or:

> Is a grenade not enough? I know where your children go to school, I know what uniform they wear, what time they go to school and what time they come home. (Anonymous telephone caller to a volunteer, June 1998, after a live grenade was found in the Volunteer Team's front yard).

But in the face of all these threats, a counter movement is emerging. Since the riots and the rapes, more and more people feel it is now urgent to expose the network of architects and actors behind it all. These people come from many backgrounds: from different religions, ages, ethnicity and social status. They have one goal, to disclose who planned and executed the riots and the rapes.

Common life

The exposure of this network becomes the key to restoring our common life. Whether those who are supposed to guard the peace will help us or not, we the people will work harder to protect each other while helping the victims.

The network of the think tanks and actors of the rapes cannot be separated from those of the riots in May 1998. The demolition, the burning down, and the rape are different elements of the same systematic and organised acts.

> I am not an intelligence agent, but I am a commander who instigated the riot. I recruited my 60 men from various armed forces units. I could easily rape these women (pointing his finger toward three Chinese girls). Killing you is easy... (Remark made by an unidentified person who attended a meeting of the Volunteer Team in Central Jakarta, June 1998).

Certain groups had already hatched this systematic plan much earlier:

> Long before the riot, a well-built man called by. He also visited the poor housing areas around Pantai Indah Kapuk estate. At first he just became acquainted with the youths and chatted with them. Then the unidentified man treated them to food, drinks and smokes, so they became good friends. He then told them: 'If you guys like it, pretty soon you will have expensive things, and you can fuck those Chinese women you never dared to touch!' (Eyewitness, June 1998).

To all of you in government, you have a special interest in this tragedy, precisely because you think of yourselves as managers of our common life in this nation-state. More and more people are waiting for your significant help in uncovering the network behind the rapes and the massive destruction.

If not, please do not blame us if more and more people believe that many 'government' and 'security' elements are of no use at all. Or even that they do function but that they gave their blessing or even collaborated in the tragedies.

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