

Indonesian president speeds up executions of prisoners

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In the early hours of Sunday morning, four men and two women convicted of drug offences and sentenced to death by Indonesian courts were taken from their cells, tied to poles and shot dead by members of a 48-man squad of the country's police Mobile Brigade.

The six people killed, five foreigners and one Indonesian, had sought clemency from President Joko Widodo. He formally rejected their pleas on December 30. In the lead-up to their judicial killings, Widodo, through his Attorney General H.M. Prasetyo, made clear last Thursday that he would show no mercy to any of the 60 drug offenders who are among more than 130 prisoners on death row in Indonesia's prisons.

Under Indonesia's reactionary legal code, 11 crimes stipulate the death sentence, including subversion, corruption, firearms offences, drug trafficking and murder. According to Deputy Attorney General Basuni Masyarif, the government wants to execute at least 10 prisoners per year, to clear the backlog on death row.

Previous executions—of three people convicted of murder and two of drug smuggling—took place in March 2013 under Widodo's predecessor, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Before that, there had been no executions for five years.

The brutal nature of the regime now in power in Jakarta was reflected in Prasetyo's boastful description of the factory-like preparations for the killings. "We have prepared everything, firing squad, clergy men and doctors. The executions will be done simultaneously, not one by one."

Four men and one woman were taken to a clearing seven kilometres from the maximum security prison on Nusakambangan Island and shot. The second woman was shot in Boyolali. Both jails are in the Central Java province.

Killed on Nusakambangan Island were 53-year-old

Brazilian citizen Marco Archer Cardoso Moreira, who was sentenced in 2004; Dutch citizen Ang Kiem Soei, 52, sentenced in 2003; Rani Andriani, 38, an Indonesian woman, sentenced in 2000; Namaona Denis, 48, from Malawi, sentenced in 2001; and Daniel Enemu, 38, a Nigerian who was sentenced in 2004. The woman shot in Boyolali was 37-year-old Vietnamese citizen Tran Thi Bich Hanh, sentenced in 2011.

The Dutch and Brazilian governments have recalled their ambassadors. Widodo dismissed personal appeals for clemency by Dutch King Willem-Alexander and Prime Minister Mark Rutte, and Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff.

Both Widodo and Prasetyo claimed that the executions will, in the attorney general's words, "send a signal to all drug rings that Indonesia is serious about fighting them ... we are trying to save Indonesia from the danger of drugs." But, as the Indonesian Commission of Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) pointed out in a statement on Saturday, the six killings will do nothing to stop the global production and distribution of narcotics.

The 60 drug offenders being executed in Indonesia are small-time dealers, or disadvantaged individuals who became embroiled in the drug trade out of the desperate need for money. None can be described as prominent figures in the multi-billion dollar drug industry. The main criminal organisations routinely bribe law enforcement officials worldwide and the main operators rarely appear in courts.

Widodo's law-and-order campaign is an appeal to the most reactionary elements in Indonesian society, under conditions in which his government fears the development of significant social unrest. Amid the global economic slump, he is attempting to impose a

program of pro-market restructuring and austerity that will further undermine the living standards of millions of Indonesian workers and rural poor. His government's abolition of fuel subsidies on January 1 is only an indication of what is to come.

Widodo is particularly seeking to use the executions to cultivate support among right-wing Islamist fundamentalists and within the police and military apparatus—the forces that will be deployed to suppress political opposition. During the 1965–66 CIA-sponsored coup that brought the Suharto dictatorship to power, the military and Islamist organisations carried out the mass murder of over half a million members of the Indonesian Communist Party, trade unionists, workers and peasants. While the Suharto regime was replaced with the façade of democracy in 1998, the same right-wing forces still form the backbone of the state.

Further high-profile executions are being prepared, including of two Australian citizens—part of the group known as the “Bali Nine”—who were arrested in April 2005 for attempting to smuggle eight kilograms of heroin out of Bali to Australia. Seven of the nine are serving sentences ranging from 20 years to life imprisonment, but Myrun Sukumaran and Andrew Chan were convicted and condemned to death.

Widodo has already rejected a last-ditched clemency plea by 33-year-old Sukumaran. An appeal by Chan, 31, has not been finalised. Indonesian officials have indicated that once it is rejected, the two will be shot together.

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop have made appeals to Jakarta for clemency, including, reportedly, personal phone calls to Widodo. According to Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir, however, the Australian government has done nothing that would in any way threaten its intimate ties with the Indonesian state and military apparatus. Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, who has also made approaches to Widodo, pointedly declared “one doesn't want to say anything to inflame” the Indonesian government, such as condemning yesterday's killings.

The Australian political establishment has form in abandoning its citizens to the death penalty in order to preserve its interests in South East Asia.

In 2005, Singapore faced no consequences for

executing Nguyen Tuong Van, a young Australian sentenced to death over minor drug charges. The then Howard Liberal-National government and the Labor Party opposition made appeals for clemency but took no further action.

In the case of the “Bali Nine,” Australian authorities are directly complicit in their arrest in Bali—and therefore in the issuing of death sentences.

Lee Rush, the father of Scott Rush, one of the young people recruited to be drug mules, contacted the Australian Federal Police (AFP) before the group departed for Bali, saying he feared his son had become swept up in a criminal operation. Far from taking any action to prevent Rush proceeding with the enterprise, as the AFP promised his father, the police tipped off their Indonesian counterparts and encouraged them to wait for the youth to incriminate themselves before detaining them.



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