

Indonesian authorities prepare for more executions

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Indonesian President Joko Widodo's government is preparing for another round of executions, involving 11 prisoners, following the death by firing squad of six drug offenders on January 18.

In a CNN interview on January 27, Widodo dismissed clemency appeals by lawyers or foreign governments. "No compromise, no compromise," he said. "They can ask for amnesty to the president but I tell you there will be no amnesty for drug dealers." He specifically ruled out clemency for two young Australian men, Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan.

The next day, Attorney-General H.M. Prasetyo told members of the Indonesian parliament that his office was deciding on the timing and site for the executions. The isolated Nusakambangan Island, off central Java, he said, was an "ideal place," for security reasons. Five of the six prisoners executed on January 18 were killed on the island by a police Mobile Brigade firing squad.

Lawyers for Sukumaran and Chan said they would apply for a second judicial review in Indonesia's Supreme Court, based on a Constitutional Court ruling that recommended this for prisoners who have spent more than 10 years on death row. But Attorney-General Prasetyo said a meeting between his department, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court, had agreed the pair was not eligible for a second review.

Prasetyo said the government had made no decree to enact the Constitutional Court's ruling. "We made the decision together, that before the government issues a governmental decree on it, then [a] judicial review can only be done once," he said. His statement underscores the government's determination to proceed with the executions.

Events are moving quickly in the state-organised killing process. The Indonesian media reported that Sukumaran and Chan would be put to death in the next

round. Widodo rejected Chan's clemency appeal on January 22, clearing the way for the two to be executed together.

Yesterday the *Jakarta Post* published the names of all 11 condemned to die. They include four Indonesians and foreign nationals from the Philippines, France, Ghana, Spain and Brazil. Apart from two Indonesians convicted of multiple murders, they have been convicted of relatively minor drug offences that occurred between 1999 and 2005.

These developments have caused deep public concern in Australia. Last night, artists, musicians and hundreds of people gathered in Sydney's Martin Place for a vigil appealing for clemency. Sukumaran's grandmother Edith Visvanathan made an emotional plea: "I come to ask pardon from the president, the president and the people of Indonesia, to forgive my grandson and give him a second chance."

The impetus for the accelerated application of Indonesia's death penalty laws is coming from Widodo himself, however. Three people were executed during the five years before Widodo's installation as president last October. Now 17 have been put to death, or scheduled to be killed, within the space of two weeks. Eleven offences, ranging from murder to subversion and corruption, are punishable by execution under Indonesian law.

Widodo's motives are entirely political. Under conditions of a deepening global economic crisis, falling oil prices and growing demands for austerity cuts and a radical pro-market restructuring of the Indonesian economy, Widodo is attempting to shore up his relations with the military-police security apparatus and right-wing Islamist groups.

During the 1965 CIA-backed military coup that overthrew the Sukarno government, the Indonesian

security forces combined with right-wing Islamist groups to murder at least half a million Communist Party of Indonesia members, workers and peasants and install General Suharto's military dictatorship, which lasted more than 30 years. These military and Islamist forces still retain a dominant position in the Indonesian state.

The Islamist organisations blame Western influence for producing an estimated five million drug addicts in Indonesia and demand a savage response from the state. The real source of the problem, however, is the mass poverty and despair produced by the enrichment of Indonesia's ruling oligarchy at the expense of hundreds of millions of workers and peasants. Over half Indonesia's 250 million people live on or below the miserably low United Nations poverty line of \$US2 per day.

The fate of the two condemned Australians points to the close economic relationship and strategic partnership between Canberra and Jakarta, which also underpinned the sordid manner in which Australian police authorities set up both men in 2005 for arrest, and therefore execution.

On January 23, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott publicly called on Indonesian authorities to grant clemency for Sukumaran and Chan. He declared that both had reformed and helped rehabilitate other prisoners incarcerated in Denpasar's Kerobokan prison on the island of Bali. No specific details have been provided about Abbott's contacts with Indonesian officials, but the Indonesian foreign ministry made it clear that Canberra's appeals have been presented in such a way as to not endanger the bilateral relationship.

The Australian government has not denounced the reactionary death penalty or criticised Widodo's use of it, nor threatened diplomatic or economic sanctions if the executions go ahead. Labor Party opposition leader Bill Shorten has defended the Abbott government, declaring on January 23 that it was doing "everything it can" to prevent the execution of the two Australians.

Successive Liberal-National and Labor governments in Australia have worked assiduously since the 1965 coup to cultivate and maintain the closest relations with the Indonesian ruling elite. Former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating hailed the bloody coup as the "most important contribution to stability" in South East Asia.

Canberra's token appeals are entirely hypocritical. In 2005 the Australian Federal Police (AFP) supplied the Indonesian police with detailed information about a group of Australians—the "Bali Nine," which included Sukumaran and Chan—who planned to import heroin into Australia from Bali. The AFP provided photographs, passport numbers and details of their movements and planned smuggling methods. The AFP knew that, as a result, the nine were likely to face death sentences.

Lee Rush, the father of one of the Bali Nine, contacted the AFP and was led to believe that the police would stop his son Scott before the group left Australia. The police reneged on this undertaking and allowed the Indonesian operation to proceed.

This AFP decision was vehemently defended by both Prime Minister John Howard and opposition leader Kim Beazley. It served two purposes. First and foremost, it sought to help rebuild the Australian political and security establishment's connections with the Indonesian security forces, following strained relations between the two countries over East Timor in 1999–2000. Second, it side-stepped the abolition of the death penalty in Australia, where legislation also restricts the extradition of people to face possible execution overseas.

When Labor's Beazley was asked in 2005 if the AFP had done the "right thing" in the Bali Nine case, he declared: "Australians do need to understand this—it is utterly critical for this nation that there is intimate collaboration between the AFP and the police forces of this region."



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