

Autopsy indicates Indonesian police unit tortured and killed prisoner

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A forensic examination has produced clear evidence that the Indonesian National Police's notorious special counter-terrorism unit, Special Detachment 88 or Densus 88, killed an alleged terrorist suspect last month after torturing him.

Densus 88 was established, with US and Australian assistance, after the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed 202 people on the resort island. The unit works closely with, and receives training from, the American FBI and the Australian Federal Police (AFP). Since its formation, there have been allegations of hundreds of extra judicial killings, deaths in custody, torture, unlawful arrests and detentions throughout Indonesia.

Now there is a well-documented case. Siyono, 34, a father of five, was reportedly killed on March 11, four days after he was arrested—without a warrant—at Pogung village in Klaten, Central Java. Police asked his wife, Suratmi, to collect his body from Jakarta. Immediately suspicious, she reported the death, which became the 121st such case known to the Indonesian Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM).

Since then, media reports and statements from Komnas HAM and the Asian Human Rights Commission have traced the unravelling of the initial police accounts of Siyono's death. The reports point to a blatant cover-up that has been exposed only because of the intransigence of family members.

Police claimed that Siyono was a leader of an offshoot of the nebulous Jamaah Islamiah terrorist group and knew the location of warehouses of weapons inherited from groups involved in the Bali bombing. According to the police, Siyono's death resulted from a head wound and brain haemorrhage that occurred during a fight with a police officer as Siyono was being transported to Yogyakarta.

On March 14, police Inspector General Anton Charliyan insisted that this account was confirmed by an autopsy

conducted in Jakarta's Kramat Hospital. But Suratmi saw that the condition of her husband's body that did not match the police accounts, because it displayed signs of further violence.

These suspicions were heightened when two female Densus 88 officers handed Suratmi and Siyono's brother 100 million rupiah (\$US7,600) in cash. Despite threats and intimidation from local authorities, the family insisted on an autopsy, which was conducted by a team of doctors at the village grave site on April 3.

Released at a Jakarta press conference on April 11, the autopsy results repudiated the police accounts. It was clear that no previous autopsy had been conducted. Siyono died as the result of blows delivered by a blunt object that smashed six ribs, causing a bone to pierce his heart. There was bruising on his back but no signs of a defensive struggle. A head wound had been sustained but there was no sign of a brain haemorrhage and this wound was not the cause of death.

As a result, the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) alleged that Siyono was tortured during interrogation. Authorities then admitted that no police autopsy had been conducted. Inspector General Anton claimed that the death was an "unfortunate" accident because it meant information about the alleged weapons caches was now lost.

The police internal affairs chief told the media on April 14 that an inquiry was underway. But Inspector General Tito Karnavian of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNTP), which reports directly to President Joko Widodo, effectively pre-empted any inquiry by declaring: "Did the autopsy show evidence of torture? Don't jump to conclusions?"

It is apparent that the security chiefs are confident that despite the exposures in the Siyono case, Densus 88 and other security operations will continue with impunity, just as they did during the US-backed military dictatorship of

General Suharto from 1965 to 1998.

In effect, by embracing the US-led “war on terror” and working with the Western intelligence networks, the Indonesian police-military apparatus spawned under Suharto has remained intact and unaccountable. As well as providing a pretext for predatory invasions and interventions by the US and its allies in the Middle East, the “war on terror” has been a vehicle for massive expansions of police and spy agency powers internationally.

Densus 88 is funded by the US State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service, despite previous US Congressional restrictions on aid to the Indonesian military (TNI). According to a 2007 study, CIA, FBI and Secret Service instructors have been involved with the unit’s training. Most of the staff were ex-US Special Forces personnel. Australia’s AFP has also been involved, together with Australian Special Forces.

Both the US and Australian governments have provided Densus 88 with advanced electronic and communications surveillance technology. A report in the *Strategist*, published by the Australian Strategy Policy Institute, in January said the Australian security forces had developed particularly close collaboration with their Indonesian counterparts through the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation.

Since Widodo took office in October 2014, the Indonesian security apparatus has expanded. Last June, Widodo’s government approved the formation of the TNI’s Joint Special Operations Command, tasked with carrying out “anti-terrorist” operations throughout the country. Political, Legal and Human Rights Minister Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno announced that the organisation might also be used “for other issues related to security,” indicating plans to restore the sweeping powers exercised by the TNI under Suharto.

As a result of a terrorist attack by four men in Jakarta this January, a bill is now before parliament to greatly increase the powers available to Densus 88. These include preventive detention of suspects for up to six months and stripping convicted terrorists of citizenship and passports.



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