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# UN human rights chief visit moment of truth for Indonesia

The visit of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein is a positive gesture, but it is also a moment of truth, an opportunity for Indonesia to take a hard look at its level of compliance with its international human rights obligations amid the increasing level of intolerance toward those who are different, disempowered and marginalized in Indonesia.

The UN human rights boss, who is visiting at the invitation of the Indonesian government, is scheduled to meet, among others, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, Attorney General M. Prasetyo and the National Commission on Human Rights between Feb. 4 and 7.

Since he took office in September 2014, Hussein has been outspoken on a range of issues, including the death penalty, "blasphemy," the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights and intersex (LGBTI) issues, discriminatory laws in Aceh and impunity in Indonesia. He issued a strong statement on the death penalty on July 26, 2016, when Indonesia was about to execute 14 people.

Human rights activists have high hopes for the visit and expect Hussein to continue to be frank on Indonesia's human rights record, make strong statements and push for Indonesia to take concrete steps to ensure compliance with its international human rights obligations, especially when it comes to protecting minority groups and addressing human rights violations.

The trip is a good opportunity for Hussein to speak out against injustice in Indonesia as his visit comes at a time when minority groups are crying out for help. They have been continuously persecuted — and prosecuted — by both law enforcement officers and mobs in the name of morality.

It was "morality" that recently justified police action in North Aceh to raid beauty salons and arrest 12 transgender women employees and force them to act like men. In what was clearly punishment through public shaming, the police cut their hair and forced the transgender women to wear men's clothing. Under international law, such conduct constitutes cruel, inhumane and de-

## INSIGHT



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grading punishment.

Despite the North Aceh Police chief undergoing internal investigation for an alleged breach of ethics, local authorities in the province, where sharia is enforced, continue the crackdown on transgender people as part of their "re-education" program. This is a serious violation of the rights to equality, privacy and freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, which we can trust Hussein to address during his visit.

At the meeting with President Jokowi, Hussein is expected to seek reassurances on Papua, the country's easternmost province, where security forces have long been notorious for reported hu-

man rights violations.

On Friday, three BBC journalists covering the deep and worrying health crisis in Asmat were forced to leave the region after one of them, Rebecca Alice Henske, criticized, via Twitter, the provision of aid in response to the measles and malnutrition outbreak there. Local immigration officers also seized Rebecca's passport over what they considered an "offensive" tweet. The health crisis has received international attention after at least 71 children died of the disease.

The expulsion contradicted Jokowi's commitment to open the resource-rich province to foreign journalists. A commitment made in 2015 when Papua was in the international spotlight.

Hussein may also talk to the President about the recent and ongoing discussions at the House of Representatives on legislation that would criminalize LGBTI people and punish consensual sex outside marriage, within the ongoing amendment of the outdated Criminal Code. The proposed amendments would clearly violate the human right to nondis-

crimination and the private lives of LGBTI people, paving the way for future persecution.

Jokowi, in 2014, pledged to address human rights cases such as the mass killings in 1965, the shooting of students in 1998/1999, the May 1998 riots and sectarian violence in 1998, the summary killings in Priok in 1984 and Talangsari in 1989, not to mention killings in Aceh, Papua and East Timor when it was under Indonesian rule.

There are plenty of unresolved cases in the much more recent past — attacks on rights activists, environmentalists and anticorruption activists such as Budi Heriawan, Budhi Fibriany, Joko Prianto and Noyel Baswedan — that have become new challenges for Jokowi's human rights agenda.

As of today, President Jokowi has not shown enough political will to walk his talk on human rights, despite the fact that he is surrounded by people who are experts on the matter.

Instead, President Jokowi has opted to focus on massive infrastructure projects in the country, which often create new

human rights violations, in particular large-scale forced evictions of people from their land to support the development agenda, not to mention silencing protesters by means of intimidation and prosecution.

If Jokowi is looking for someone he can trust and who can give him sound human rights advice, surely Hussein is the best person to talk to. For his part, Hussein would in all probability use his upcoming meeting to convince Jokowi to make human rights a real priority of his administration's agenda, with concrete plans toward tangible results.

Welcome to Indonesia, High Commissioner Hussein! We hope the President, and the Indonesian government as a whole, is open-minded, informative and a good listener during talks with you so that Indonesia and the UN can establish stronger cooperation on human rights, for the benefit of both sides, most importantly all Indonesians.

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