

Amid criticism, Jokowi maintains stance on LGBT

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President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo invoked culture and beliefs adopted by the people of Indonesia, home to the largest Muslim population in the world, in implying on Tuesday that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community is not acceptable in the country.

The remark came despite forceful criticism by civil society groups over the inclusion of an article that may outlaw same-sex relations in the Criminal Code (KUHP) bill being deliberated at the House of Representatives.

Although Jokowi did not abandon his disapproval of the LGBT community, he highlighted that the government would not go to the extent of "overcriminalizing" members of the group.

The President conveyed his stance during his meeting with United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein on Tuesday.

Jokowi and several Cabinet ministers welcomed al-Hussein, who had been invited by the government to visit Indonesia from Feb. 5 to 7, at Merdeka Palace.

The bill, which seeks to expand the definition of adultery and to criminalize consensual sex between two unmarried persons, also includes an article that, if passed, may outlaw same-sex relations. This article has been widely dubbed the "LGBT article."

Law and Human Rights Minister Yasonna Hamonangan Laoly said al-Hussein told Indonesian officials during the meeting that the country's authorities should not discriminate against people whose primary sexual orientation was toward the same gender.

The minister said he told al-Hussein that Indonesia had its own culture. He later asserted that what the government wanted in the article was to take legal measures against those who engaged in same-sex intercourse with minors.

"In the [KUHP revision] proposed by the government, the

[same-sex relations] are [criminalized] when it is conducted with minors. That is the stance of the government. The deliberation of the bill is still ongoing at the House of Representatives," Yasonna told journalists after the meeting.

He referred to Article 495, which, according to the copy of the bill obtained by *The Jakarta Post*, stipulates that any person conducting obscene actions with someone of the same gender whose age is not yet 18 can be charged with a maximum of nine years in prison.

The article is part of the bill's section on obscenity. Some political party factions reportedly have sought to eliminate the age limit to include possible punishment against people of all ages who engage in sexual intercourse with a member of the same sex. The move aims to outlaw homosexual relations, which many lawmakers consider a violation of morality.

Article 495 is among the pending issues that still need to be resolved by teams from lawmakers and the government, according to the decision made on Jan. 16.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abdurrahman Mohammad Fachir said in his meeting with al-Hussein that Jokowi had also reiterated the government's commitment to upholding human rights in Indonesia.

"The President said whether it was related to LGBT or other minority groups, when it came to their rights [as citizens], it's the responsibility of the state to uphold it," Fachir said.

Anti-LGBT sentiments in Indonesia have intensified in recent years following damaging remarks from public officials, as well as police crackdowns on spas and private entertainment spaces allegedly operating as sex clubs for homosexual men.

Scrutiny of the LGBT community took a nasty turn after the North Aceh Police raided beauty salons and arrested 12 transgender employees to force them to "act like real men", an incident which highlighted growing discrimination against the minority group.