

Transgender women arrested, forced to be 'real men'

Hotli Simanjuntak

THE JAKARTA POST/BANDA ACEH/
JAKARTA

The growing sentiment against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Aceh took a nasty new turn on Sunday with the backing of police, raising concerns from rights activists and members of the community.

North Aceh Police personnel and officers from Wilayahul Hisbah, Aceh's Islamic religious police force rounded up 12 transgender women in a crackdown in six different beauty parlors in the towns of Lhoksukon and Pantolabu in North Aceh regency in the early hours on Sunday.

It was part of an operation aimed at eradicating "societal diseases," led by North Aceh Police chief Adj. Comr. Sr. Ahmad Untung Surianata. The police claimed the crackdown was based on complaints by members of the public accusing the beauty parlors of being locations for immoral acts.

"The people felt uneasy so they reported it to us," Untung said on Monday.

The 12 arrested women were then taken to the North Aceh Police headquarters for "training" on how to be "real men." The police also shaved their heads and forced them to wear men's clothing.

"We made their hair neater so that they don't look like women," Untung said. "They often express their gender identity as women, so we have made them neater."

Officers also coached them by making them run for a while, and then shout as loud as possible so that their male voice came out, Untung added. "Now they realize their mistake and now they want to be real men."

He asserted the operation was intended to prevent an increase



Serambi Indonesia

Tough time: Police arrest transgender beauty parlor employees in Pantolabu, Tanah Jambo Aye district, North Aceh regency, Aceh, as part of an operation, which also took place in Lhoksukon district in the same regency, on Saturday night.

in the number LGBT people in the population, because it would have an adverse effect on future generations. He also claimed the operation had been sanctioned by local Islamic clerics.

Untung warned that all transgender women in Aceh should immediately repent and return to their natural condition as men, saying that they were in violation of Islamic law. The arrested women were all released and returned to their homes on Monday without any charges.

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia that enforces sharia, or Islamic-based law, through its Islamic criminal code *qanun jinayat* on the back of its special autonomy status granted as part of the Helsinki peace agreement between Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in 2005. The provincial administration enacted a tougher *qanun jinayat* in 2015 banning alcohol consumption, adultery, dating in

public, rape, sexual harassment, gambling and homosexuality. However, under the code it is the Wilayahul Hisbah that has the authority to conduct raids or make arrests of code violators.

Members of the LGBT community in Aceh strongly denounced the police's actions, saying the police had acted against procedures and outside their authority.

"The police should be the ones protecting minorities and people who are discriminated against in Aceh," Sindi, a transgender woman and a member of an Aceh LGBT group, said on Monday. "Who will protect us, if not the police?"

The LGBT community in Aceh was very concerned at the moment as they seemed to be targeted by certain groups, she said. In several regencies in the province, Aceh Anti-LGBT Movement groups have sprung up with the purpose of arresting, raiding, and spying on the activities of LGBT groups, especially transgender

people. "We feel threatened and very afraid," Sindi said. "We cannot go on with our daily lives like normal people."

Erasmus Napitupulu of the Institute of Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR) condemned the police's actions, saying their treatment of the transgender women was "cruel, inhumane and degrading." "Their actions constitute inhumane and arbitrary torture."

The police's actions were contrary to the United Nations Convention Against Torture, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Indonesia's own 1945 constitution.

The forceful measures against the transgender women were also in violation of criminal procedure as they were taken by force to the North Aceh Police headquarters, even though they had not been named suspects in any crime, Erasmus added.

He called on National Police Chief Gen. Tito Karnavian to investigate the North Aceh Police's actions and evaluate the performance of the North Aceh Police chief and the Aceh Police chief because they were "negligent in carrying out their duties."

Beka Ulung Hapsara of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) said the commission had sent a letter to the Aceh Police chief on Monday, seeking clarification on the actions of the North Aceh Police.

"We strongly condemn the North Aceh Police's demeaning and degrading treatment of the transgender women," he said. "The transgender women are also citizens and all citizens deserve the same protection under the law."

National Police officials did not respond to requests for comment. (kmt)