

Govt remains indecisive over resolving historic rights abuses

**Haeril Halim, Ina Parlina
and Stefani Ribka**

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The government said on Tuesday that it had yet to decide on what actions to take to resolve historic human rights abuses as several mechanisms were still being considered.

Presidential Chief of Staff Teten Masduki said that the government was still discussing what would be the best format for the solutions, whether it will take judicial or non-judicial measures.

He said that the discussion was also seeking to find out whether the government needed to set up a special body tasked to solve historic human rights abuse cases, or if they would be solved by existing law enforcement institutions.

One of the challenges the government is facing in solving the cases was that some of the perpetrators had already died, making it hard for a judicial body to collect evidence to confirm their offenses, Teten added.

"Probably a better format for the solution is reconciliation, but if we talk about reconciliation there will be demands to bring out the truth about the cases before agreeing on a reconciliation. Whether we need an

ad hoc team to handle the reconciliation is still being discussed, but the point is there must be a solution to the matter," Teten said.

He said that it would take a while for the government to solve the abuse cases because President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's administration was currently focused on repairing the economy.

"I think all will agree that hungry stomachs can lead to turmoil; more human rights problems will emerge. I believe the President is indeed heavy on the economy because the President perceives if the economy gets better and people's welfare gets better, we can handle such problems even better," he said.

The slow progress at the State Palace, as well as in the Attorney General's Office (AGO) and other relevant ministries has made activists, victims and families come to the Presidential Advisory Board (Wantimpres) to urge Jokowi to form an independent commission directly under him to reveal the truth of the historic abuses and help the victims and families.

Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace chairman Hendaradi said that he hoped that the board could channel the aspirations directly to

- » Government considering whether to take legal or reconciliation approach to probe historic abuses
- » Reconciliation requires probe into truth about cases
- » Group demands President set up special task force to do mission

the President to have the commission formed faster.

"We demand the President form a presidential task force, consisting of intellectuals and not government people, including Komnas HAM [state commission for human rights], nor the military, intelligence or the police, all of which were part of the problems themselves," he told reporters after meeting with Wantimpres.

They demand the team and government meet and question witnesses, many of whom are still alive.

"We reject the government's reason for dragging out the progress saying there is not enough evidence because many of them are still alive," Hendaradi said.

Setara, victims and families cited

former president BJ Habibie, former Indonesian Military (TNI) commander Gen. (ret) Wiranto and Maj. Gen. (ret) Kivlan Zein, a former military officer who admits to knowing the locations of the persons who went missing during the 1997/1998 tragedies, as examples of witnesses.

The team will then conclude whether the solution should go through a judicial or non-judicial process; either way will have to include revelations of the truth and the perpetrators behind the incidents.

Setara and others are worried that the government will only apologize as a way to solve everything without revealing the truth as the government keeps saying it lacks evidence.

The dossiers of seven major cases were completed by the state commission of human rights (Komnas HAM) in 2002, but the AGO always returns them because of a lack of evidence.

The cases include the 1989 Talangsari incident in Central Lampung, the 2001 and 2003 Wamena and Wasior incidents in Papua, various kidnappings and unresolved shootings in the 1980s, the 1965 communist purge and the 1998 May riots.