

# Local administrations true guardians of rights: Activists

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Human rights groups have called on local administrations to apply a rights-friendly city concept as an attempt to prevent more human rights abuses in the future.

International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID) senior officer for human rights Mugiyanto said on Sunday that the concept included inclusion of pluralism values in local regulations.

"[Supporting pluralism] is in line with commitments made by the central government," Mugiyanto told a press briefing, referring to Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 75/2015 on the 2015-2019 National Plan of Action on Human Rights (RANHAM) that elaborates the government's commitment on human rights.

Local administrations, he said, played a pivotal role because the peace and security of all regions in the country mainly depended on local rights enforcement and regulations by regional leaders.

He cited, as an example the recent circular issued by Bogor Mayor Bima Arya in October banning Shiite Muslims in the city from celebrating their religious feast day, Asyura, which contravened the principle of human rights.

The circular resulted in Bogor being recognized for its religious intolerance, which is now reportedly the worst in Indonesia according to a recent study by human rights advocacy group Setara Institute.

"The mayor, indeed, has the au-



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**Standing up:** Human rights activists gather on Sunday to promote a conference on human rights to be held in Jakarta this week.

thority to issue such a circular, but that right was not a positive move because it clearly violated freedom of religion," Mugiyanto said.

Mugiyanto mentioned the Aceh Legislative Council (DPRA) initiative to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (KKR), as an example of pro-human rights regulation.

The KKR would have the authority to solve problems related to past human rights violations in Aceh during the separatist conflict and also to accommodate the victims of

such violations.

The Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM) said that local administrations could solve human rights problems faster and more effectively than the central government.

"The central government usually takes too long to respond. Many problems either cannot find a way out or face long periods of deadlock," ELSAM human rights researcher Zainal Abidin said.

He went on to say that human rights-friendly cities could never be

realized unless local leaders showed the political will to protect their citizens from human rights violations.

According to him, there are three cities that can be used as best practice examples for political will — Sanggau in West Kalimantan, Palu in Central Sulawesi and Wonosobo in Central Java.

Sanggau is arranging several by-laws that tend to human rights, asking for help and guidelines from local rights groups, experts and civil society. The same effort is also happening in Wonosobo.

Palu is engaging local rights groups to arrange a bylaw that will facilitate and accommodate access for victims — the survivors and their families — of the 1965 massacre: This bylaw will give victims the freedom to express their trauma and to decide what they want the local authorities to do to restore their property and more importantly, their dignity.

"If all cities possess such a political will, rights commission reports on violence will likely decrease," Zainal said.

Yuli Asmini from the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) said that beside political will, the local government should also have a good control mechanism on human rights.

"The best way is to involve the public and society groups in every decision, including the making of regulations. Local administrations usually have divisions which specifically deal with human rights matters. Now they just need to make these work well," Yuli said. (foy)