



Indonesia: Government must stop any attempt of criminalisation against activist Ravio Patra and bring the real perpetrators to justice

(Bangkok/Jakarta, 24 April 2020) – The arrest of activist Ravio Patra points towards a new and worrying form of criminalising dissent in Indonesia – one that holds the victim of a cybercrime attack responsible for the action of the real perpetrators.

In a joint statement, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and seven of its Indonesia members expressed solidarity with Ravio Patra, urging the Government of Indonesia to cease any further attempt to prosecute him and instead seek the real perpetrators of the cybercrime attack.

The seven organisations are: the Alliance of Independent Journalists Indonesia (AJI), the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), the Indonesian Human Rights (Imparsial), the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), and the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM).

On 22 April, Ravio Patra tweeted that his WhatsApp account had been hacked. He had lost access the account between 14:00 to 19:00 during which a message had been sent from his mobile number calling for nationwide riots and looting on 30 April. He was arrested shortly after and detained for two days.

‘We believe that Ravio Patra was framed. The Indonesian authorities should investigate the perpetrators behind the alleged hacking instead of arresting an outspoken activist critical of national politics, including the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates a worrying development in how Indonesia is criminalising dissent,’ Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA, said on behalf of the organisations.

Ravio Patra, who is also a researcher, had criticised the Indonesian Government on various subjects on social media, including on a possible conflict of interest involving Joko Widodo’s presidential staff in several government projects. More recently, he published an article warning that the Indonesian Government’s presentation of COVID-19 related data was problematic, and could lead to misinterpretation and false sense of security among the public.¹

Ravio Patra’s arrest comes three weeks after a police telegram containing instructions to criminalise misinformation and fake news as well as defamation against the President and other government officials during the COVID-19 pandemic was leaked on 4 April 2020.²

¹ <https://tirto.id/kenapa-penyajian-data-rasio-kematian-covid-19-dari-bnnpb-menyesatkan-eP1k>

² <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200405201542-12-490559/kapolri-terbitkan-telegram-soal-penghinaan-pejabat-dan-hoaks>

The incident which has befallen Rasio Patra has had a chilling effect on the champions of free expression – human rights defenders, activists and civil society and the Indonesia society at large – who debate, discuss and express dissent in online spaces.

Jointly, FORUM-ASIA and its seven members in Indonesia call on the Government of Indonesia to halt any further criminalisation of Rasio Patra and ensure the provision of remedial action.

‘People should be free to exercise their rights to freedom of opinion and expression. We urge the Government of Indonesia to conduct an open and transparent investigation into Rasio Patra’s case, bring the perpetrators to justice and ensure people’s access to civil liberties remain. We stand in solidarity with Rasio Patra and urge the Government of Indonesia to halt any further attempt to prosecute him. The perpetrators of the cybercrime against him must be brought to justice,’ the organisations said.

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