



Indonesia: End police violence, respect fundamental freedoms at the Omnibus Law protests

(Bangkok/Jakarta, 8 October 2020) – The Government of Indonesia should ensure the protection of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and halt law enforcement from using excessive force at protests against the recently passed Omnibus Law, said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development and eight of its member organisations in Indonesia.

FORUM-ASIA’s members in Indonesia are: The Alliance of Independent Journalists Indonesia (AJI), the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (Imparsial), the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM), and Sekretariat Anak Merdeka (SAMIN).

Massive protests have erupted across Indonesia since 6 October 2020. The number is expected to increase today as more people are coming out to call for the immediate repeal of the recently passed Omnibus Law, which would significantly weaken various aspects including labour protections and environmental safeguards.¹

‘The Government should ensure a safe environment for the public to share their dissent against the Omnibus law. Indonesia has the obligation to protect and respect the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of expression, and to ensure the government’s actions are compliant with international human rights standards. Any form of police violence is inexcusable,’ said the groups.

On 7 October, the police violently dispersed protests in cities across the country, using water cannons and tear gas, and arresting hundreds. Protest organisers have also shared allegations of at least one individual beaten by the police while another six protesters have allegedly been critically injured in clashes.²

It is also believed that an internal police directive detailed its plans to conduct cyber-patrols on social media, supposedly to ‘counter narratives’ and discourage individuals from participating in the protests.³

¹ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=33092>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/07/indonesia-police-use-water-cannon-and-teargas-to-disperse-labour-law-protests>

³ <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3104412/indonesians-begin-protests-against-omnibus-jobs-law-amid-online>

Under international standards, the State has the obligation to respect fundamental freedoms in both online and offline spaces. State forces are prohibited from conducting unwarranted interference in any peaceful assembly.

‘These efforts by the police to discredit the legitimate concerns of the Indonesian people, civil society organisations and human rights organisations reaffirm protesters’ distrust against the Government, when the law was passed despite overwhelming criticism. The government and the police continue to deprive the people the right to express dissent. As we head towards these massive protests, the police and the government should know that their actions will come under the scrutiny of Indonesians, human rights organisations and the international community.’

The police have argued that the protests will cause the massive risk of transmitting COVID-19 and have used this reasoning to prohibit individuals from attending protests. Protesters have however argued that the threats posed by the Omnibus Law would have further and greater repercussions to their rights.

Arguing that it would improve the economy and investments, the Parliament passed the Omnibus Law on 4 October 2020 despite public outrage. The law revises 79 existing laws to the detriment of workers, indigenous communities and the environment, whose protection would be further side-lined.⁴

‘The passage of the Omnibus Law has demonstrated how the State prioritises business over the protection of its people’s rights and welfare as well as the environment. These protests should be a reminder that the people are angry and want to claim back what the government has taken. Therefore, we reiterate our call for the Government to repeal the law immediately,’ said the groups.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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⁴ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=33092>