

Militia and illegal weapons still haunt peace in Aceh

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Shinta Shinaga, Banda Aceh - The peace process in Aceh has encountered a stumbling stone. Militia groups still exist and recently their level of activity has even been increasing. Added to this is the spread of illegal weapons.

These two issues continue to haunt the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). To this day, Friday March 17, they are increasingly becoming hot topics of discussion.

Moreover it needs to be remembered that the MoU does not regulate the disbanding of the militia and there are no clear mechanisms for the surrender of the illegal weapons they possess. The MoU only regulates the disbanding of the Aceh National Army (TNA, GAM's armed wing) and the decommissioning of GAM's weapons. Both of which have already been carried out.

GAM says the militias are derived from the TNI (Indonesian military) and regards them as a potential threat that could hinder the peace agreement. "These militia are a potential threat. But we are not assuming it will obstruct the peace process in Aceh. The problem will of course still exist. But it should be handled wisely", said GAM's Swedish spokesperson Bakhtiar Abdullah at GAM's central office in Lamdingin, Banda Aceh, on Wednesday March 15.

On the question of the weapons possessed by the militia meanwhile, Abdullah declined to speculate admitting that he does not have any hard evidence. "Our weapons were destroyed in accordance with the MoU. The weapons that in the past we constantly carried, like a wife, have been cut in three, destroyed by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM)", said Abdullah.

The head of the Aceh Transitional Command for the Pase region, Tengku Zulkarnain, also says he can guarantee that the illegal weapons did not originate from GAM. "In Pase there is not one illegal weapon. But of course there is no evidence. Even if there was, the illegal weapons in Aceh are not our business. That is the responsibility of the police", said the ex-TNA member at his office on Jl. Medan in Lhokseumawe on Thursday March 16.

The North Aceh head of the AMM, Jorma Gardemeister, also confirmed that GAM's weapons had been surrendered to the AMM and destroyed. "If [weapons] still exist, it's illegal. It is the police that must deal with it and then hand them over to the AMM", said Gardemeister who originates from Finland.

Government investigation

The AMM has meanwhile asked the Indonesian government to investigate reports on the increase in the level of militia activity in various parts of Aceh. The AMM is presently waiting for the results of the investigation. "A militia presence could disrupt the peace process. But we believe that the government can overcome it", said AMM head Pieter Feith at his offices on Jl. Tengku Abdul Rauf in Banda Aceh on Wednesday.

Although not often, the AMM has however also been monitoring actions that are unhelpful to the peace process such as statements about the past that was dominated by conflict. "These statements does not reflect [the views of] the GAM leadership. This phenomena, they are illegal groups. Of course it will be embarrassing if they reemerge after the AMM has gone. Even though the crisis in Aceh has ended and the armed conflict resolved", asserted Feith.
(sss)

[Translated by James Balowski.]

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