

Indonesia: On holding civil posts, TNI commander claims soldiers are needed everywhere

Tuesday 16 July 2024, by [BALOWSKI James](#), [DIRGANTARA Adhyasta](#), [Ihsanuddin](#) (Date first published: 10 July 2024).

Adhyasta Dirgantara, Ihsanuddin, Jakarta — TNI (Indonesian military) Commander General Agus Subiyanto has bragged that TNI soldiers are needed everywhere by the government and society.

He gave as an example, the TNI being needed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Kementan) to build rice fields in the context of the food estate program.

Subiyanto was responding to concerns that the TNI could potentially fill civilian positions under revisions to regulations on state civil servants (ASN).

“That’s yeah, what I think ... because what’s happening yeah, I’m the TNI commander, there are several ministries that have asked for an MoU [Memorandum of Understanding] with me. One of them is the Ministry of Agriculture. Because indeed they’re needed ... For example, now we’re establishing a food estate, making rice fields in Merauke [regency in South Papua province], 1,058 hectares”, Subiyanto said at the House of Representatives (DPR) building in Senayan, Jakarta, on Wednesday July 10.

“Special expertise is needed, equipment also. Meanwhile it’s a remote area right, so that TNI is needed there. So, we need an MoU. Also in other regions”, he continued.

Then, Subiyanto said, the Communication and Information Ministry (Kominfo) also needs TNI help in building Base Transceiver Stations (BTS). He cited other ministries that have also asked the TNI to provide security for vital national projects.

“Also from BUMN [state-owned enterprises], securing vital national projects. It’s just one of the several ministries right, from the Kominfo, they’re building BTS in remote areas, these need the military to construct and secure them”, Subiyanto explained.

Therefore, said Subiyanto, the public should think positively about the possibility of the TNI filling civilian positions, saying that the TNI is present for the public’s welfare and at the same time to assist government programs.

“I think you have to think positively. I think the public also doesn’t need to ... Yes (for public services). For the public welfare, assisting government programs. Not for other things”, he added.

Earlier, Indonesian Human Rights Watch (Imparsial) criticised the government’s plan to ratify a government regulation on the management of state civil servants. The draft regulation stipulates that TNI and National Police (Polri) personnel can occupy civil positions, and visa-versa.

According to Imparsial Director Gufron Mabruri, the plan to place TNI and Polri personnel in civilian positions will clearly threaten democracy because it will legalise the return of BRI's (as the TNI was once known) dwi-fungsi (dual sociopolitical function) as it was under the authoritarian era of Suharto's New Order regime.

"We believe that in the effort to maintain and encourage the advance of democratic systems and practices in Indonesia, the socio-political role of ABRI (TNI and Polri) that was abolished in the years of political transition in 1998 is important to be maintained and defended", Mabruri said in a press release on Friday March 15.

In this context, according to Mabruri, it is important for the political elite not to open space to revive the political practices of the authoritarian era.

"Because once this space is opened and moreover it is legalised in law, it is tantamount to returning the TNI and Polri to the role it played in the authoritarian era of the New Order", said Mabruri.

He said that if this is attempting to address the problem of the buildup of senior officers with no jobs in the TNI and National Police, the other way to resolve this could be through improving the recruitment process, education, career paths and promotions.

"These various agendas are far more important to carry out, not to open space for their placement in civilian positions that will only cause new problems in the future", said Mabruri.

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