

On International Women's Day women say stop paying the debt

Friday 17 March 2006, by [Perempuan Mahardhika](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2006).

On March 8, no less than 400 mostly women activists from Perempuan Mahardhika, which is made up of urban poor, worker and student organisations along with other women's groups, marched to demand government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono stop paying the foreign debt and use the budget to improve welfare for the poor. They also opposed planned increases to basic electricity rates and the enactment of the draft law on pornography.

The group said that no less than 20,000 women die during childbirth every year, or 307 for each 100,000 pregnancies. This is the highest rate in Asia and far worse than Singapore, Malaysia and even Vietnam which has a rate of 160 deaths for each 100,000 births. The highest mortality rates are among poor women in rural areas and urban slums. Forty percent of these deaths are caused by malnutrition, haemorrhaging, infection and complications during abortions, not to mention the poor quality and high cost of health services.

The recent debate on the pornography bill, which is to be ratified by the Regional House of Representatives, is evidence of the fact that the government cannot resolve the fundamental problems confronting women. Problems that have their basis in the capitalism system of imperialist domination and militarism which has created a culture of state and domestic violence and patriarchy as a remnant of feudalism.

The domination of Indonesia's economy by foreign capital requires that almost of our national assets be privatized. Caught in the debt trap Indonesia is forced to cut subsidies for the poor and liberalise markets. This is neo-liberalism. And workers, the peasantry, the urban poor and women with children are the most effected.

Around 27 percent of national budget goes to pay the foreign debt and its interest while less than 7 percent goes to development (infrastructure, education, healthcare etc). Simultaneously, along with

other neoliberal packages, it is no wonder that this worsens the lives of the poor. Since the fuel price hikes last October the total number of people living under the poverty line based on monthly income of 125,000-175,000 rupiah per month (about US\$13-18) increased to 118 million from the total population 230 million. Most are women particularly after the massive wave of layoffs over the last year. This does not yet include those living on US\$2 a day, surely more than a half of Indonesian population.

Under these conditions, women are facing a greater economic burden and this will hamper attempts to achieve gender equity. It is these factors that lie behind our march today to the National Development Planning Board and the State Palace, two institutions that along with the cabinet are the architects of Indonesian economic policies.

Demands opposing the planned electricity hikes are based on the government's "hands off" policy of failing to take responsibility for subsidising basic services for the people. Electricity costs have already increase following the fuel price hikes and this cost is being borne by the ordinary people. The State Electricity Company PLN is no longer owned and supervised by the government — even though it is still called a "state-owned enterprise" — but each local supplier has largely been sub-contracted to private companies. Corruption in many of PLN projects also adds to the costs and loss of revenue but this is then used to justify increasing electricity rates.

Perempuan Mahardhika declares therefore that the Yudhoyono government has failed to improve the people's welfare and under their governance the people of Indonesia have only fallen deeper in to poverty. We demand that:

1. The government stop paying the debt — abolish the debt through the unity of the people
2. That the government abandons the planned electricity rate increases — nationalise the domestic energy industry

Perempuan Mahardhika

Perempuan Mahardhika is made up of the National Student League for Democracy (LMND), the women's section of the Urban Poor Union (SRMK), the women's section of the People's Democratic Party (PRD), the

women's committee of the Indonesian National Front for Labour Struggles (FNPBI) and the women's section of the National Peasants Union (STN)

[Reported by Zely Ariane.]