

Indonesia

# Justice for Munir!

Tuesday 9 August 2005, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 17 July 2005).

**A key figure in the democratic struggle, Munir died of arsenic poisoning in September 2004. The main murder suspect is a pilot for the Indonesian company Garuda Airlines, but everything indicates that this is the work of the secret services.**

Munir Said Thalib was 38 years old when he died of arsenic poisoning on September 7, 2004, while flying to Holland on a Garuda flight. According to an inquest, he had previously been the target of three other assassination attempts, involving: a fake car accident, a black magic curse and a first attempt at poisoning that failed. The inquest implicated the highly official National Intelligence Agency (BIN).

Munir was a key figure in the fight for human rights in a country which lived under one of the most bloodthirsty anti-Communist dictatorships on the planet for more than three decades (1965-1998). Immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime, he devoted himself to publicising the truth about the kidnapping and torture of militants carried out by the Kopassus special forces. Munir created the Commission for Disappearance and Victims of Violence (Kontras) and supported the families of democratic activists "erased" (kidnapped and murdered) by army units. He also occupied the post of executive director of Indonesian Human Rights Monitor.

Kopassus, an elite corps of the army, was responsible for a reign of terror in East Timor as well as Aceh. After the overthrow of the dictatorship, the Indonesian army continued to commit numerous crimes in East Timor, notably to oppose the independence referendum in 1999. Once again, Munir played a very important role in bringing to light the responsibilities of superior officers, like the chief of staff, General Wiranto. Kopassus also had links with Islamist groups like Laksar Jihad and Jemaah Islamiah (the latter being accused of having carried out the 2002 Bali bombings).

Munir had publicly criticised the national secret service agency BIN. According to his colleagues, at the time of his death he was investigating a corruption scandal involving the air company Garuda. He knew he was in danger. [1]

A team of investigators (TPF or in English, Fact Finding Team) has been set up by presidential decision to look into this murder. It is chaired by the Brigadier General of the police, Marsudhi.

The first murder suspect is a pilot with Garuda, Pollycarpus Priyanto, whose presence on the flight to Amsterdam has not been explained and who had given his place in first class to Munir. His accomplices would have been two members of the crew who were responsible for serving the meals. It seems clear that Priyanto would not have acted independently. Who were the people behind the murder? According to the investigators, "members of Indonesia's intelligence service appear to have been involved". Thus, 26 phone calls were made between the office of the deputy director of BIN, Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono, and numbers belonging to the pilot, Priyanto. [2]

The investigating team has encountered a veritable refusal of cooperation from the secret services,

Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono and a former henchman of the dictatorship, Makhmud Hendropriyono. [3] For his part, Priyanto says he was recruited by the secret services, which would point to BIN's responsibility.

### Munir's burial

For Suciwati, Munir's widow, the political character of the murder of her husband is not in doubt. She reaffirmed it in a recent interview in the Indonesian newspaper "Tempo". "My husband has been the victim of a political assassination because of his fight for human rights. This murder is the fruit of a planned conspiracy, because it is not possible that it has been planned by one single person... The investigation has been going on for several months, but it was only on March 18 that the police revealed the name of a first suspect, then of two others [a pilot, a steward and a hostess]. I am certain that they are only underlings and that the people behind the crime have still not been troubled. The recent developments in the affair confirm the first suspicions, namely the implication of the directors of Garuda [Indonesia's national airline company], as well as the Indonesian secret services in the murder plot".

"Munir was assassinated at a time when, they say, freedom of expression, human rights and democracy are respected. But this murder reminds us that around us terror is still threatening." [4]

By refusing to cooperate with the investigators, the secret services have played for time, since the mandate of the TPF ended on June 23, 2005. On June 21, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) launched an appeal for the investigation to be allowed to continue and for its independence to be assured.

The Commission also demanded that the family of Munir, the democratic activists and the witnesses are effectively protected as "Munir's widow, the staff of the human rights organization Kontras and other human rights activists who had worked closely with Munir, have received various death threats, giving rise to fears for their safety". [5]

The presidency committed itself to responding rapidly to the conclusions and recommendations of the TPF. However, 20 days after the investigators submitted their report to president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the Indonesian authorities have still not reacted. Asked about it at press conferences, officials are content to dodge the basic questions, by announcing that the pilot, Priyanto, will soon come to trial. [6]

This is not good enough. The investigation must be allowed to finish its work. Justice for Munir!

Pierre Rousset has been active in solidarity with the struggle in the Philippines for 30 years. He is a well-known member of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, French section of the Fourth International).

### NOTES

[1] See the article by James Balowski, "Indonesia: Spy agency implicated in activist's murder", "Green Left Weekly", June 22, 2005.

[2] Timothy Mapes and Pupsa Madani, "Activist Death Linked to Jakarta Spies", "The Wall Street Journal", June 27, 2005

[3] Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono is a former commander of the special forces, Kopassus, who lost his post following the investigation led by Munir on the "disappearances" of 1998. Makhmud Hendropriyono was the military commander of Djakarta in 1996 when the offices of the

Indonesian Democratic Party of Megawati Sukarnoputri were attacked by henchmen of the regime (with the support of the army). At least 50 people were killed during this attack which led to three days of riots in the capital. Ironically, Hendropriyono is now close to Megawati.

[4] Interview published in French in "Courrier international", May 19-25, 2005.

[5] Asian Human Rights Commission - Urgent Appeal Program, "Update on Urgent Appeal", June 21, 2005.

[6] See the article in "Kompas", July 14, 2005, translated by James Balowski, Indoleft news service, July 16, 2005.

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