

Papuan students on Java face increased pressures from Islamist, nationalist groups

Monday 19 August 2019, by [ARBI Ivany Atina](#), [BOEDIWARDHANA Wahyoe](#), [MAWEL Benny](#) (Date first published: 19 August 2019).

Papuan students on Java Island have repeatedly become the target of intimidation by Islamist and nationalist groups as armed conflict between security forces and separatist groups in Papua escalates.

In the latest incident on Friday afternoon, scores of security forces along with civil militias from hard-line group Islam Defenders Front (FPI) and youth organization Pemuda Pancasila (PP) reportedly went to a Papuan student dormitory on Jl. Kalasan in Surabaya, East Java, and launched physical and verbal attacks against the students, following the finding of an Indonesian flag discarded near the dorm.

According to the Surabaya Legal Aid Institute, which cited the account of a student staying in the dormitory, Indonesian Military (TNI) soldiers allegedly banged on the door of the dorm while uttering curse words such as “monkey”, “dogs” and “pigs” aimed at the students inside the dormitory. Dozens of FPI and PP members reportedly came not long after.

Human rights lawyer Veronica Koman, who is also a representative of the National Committee for West Papua (KNPB), said Sunday that the angry mob purportedly damaged the dorm’s gate and threw stones at the building while chanting “Kick out Papuans!” and “Slaughter Papuans!” for hours, restricting the students’ movement.

Two good Samaritan Indonesian students, who at midnight delivered food to the students trapped inside the dorm, claimed to have been assaulted and later arrested by police who were guarding the area.

“This is beyond my comprehension, what could possibly be the crime of delivering food and water? Even prisoners have a right to eat,” Veronica said, adding that the pressure continued on the following day with the police shooting teargas into the dorm and arresting all 43 students inside the building.

“[All the teargas and violence] is totally unnecessary. They are only unarmed, hungry, thirsty and tired students who have been rounded up by hundreds of racist civil militias and security forces for more than 24 hours,” she said.

Tension between local residents and Papuan students also arose in Candi subdistrict, Candisari district, Semarang, as residents were offended by the students’ alleged reluctance to participate in the Independence Day celebrations in the neighborhood.

“We sent an invitation to join the morning march on Sunday, but two students later came to my house saying they couldn’t because they had to attend Sunday service [at the church],” local leader Maryanto told the Post on Sunday. “But when we passed by their dorm on Sunday morning, most of

them were still there.”

‘Insult against the nation’s symbol’

Surabaya Police deputy chief Adj. Sr. Comr. Leonardus Simarmata said separately that the arrests were made as the police were looking for the person who destroyed an Indonesian flag and dumped it into a ditch.

“We are just enforcing the law regarding an alleged insult against the country’s symbol,” Leonardus said in front of the dorm on Saturday. However, he assured that the police would never deny the students’ right to live in the city.

All of the students have been released after being questioned as witnesses.

Veronica deplored that such an incident had to happen every year in a similar pattern.

A clash also occurred last year on Aug. 15 at the same dormitory, during which some members of mass organizations allegedly forced Papuan students to fly the country’s flag in front of their dorm. The students claimed they did not object to the suggestion, but they first needed to inform the dorm’s caretaker, who was out of Surabaya at the time.

The initial “refusal” led to a fight between the students and mass organization members, in which one was injured. Surabaya Police officers subsequently visited the dorm and took dozens of boarders to their headquarters for questioning. The students were released hours later.

‘Prolonged discrimination against Papuans’

Experts on Papua issues argued that the incidents kept recurring as a result of several factors, including the prolonged discrimination against native Papuans from fellow citizens and security forces, in addition to unresolved past human rights abuses that took place in the easternmost part of Indonesia.

“Papuans are often depicted [by the government and mass media] as anti-nationalists who want to separate themselves from the country. The media, however, fail to present the reason behind such aspiration,” said an expert on Papua issues, Darmawan Triwibowo.

“There’s a human rights issue behind the desire, which is a political problem that should also be addressed using a political approach instead of a security or economic approach,” he added.

His voice was echoed by Papua Peace Network coordinator Adriana Elisabeth, who said various human rights violations that occurred in Papua had not been resolved to this day, despite President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo’s 2014 campaign promise to do so.

“Papuans feel like they don’t belong in the country as long as the government doesn’t resolve past human rights abuses. That’s the background we should understand,” Adriana said, urging the government to stop stigmatizing Papuans with the separatist label or treating them like criminals.

The government should also initiate talks with activists and local figures from Papua to address the ongoing tensions and conflicts. “President Jokowi was highly respected in Papua. Therefore, he should start the initiative,” she added.

Representatives from the region have frequently expressed their concerns over the government’s continuous violence in Papua at various international forums. The most recent was at the 50th Pacific

Islands Forum (PIF), held from Aug. 13 to 16 in Tuvalu, where pro-Papua independence leader Benny Wenda urged state leaders to support the free Papua campaign amid recent escalating violence in Papua, including in Nduga regency.

Dozens of citizens supporting the free-Papua campaign at the Pacific Islands Forum were reportedly arrested by the Jayapura Police on Thursday. The people staged a rally, demanding a “conflict resolution” in Papua.

Papua Police spokesman Sr. Comr. Muhamad M. Kamal confirmed the arrest on Thursday night, saying that the protestors were being questioned at the police headquarters.

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Suherdjoko in Semarang contributed to this article

Editor’s note: The article has been updated to clarify the political ideology of Pemuda Pancasila.

P.S.

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