

# **Indonesia: Police intimidation of artists brings back memories of Suharto's New Order**

Friday 15 December 2023, by [CNN Indonesia](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2023).

**Amnesty International Indonesia Executive Director Usman Hamid says that the alleged police intimidation of artist Butet Kartaredjasa brings back memories of the New Order (Orba) regime of former president Suharto.**

Hamid said that artistic activists are experiencing restrictions and have become the target of censorship such as during the New Order regime. "This intimidation of artists reminds us of the New Order era.

Artistic activities often become that target of censorship and restrictions", said Hamid in Jakarta on Wednesday December 6. "Efforts to control artistic expression that is critical can be seen as a sign of returning to practices that should have been left behind", he said.

Not only that, Hamid is of the view that the alleged intimidation against Kartaredjasa also has the potential to damage the human rights climate in Indonesia. He warned that freedom of expression, including art, is a basic right that is protected by the constitution.

"These acts of intimidation not only do irreparable damage to artistic freedoms, but also damage the human rights climate, particularly the right to freedom of expression", he asserted.

"This represents a basic right of each person that is protected by law. Restrictions on art will only harm cultural development and also public participation", he said. Hamid is therefore calling on the rogue individuals to immediately stop the practice of intimidating artists.

According to Hamid, the state must also play a role in guaranteeing artists' freedom of opinion through their works.

"We urge the authorities to immediately stop the practice of intimidating artists and any citizen who is thinking critically", he said.

"The state must guarantee artistic freedom as an integral part of freedom of expression. All forms of expression in art are important elements in building a society that is democratic and cultured", he continued.

Setara Institute for Peace and Democracy Deputy Chairperson Bonar Tigor Naipospos also considers the authorities' attitude to be excessive in its intervention in Kartaredjasa's art performance.

Even though the authorities argued it was for the sake of security.

"I see that there is nervousness within the security forces at seeing the political temperature heating

up. There is concern that the political situation will get out of control because the competing parties [in the 2024 elections] tend to use verbal language that is provocative and has the potential for conflict between supporters”, said Naipospos.

Earlier, actor and comedian Butet Kartaredjasa claimed to have been prohibited by police from using political elements in a theater performance titled “Musuh Bebuyutan” (The Hating Game) at the Taman Ismail Marzuki arts and cultural centre in Jakarta on Friday December 1.

The 41<sup>st</sup> annual stage performance is being held by the Our Indonesian Cultural Forum. The theme being taken up is a political contest between two parties that used to be on friendly terms.

Kartaredjasa claims he was ordered to sign a written statement that political elements would not be discussed in the stage performance.

“So this administrative requirement prior to this hasn’t existed since reformasi in 1998. This, in the New Order era it was like that”, Kartaredjasa told CNN Indonesia on Tuesday December 5.

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**CNN Indonesia**

**Translated by James Balowski**

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