

Indonesia: Suharto's real legacy

Tuesday 12 February 2008, by [PRD](#) (Date first published: 7 February 2008).

This statement was issued by the People's Democratic Party (PRD) after the January 27 death of former Indonesian dictator Suharto. The PRD played a significant role in the mass pro-democracy movement that overthrew Suharto in 1998.

The media widely broadcast positive coverage of Suharto during his illness, making key leaders of the New Order regime seem good and innocent of their crimes. The elites took advantage of this situation and expressed appreciation of the services rendered to the nation by Suharto.

Amien Rais is one of the first elite figures who called for the people's forgiveness and demanded an end to the Suharto legal case (a \$1.6 billion civil corruption case). President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono even sent his attorney-general to the Suharto family to discuss a win-win solution to the case. (Then later denied giving the instruction.)

The government declared national mourning and for the Indonesian flag to be lowered for a week after Suharto's death. Suharto's Golkar Party proposed making the dictator a national hero.

In 1966, Suharto's new order came to power by destroying the Indonesian revolution, which at that time was in the process of building national sovereignty after winning independence from Dutch colonialism in 1945. A bloodbath — claiming more than 3 million progressive souls — delivered Suharto to power.

Since then, he and his New Order government eliminated all progressive potential and depoliticised Indonesia.

The first law enacted by his government handed over the Papua goldmines, Kalimantan forest and Sulawesi nickel to multinational corporations, proving that the Indonesian people were not his major concern.

There are several facts that need to be taken into account in the case of Suharto. Firstly, it is not the case of just an individual but of the crimes of corruption and human rights violations committed by the New Order regime. Therefore, an investigation must not just be conducted into Suharto, but also into his New Order cronies.

During his rule, Suharto misused national assets to build an empire of wealth for his family and cronies. The government should create an institution to investigate and seize all the assets of Suharto's family and cronies. As they are state assets, there is no reason to end this process with Suharto's death.

The New Order deliberately abused human rights. Democratic space was closed and there were only three legal political parties, with a mechanism to ensure Golkar won elections. The New Order created the dual function of the military: defence and a social function, which meant the military was authorised to control the people's daily lives.

Histories were rewritten to support the New Order regime.

Unlike the Sukarno government, which built the nation based on voluntary unity, Suharto forced unity militarily — with repression in East Timor, martial law in Aceh.

“Humanitarianism” is not an excuse for the government to avoid dealing with New Order human rights violations. Massacres in 1965, mysterious deaths in the mid-’80s, martial law in Aceh, repression in Papua, the invasion of East Timor, the Tanjung Priuk case, the kidnapping of activists in the ’90s, the July 27, 1996 tragedy, racial hatred and discrimination, the riot in May 1998 — these should make clear that Suharto does not deserve the title of national hero.

Therefore we demand the following:

- Continue the investigation — bring the case of Suharto and his cronies to trial;
- Immediately seize the wealth of Suharto and his cronies;
- Cut the prices of the people’s basic needs;
- Revoke repressive New Order laws;
- The rewriting of history by the New Order regime must be reversed, and history books revised.

P.S.

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