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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:
DISAPPEARANCES AND SUMMARY EXECUTIONS

Written statement* submitted by Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), a non-governmental
organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated
in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2003]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

A culture of impunity and the 1965–66 massacre in Indonesia

1. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the Government of Indonesia to pretend that a crime against humanity—involving the massacre of between half a million and two million civilians—did not take place under the direction of General Soeharto in 1965–66. Following the uncovering of a mass grave in Wonosobo, Central Java in November 2000, yet another mass grave was uncovered near Blitar, East Java in August 2002. The international community is obliged to respond without further delay.
2. During the fifty-eighth session of the Commission, the Asian Legal Resource Centre raised concern over how failure to bring the persons and agencies responsible for the 1965–66 account has resulted in a culture of impunity in Indonesia (E/CN.4/2002/NGO/73). In its written statement, it notified the Commission about the findings in Wonosobo. Hence the Commission is well aware of this massacre. It is public knowledge.
3. At Blitar, last August 2002, the remains of four summarily executed persons out of at least 41—and possibly several hundred—were uncovered at the bottom of a vertical cave, before threats against the excavators made it impossible to continue. On this occasion, as during the excavation at Wonosobo, not only did the government intervene to prevent the work from going ahead, but also the police and civilian militia groups attempted to destroy the evidence uncovered.
4. Staff of the Asian Legal Resource Centre were on hand to directly verify the exhumation of 28 human skeletons at these two locations in 2000 and 2002. Sadly, since then no action has been taken by the Government of Indonesia to address or investigate this atrocity. In fact, not only has the massacre not been treated as a crime, rather it has been celebrated in monuments erected during the Soeharto regime. The Asian Legal Resource Centre is deeply distressed that the Indonesian parliament, the government, the attorney general and the National Human Rights Commission have all refused to investigate the circumstances surrounding the summary execution of these 28 persons.
5. These victims provide a mere hint of the scale of this massacre. Undisturbed mass graves are dotted all over Indonesia. During the time of the massacre, many more bodies were witnessed floating down rivers on their way to the sea. Other victims died in prison camps. Civilian militia groups were organised, trained and sponsored by the Indonesian military to carry out the killings, as the scale of the massacre required to remove political opposition was too great even for the military alone to accomplish.
6. During 2002, the leader of the movement to open the case of the 1965-66 massacre, Ibu Sulami, died. Ibu Sulami had survived 20 years as a prisoner of conscience at Bukit Duri Prison, Jakarta, after her arrest by the military. Her official crime was 'slander', but in fact she was locked away because she was a leader of the ground-breaking women's rights movement of Indonesia, Gerwani.

Like thousands of other Indonesian political prisoners at the time, she was tortured and denied adequate food. She recalled her interrogation as follows:

"I was beaten for about ten days and they kept on interrogating us during that time. I was asked questions again and again and I did not want to answer... They kept beating me up. They'd wake me up at 1 o'clock in the morning to destabilise me, to put my nerves on edge so that I would answer their questions. Many other women were also treated like that... The interrogations eventually got so ferocious that the women were stripped, and it was absolutely inhuman what was happening to them at that time... The young girls who were arrested at the time were really very badly treated, they were beaten almost to death in the Guntur military police headquarters in Jakarta."

7. Sulami began investigating the massacre in 1994 and eventually formed an organization for this purpose, comprising members of the families of those killed during the massacre. Sulami organized the exhumation of the grave at Wonosobo, only to find that no one in the government would investigate it further. Despite worsening health, she helped make the preparations for the opening of the mass grave at Blitar. She was intent on exposing the truth of the massacre until her dying breath. The international community owes it to the memory of this seminal human rights defender to ensure that the massacre is finally investigated. Sulami's own words best sum up the challenge that faces us

"Indonesia at this moment, all Indonesians, feel that this country is moving towards something new. Something free from the darkness of oppression and exploitation, from the corruption, collusion and nepotism that was born out of absolute power, from the economic and political crisis that grew out of the greed of its leaders. No nation can move into the future with its feet chained to a historical burden, to those dark, traumatic moments that will forever haunt the national character in the future. That burden must be released. This nation must bravely face up to its fears, to the truth that lies behind the trauma. Only then can its character once more grow healthy and strong."

8. What these remarks by Ibu Sulami indicate is the relevance of the events of 1965–66 for present-day Indonesians. To talk of human rights, democracy and social change in a society that has not yet come to terms with the magnitude of this event is an absurdity. This is the mistake of the international community, which seems to hold a misguided belief that Indonesia's 'emerging' democracy should not be upset by digging up the past. Yet it is pure fantasy to think it possible to build a culture of human rights on top of the bodies of those killed in one of single worst incidents of bloodshed in the twentieth century, all the while pretending that it never happened. It is the culture of impunity stemming from the 1965–66 massacre that is the core obstacle to achieving human rights in Indonesia. Every time the Commission hears reports of the failure of the Government of Indonesia to protect and promote the human rights of its citizens, it should recall the horrendous events of 1965–66 that both the international community and government are yet to address. The massacres and communal violence that continue to tear apart Indonesia are not only made possible by the legacy of 1965–66; they are made inevitable by it.

9. To end the cycle of communal violence and impunity ongoing in Indonesia, the Asian Legal Resource Centre demands that the Commission
 - a. Urge the Government of Indonesia towards the holding of proper, well-resourced, independent investigations into the 1965-66 massacre.
 - b. Work expediently and effectively towards establishing an international tribunal to investigate and prosecute this crime against humanity, without delay.
 - c. Take every possible step to protect those human rights defenders in Indonesia seeking the truth about this atrocity, especially through UN urgent action mechanisms.
