

Handover of Truth and Reconciliation Commission Findings and Recommendations to Aceh Parliament, A Milestone for Truth and Justice in Indonesia

31 December 2021 — After convening three public hearings and documenting more than 5000 statements from victims of human rights violations in Aceh, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) handed over its key findings and recommendations to the Aceh parliament, in a ceremony at the Main Building of Aceh parliament, on 29 December 2021. The event would also formalise the selection of 7 commissioners appointed for the period of 2022-2027. A public launch of its final report is scheduled for March 2022.

The findings handed over to the Aceh parliament covers investigations into human rights violations that took place between 1976-2005 in 14 districts. The Aceh TRC has also recommended the names of 245 survivors needing urgent reparations, as formalised in a Decree by the Governor of Aceh this year. The Commission has a mandate to strengthen peace by looking at violations committed by all sides of the conflict, facilitating reconciliation, and making recommendations for comprehensive reparations for victims. During its tenure, the Aceh TRC forged a pathway to provide recognition to victims, promote urgent assistance to vulnerable survivors — prioritising survivors of torture, sexual violence and those disabled due to the conflict.

The establishment of the Aceh TRC was fraught with challenges. The Helsinki peace accord (2005), signed in the wake of the tsunami, contained the promise for a truth commission, as part of Indonesia's national truth and reconciliation process. When the Constitutional Court struck down Indonesia's truth commission law, the Aceh truth commission was left in legal limbo. As survivors and civil society in Aceh continued to push for their right to truth, the Commission was established by a local law (called *Qanun*, an Arabic word for 'canon' or law) passed by the Aceh parliament in 2013.

The commission worked with limited powers and was not able to compel testimonies or evidence from persons or organizations outside of Aceh. This localised truth-seeking process had to deal with budget constraints, overcome political apathy, COVID-19 restrictions, and work closely with civil society groups.

Afridal Darmi, Chair of the Aceh TRC stated in his address to parliament: "In the past five years, the Aceh TRC has weathered many dynamics in our journey — from the ebb and flow of support, accusations of opening old wounds, bearing the brunt of the criticism, cynicism, complaints, considered too slow in carrying its mandate, and faced many other criticisms from other parties. If taken together it can be summarized in one word, "hope" that the Aceh TRC can function well, and be optimal in carrying out its duties and mandate... We are reminded that the inner spirit of the Aceh TRC is a truth commission that has put victims and their healing at the centre (of our work)."

Galuh Wandita, Director of AJAR stated: "We welcome this important milestone in the pursuit of peace, truth, and justice in Aceh. The Aceh TRC is an important model for truth-seeking, across Indonesia and for other conflict areas in the world." AJAR also congratulates the appointment of the new commissioners, tasked to continue the work to uncover the truth, and ensure that the findings and recommendations are disseminated and implemented without further delays. The continuing legacy of the Aceh TRC is a key example for the Asia-Pacific region on how to deal with the past, by listening to survivors, working towards a more accountable society, free from impunity.

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