

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on the right to education

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

12 January 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence; Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and Special Rapporteur on the right to education, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 54/8, 55/5, 54/14 and 53/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **various initiatives which undermine efforts to achieve justice, truth and reparation for victims of gross human rights violations and contribute to perpetuate impunity.**

The alleged inadequacy of some measures adopted by the relevant authorities in Indonesia to ensure truth, justice, reparation, memory and guarantees of non-recurrence has been the subject of a previous communication sent by mandate holders to your Excellency's Government ([IDN 8/2023](#)). We are grateful for the response by your Excellency's Government received on 8 March 2024.

According to the information received:

In recent months, denialist and revisionist statements by State officials, alongside initiatives aimed at glorifying President Soeharto's rule, a period marked by gross and widespread human rights violations, including unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence and enforced disappearances, have intensified.

On 14 December 2024, the Minister of Culture announced the Government's plan to revise official history books with "new historical findings and scholarly research". According to the Minister, the new history books would seek to adopt a "more positive tone" to "unite" the nation and would be written in "Indonesia-centric perspective for the country's national interest".¹ An official draft document written by an historian team and produced by the Ministry of Culture, dated 16 January 2025, titled 'Conceptual Framework for the Writing of "Indonesian History"', was leaked and reported in the media in May 2025.

The draft outline, whose authenticity was confirmed by the editor of the project in May 2025, reportedly omits several historical incidents of serious human rights violations that occurred during Soeharto's regime. Among others, the draft reportedly did not mention the human rights violations that have occurred

¹ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d7993375/menbudfadlizonpastikanpenulisansejarahri-terbukainklusif>

during the period, even though the Indonesian Government under President Widodo's administration had acknowledged and expressed regret for 12 cases of gross human rights violations in January 2023, following up on a recommendation from the government-commissioned Non-Judicial Settlement Team for Past Gross Human Rights Violations (Tim PPHAM). Reportedly, in the draft, some gross violations, such as the Tanjung Priok shootings in 1984 and the Talangsari tragedy in 1989, were also framed in a misleading way, as the incidents were reported as a "reaction towards political and economic policies", whereas, on the contrary, the National Commission of Human Rights had found preliminary evidence that Indonesian military members had committed human rights violations against civilians, including suspected unlawful deaths, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment. The draft also did not mention the case of enforced disappearances of pro-democracy activists in 1997-1998.

A few months later, on 10 November 2025, President Prabowo Subianto hailed former President Soeharto – his former father-in-law – as "a hero of the struggle for independence" during the annual celebration of the Heroes' Day. The bestowment of "national hero" title to former President Soeharto has been met with profound dismay, especially from victims and their families who suffered from gross human rights violations during the 'New Order' era, which has been widely documented.

In 2003, an ad-hoc team of the National Commission of Human Rights concluded that the preliminary evidence and findings "strongly suggested" that Soeharto, in his official capacity as a President, "was implicated in serious human rights violations, both by commission or by omission". Between 1969-1979, an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 untried political prisoners were exiled to the island of Buru in the Moluccas, where they were placed in an isolated camp and were forced to carry out hard labour. According to the ad-hoc team's findings, these political prisoners were deprived of liberty, enslaved, and subjected to forced labour under inhuman conditions. The harsh conditions, food shortage and inadequate medical care led to widespread hunger and disease. Some allege that more than 300 prisoners died in Buru prison camps, largely due to illness. The findings of the commission showed that the forced relocation, forced labour and other ill-treatments that followed were the outcomes of decrees signed by the Commander of the Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib), a military unit in charge of internal security formed in October 1965 by Soeharto, who became its first commander until 1969. President Soeharto was also reportedly involved in summary execution-style killings between 1982-1985, which were locally known as penembakan misterius or 'Petrus', which Soeharto himself admitted in his autobiography published in 1989.

Soeharto was also a Major General at the time military operations were carried out in the mid-1960s' in reaction to the alleged coup attempt of 1965. Following the alleged coup attempt, an estimated 500,000 to one million people were killed and hundreds of thousands were detained without charge or trial in a string of atrocities that was later known as the 1965-1966 tragedy.

We are deeply concerned that instead of holding perpetrators of gross human rights violations accountable and providing truth, justice and reparations for victims and their families, the aforementioned policy initiatives could further strengthen impunity and distort the historical truths of human rights violations, abuse of power, corruption and suppression of dissent during the Soeharto presidency.

The historical narrative revision appears to seek to produce a singular, State-driven narrative, which risks obscuring past gross human rights violations and reshaping the collective memory of periods marked by state violence. The plan to use the rewritten historical textbooks as teaching materials in schools could also potentially amount to indoctrination, thereby violating children's right to quality education, in violation of article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights and article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Children's right to critical thinking, freedoms of information, opinion and expression, protected by article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights. It is furthermore contrary to the right to access and participate in heritage, which includes historical facts and events, protected inter alia under article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. On the other hand, the decision to name former President Soeharto a national hero can entrench impunity for those responsible of gross human rights violations, while further silencing the voices of victims and their families, in direct contradiction with Indonesia's obligations to ensure justice and accountability.

We would like to recall that the denial of past violations and the deliberate disinformation about past events that gravely affected a society, are contrary to the duty of States to ensure the full disclosure of the truth and the preservation of memory about past violations, as stipulated in numerous international human rights standards. Such remarks inflict suffering on victims and their families, and lead to their re-victimization and deprivation of their right to participate in memorialization processes. In addition, they undermine efforts to prevent the recurrence of past violations, including through education.

In addition, we note with concern that the aforementioned initiatives do not appear to constitute isolated actions but rather sustained measures that undermines existing efforts to memorialize abusive past and provide recognition to victims and their families. Despite the findings of the National Commission of Human Rights' ad-hoc team, there has been little to no accountability for the widespread abuses committed during Soeharto administration. Despite the government's acknowledgment of gross human rights violations in Indonesia between 1965 and 2003, and former President Widodo's assurance that judicial processes would not be ruled out, no further steps have been taken to prosecute those responsible of violations and to ensure victims' access to truth, justice and reparations. Even more so, the idolisation of Soeharto sends a signal that the state has allowed, and will continue to allow, human rights violations to occur with impunity. In this context, we gravely worry that these initiatives could become a pretext to grant impunity to those suspected of criminal responsibility and instead whitewash the country's serious human rights violations that have been shrouded in impunity for decades. Moreover, it could further revictimize victims and jeopardize the memorialization process, which is central to the victims' fight for truth, justice and reparations.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please explain how your Excellency's Government plans to protect the rights to truth, justice, reparation, memory and guarantees of non-recurrence of victims and their families for the gross violations of human rights they have endured, pursuant to the State's obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination Racial Discrimination, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, PR, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights SCR, and other international human rights instruments.
3. Please provide information about the measures taken to ensure that human rights violations committed during the Soeharto rule continue to be acknowledged and that such information is widely disseminated among the population in order to ensure that the collective memory about these violations is preserved, and its recurrence prevented.
4. Please provide information about the initiatives envisaged to revoke the Presidential Decree that bestow the title of national hero to former President Soeharto and ensure that any history-rewriting measures do not inaccurately reflect historical facts about past violations, involve the meaningful participation of victims and their contribution to the historical narrative, while ensuring that the elaboration of history textbooks is left to historians in a context where academic freedom is respected.
5. Please provide information about the steps taken by your Excellency's Government to undertake investigations into the gross human rights violations committed during President Soeharto's ruling, based on the preliminary investigation of the National Human Rights Commission, and ensure that those responsible of gross violations will face criminal accountability and that the victims and their families obtain justice and full reparations.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the

investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Bernard Duhaime

Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

Alexandra Xanthaki

Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Gabriella Citroni

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Farida Shaheed

Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards that are applicable to the issues brought forth by the situation described above.

In this regard, we would like to recall the Updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity. Principle 2 establishes the inalienable right of all persons to know the truth about past events concerning the perpetration of heinous crimes and about the circumstances and reasons that led to them. Full and effective exercise of the right to the truth provides a vital safeguard against the recurrence of violations.

In addition, principle 3 establishes the duty of States to preserve memory about those violations and their responsibility in the transmission of such history. It underscores that "people's knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and, as such, must be ensured by appropriate measures in fulfilment of the State's duty to preserve archives and other evidence concerning violations of human rights [...] and to facilitate knowledge of those violations". Such measures shall aim at "preserving the collective memory from extinction and, in particular, at guarding against the development of revisionist and negationist arguments". Interpretation of past events that have the effect of denying or misrepresenting violations are incompatible with the aforementioned obligations of the States.

We would further like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 33/19 on human rights and transitional justice that notes with concern that attempts to deny or to justify gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law may risk undermining the fight against impunity, reconciliation and efforts to prevent such crimes, (p. 12). It further recognizes that justice processes, memorialization processes, and the preservation of archives and other reliable evidence concerning gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law [...] ensure that such crimes are never forgotten and contribute to the prevention of their recurrence.

According to the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (2005), victims of historical atrocities are entitled to a "full and public disclosure of the truth;" "public apology, including acknowledgement of the facts and acceptance of responsibility;" "commemorations and tributes to the victims," and "inclusion of an accurate account of the violations that occurred ... in educational materials at all levels," among others (principle 22).

In a report [A/HRC/45/45](#), the former Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence stressed that any memorialization should "never serve as a pretext for granting de jure or de facto impunity to the perpetrators of gross violations of human rights or serious violations of international humanitarian law." Memorialization is aimed at preserving, and

transmitting to present and future generations, accurate and comprehensive accounts of past human rights violations and the harm suffered by all victims, with a view to informing society, restoring the dignity of victims, promoting healing and reconciliation and preventing the recurrence of violations. He also stressed that a good use of memory aims to create the conditions for a debate to develop in society on the causes, direct and indirect responsibilities and consequences of past crimes and violence. The Special Rapporteur further noted that memory is a vital tool for enabling societies to emerge from the cycle of hatred and conflict and begin taking definite steps towards building a culture of peace and to help change toxic cultures of political violence. He warned that memory processes cannot, under any circumstances, deny or attempt to diminish the importance of the violations and crimes committed that were established by truth commissions and/or judicial proceedings (paragraphs 107-108). The Special Rapporteur also expressed grave concern ‘about the possible dangerous manipulation of information and memory to the detriment of human rights. At the same time, he stressed that the voices of the victims must occupy a privileged space in the construction of memory, as this will help to counteract denialist and/or revisionist attempts and manipulations by perpetrators of violations and by groups or political interests seeking to revive violence (paragraph 109).

The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights has also dedicated two reports to the issue of historical and memorial narratives in divided societies, relating to (a) history textbooks ([A/68/296](#)) and (b) memorials and museums ([A/HRC/25/49](#)). In both reports, the Special Rapporteur stressed the importance of setting out the conditions to ensure a multiperspective approach in history teaching and memorialization processes. History teaching and memorial practices should foster critical thought, analytic learning and open spaces for debate. In ensuring that sufficient space is available for various narratives and perspectives to be expressed, she recommended that States and other stakeholders should neither engage in nor support policies of denial that prevent the construction of memorials or memorialization processes ([A/HRC/25/49](#), para. 105). The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights warned against the fact that “dominant homogenizing narrative blanches out diversity, ignoring the cultural heritage of everyone outside the group in power, simultaneously depriving the majority of the opportunity to understand the complexity of their country” ([A/68/296](#), para. 31). She furthermore stressed that memorialization should be understood as processes that provide the necessary space for those affected to articulate their diverse narratives in culturally meaningful ways, and, as a contribution to guarantees of non-recurrence, demands that the past inform the present and facilitate the understanding of contemporary issues relating to democracy, human rights and equality ([A/HRC/25/49](#), paras. 101 and 103).

The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, amongst many important and detailed recommendations regarding the reform of the curricula and standards for history teaching, added that the right of children to develop their own historical perspective throughout education is to be considered an integral part of the right to education. Indoctrination on any grounds, including political or religious ideology, should not be tolerated in either public or private schools. History teaching should be based on the understanding of history as an academic discipline. History teaching should aim at fostering critical thought, analytic learning and debate; stressing the complexity of history, it should enable a comparative and multiperspective approach. It should not serve the purpose of strengthening patriotism, fortifying national identity

or shaping the young in line with either the official ideology or the guidelines of the dominant religion. Processes for reforming curricula and formulating history teaching standards must be transparent and include the input of practitioners and professional associations. While diverse communities and groups should be consulted, the elaboration of history textbooks should be left to historians; decision-making by others (especially politicians or thinkers from religious, literary or wider intellectual circles) should be avoided. (A/68/296, paras.87, 88 a, b and g)

In the same vein, we recall and stress that the Special Rapporteur on the right to education has also emphasized that states should prioritize inclusive and quality education to prevent the recurrence of gross human rights violations, including by ensuring that history teaching become “a space for deconstruction, debate and confrontation of opinions” with education being “free of propaganda” ([A/74/243](#)).

We wish to remind your Excellency’s Government that the prohibition of enforced disappearance have attained the status of jus cogens, and that, acts amounting to enforced disappearance or arbitrary deprivation of life, when perpetrated as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian population, would amount to crimes against humanity.

Likewise, articles 12 and 19 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons Against Enforced Disappearance establish that each State shall establish rules under its national law indicating those officials authorized to order deprivation of liberty, establishing the conditions under which such orders may be given, and stipulating penalties for officials who, without legal justification, refuse to provide information on any detention, the victims or family relatives have the right to obtain redress, including adequate compensation , respectively.

Similarly, in its study on standards and public policies for an effective investigation of enforced disappearances,² the Working Group reiterated that the investigations related to enforced disappearance should be carried out until the fate of the disappeared is clarified and that this should be done within a reasonable time (paragraph 61).

We also draw the attention of Your Excellency’s Government to the General Comment of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on “the right to truth in relation to enforced disappearances”, which states that the right to truth also ensures that the State has an obligation to provide protection and assistance to victims, witnesses, and other interested parties. The pursuit of truth often leads perpetrators and others to attempt to prevent its disclosure through threats and even attacks against those involved in the investigation. Therefore, the State has an obligation to ensure effective protection for those affected. Individual and collective reparations may be granted concurrently and they do not exclude each other, given that both their essence and purpose are different. Collective reparations respond to collective harm or harm to society as a whole. Public apology or acceptance of responsibility as well as the construction of monuments or memorials for victims of enforced disappearances are possible forms of collective reparation ([A/HRC/22/45](#), paras. 64 and 66).

2 [A/HRC/45/13/Add.3](#)

We further recall that international human rights law requires States to respect and ensure the non-derogable right to life and to provide an effective remedy where that right is violated, including through prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations into potentially unlawful deprivations of life, and, where responsibility is established, accountability and reparation. The Human Rights Committee has affirmed that families of victims of potentially unlawful killings have the right to know, *inter alia*, the truth relating to the events leading to their relative's killing, the progress of investigations, and, where possible, the identity of those responsible [*Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018), para. 28; see also E/CN.4/2006/91, para. 8*].

We further recall that the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions emphasized in his report on the rights of families of victims of unlawful killings that, under international human rights law, families must be recognized as victims in their own right, and that their rights must be upheld in law and in practice, including the rights to truth, justice and reparations [*A/HRC/59/54, paras. 14-15 and 60; see also para. 65*].

In addition, international law recognizes the profound harm suffered by families when truth and justice are denied. In this regard, the Human Rights Committee has found that the anguish and stress caused to a close relative by an enforced disappearance and the continuing uncertainty as to fate and whereabouts may engage the prohibition of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment with respect to the family member [*Human Rights Committee, Almeida de Quinteros et al. v. Uruguay, communication No. 107/1981, views adopted 21 July 1983, para. 14*]. Similarly, the Special Rapporteur has underscored that the extreme and often lasting pain and trauma suffered by families following an unlawful killing, particularly when compounded by denial of dignity, information, justice, truth and reparation, may amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, reinforcing the need for robust protection and guarantees of non-recurrence [*A/HRC/59/54, paras. 13 and 60*].