

**First-Year Anniversary of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission:  
Truth-Seeking on Human Rights Violations in Aceh to Strengthen Peace**

**24 October 2017**

Today marks the first-year anniversary of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Aceh TRC) following its inauguration by the Governor of Aceh on 24 October 2016. The Aceh TRC's presence is a milestone in rekindling the hope of justice for victims of conflict and human rights violations in Aceh. The Aceh TRC is expected to open spaces for truth and to strengthen peace in Aceh, as well as to contribute to human rights efforts in Indonesia.

The peace agreement between the Government of Indonesia and the Aceh Independence Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* – GAM) in the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of 15 August 2005 mandated a judicial mechanism, in the form of a human rights court, and a non-judicial mechanism, in the form of a TRC, to address human rights violations that occurred during Aceh's conflict period. These mechanisms have been stipulated also in the Aceh Government's Law No. 11/2006. Establishment of the Aceh TRC and the human rights court are obligations of both the Government of Aceh and the Government of Indonesia to address human rights violations and to fulfill victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation.

The principles of the Aceh TRC include:

1. The TRC's truth-seeking process will be designed and implemented in Aceh with an ultimate aim to reveal the truth and realign the history of Aceh;
2. The establishment of the legislative-based commission will operate according to local regulations passed by the Aceh Parliament. This commission will not exercise authority beyond Aceh, and will have no power to coerce people to participate;
3. The commission has a mandate to investigate human rights violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict with sufficient protection of the commission to ensure its independence and nonalignment;
4. The TRC will implement its mandate at the grassroots level; and
5. Community-based reconciliation processes will provide conflict mediation related to past human rights violations at the local level.
6. The TRC is a non-judicial mechanism, as the judicial mechanism refers to Law No. 26/2000 on the establishment of a human rights court.

Civil society has accompanied the process that produced the Qanun (Local Regulation) No. 17/ 2013 to establish the Aceh TRC through to its current implementation. Civil society lauds the commitment of the Aceh TRC commissioners in their efforts to maintain professionalism and effectiveness in their work. After a year, the Aceh TRC has made several achievements.

1. The Aceh TRC has a temporary secretariat office and has recruited 12 secretariat staff. The TRC has also started recruiting for individuals for its working group in order to assist the current seven commissioners in fulfilling each of their mandates.
2. The Aceh TRC has started its socialisation activities in some districts and cities in Aceh, and has been well-received by the society, religious figures and local government.
3. The Aceh TRC has drafted a strategic plan and program, as well as several supporting regulations on the internal mechanism process for its truth-seeking efforts.
4. The Aceh TRC has communicated and coordinated with several state institutions at both national and local (Aceh) levels. It has also established institutional cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission and National Women's Commission of Indonesia to support its work.

Nonetheless, we find that the Aceh TRC still faces external and internal challenges.

1. In a seminar held by the Aceh TRC on 12 October 2017, the Governor of Aceh's opening remarks, delivered by the Governor of Aceh's Expert Staff in Human Resources and Stakeholder Relations, Dr. Abdul Karim, Msi, affirmed that "The Aceh TRC is a commitment of the GAM and the Republic of Indonesia as mandated in the MoU in Helsinki. The government will focus on empowering the Aceh TRC, both in terms of institutional capacity and human resources."

The Governor stressed four important elements in his statement, "First, the commissioners must develop a high quality and professional institution. Second [commissioners must] collect existing data from all places or institutions as a start and basis for future statement-taking efforts. Third, truth-seeking and statement-taking efforts must not be conducted before preparing the institution and its personnel for their tasks. Fourth, all institutions committed to the Aceh TRC must mutually protect and support the TRC in the journey to realise justice for victims and to maintain peace." The government should follow up on its support for operational and infrastructural assistance and, most importantly, facilitate coordination amongst the Aceh TRC, the Government of Aceh and the Aceh Parliament.

2. The Aceh TRC must work hard to convince the wider public, not only in Aceh but also nationally, that the truth-seeking mechanism is an effort to end impunity and respond to the lack of justice experienced by the victims. Hence, the Aceh TRC urgently needs a strategy and simultaneously to mobilise its message and invite participation in order to answer this challenge.
3. The Government of Indonesia must also be able to view the Aceh TRC as an opportunity and as a commitment to implement the mandate in the Helsinki MoU (Peace Accord) between GAM and the Government of Indonesia, and also in the Aceh Government's Law No. 11/2006. This can be accomplished by the Central Government making an official statement of support for the Aceh TRC and legally issuing a Presidential Regulation to strengthen the existence of this institution.

The three points above should be the priority of the Aceh TRC and the Government of Indonesia in the weeks and months to come. Happy first-year anniversary, Aceh TRC! Let us realise victims and survivors' hopes for truth and justice.

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