



The Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission Public Hearing: Providing Space for Victims of Torture to Voice Their Truth and Hope

29 November 2018
Banda Aceh, Indonesia

“I feel relieved,” said the first testifier when asked how he felt at the end of the first day of the public hearing at the Governor’s compound in Banda Aceh. On 28-29 November 2018, the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) held its first formal public hearing for victims of past human rights violations committed during the Aceh conflict period of 1976-2005. Fourteen victims and three expert witnesses testified at this public hearing.

A truth and reconciliation commission is a non-judicial mechanism that aims to seek the truth of past human rights violations, to provide acknowledgement for victims, and to recommend reparations for victims and institutional reform.

The Aceh TRC is mandated by Aceh’s local regulation 17/2013 and the MoU between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in 2005, as an effort to nurture peace. This independent state agency is the first truth and reconciliation commission in Indonesia. To date, the TRC has gathered more than 700 statements from victims of past human rights violations in Aceh.

In his opening remarks, the Aceh TRC’s chairperson, Afridal Darmi, addressed the public hearing testifiers, “May your testimonies serve as a valuable lesson for us all, so that the subsequent generations of this nation will take the lessons of the past with the hope that such dark incidents will not recur. It is the state’s responsibility to provide comprehensive reparations to victims.” In his closing statement, Aceh’s Wali Nanggroe (Guardian of State, or Aceh’s Cultural Leader) Teungku Malik Mahmud Al Haytar stated, “This public hearing is a historic beginning which may bring the fulfillment of the victims’ rights a little closer.”

On this occasion AJAR’s Director, Galuh Wandita, stated, “During these two days we are witnessing stories of pain and complete disregard for human decency in the practice of mass torture that took place in Aceh. For many of these survivors, this is the first time they have spoken out about the unspeakable violence that they had to endure. This public recognition is one step towards healing and reclaiming dignity.”

AJAR calls on the National and Aceh governments to support the Aceh TRC in implementing the following steps:

- a. Establish follow-up recommendations to the national and Aceh governments, particularly in regard to the rights of victims to urgent reparations based on universal standards, on conducting reconciliation as well as on institutional reform;
- b. Fully support the Aceh TRC in implementing its mandate, including further statement-taking and analysis to elucidate the patterns and causes of these human rights violations committed during the conflict in Aceh; and
- c. Request information and documents from military and civil officers as well as state and non-state institutions (on both the national and Aceh levels) related to the human rights violations that were experienced by the testifiers, so that these violations will not recur.

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