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Indonesia

Women cannot win decent work and freedom from violence under the anti-democratic regime in Indonesia:

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- Features -

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Ahead of the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women [1] from 25 November to 10 December, Free Women association [2] held a press conference to announce simultaneous actions in Jakarta, Palu, Samarinda and Manokwari [3] on the opening day of the campaign, 25 November 2025. This year, Free Women adopted the theme "Decent Work and Freedom from Violence Will Not Be Achieved Under an Anti-Democratic Regime."

The Chair of Free Women, Mutiara Ika Pratiwi, opened the press conference by emphasising that this year's commemoration carries particular urgency amid Indonesia's democratic decline.

"On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, observed globally from 25 November to 10 December, Free Women will conduct simultaneous national actions in four cities under the theme 'Decent Work and Freedom from Violence Will Not Be Achieved Under an Anti-Democratic Regime'. This is an effort to strengthen the global commitment of the women's movement to end torture and violence against women," said Mutiara.

She recalled the history of 25 November as the day the Mirabal Sisters were murdered by the dictator Trujillo, as a sign that violence against women has always been a strategy of authoritarian regimes.

Mutiara highlighted that Indonesia's democratic regression has been confirmed by various global indices, including Freedom House, the Global State of Democracy Indices and the Economist Intelligence Unit. [4]

"We are witnessing the persecution of activists, discrimination against minority groups, and ongoing conflict in Papua [5]. This situation runs parallel to the dismissal of trade union activists in various regions as a form of union-busting," she said firmly.

In such conditions, violence against women continues to rise.

"According to combined data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, the National Commission on Violence Against Women and the Federation of Women's Liberation [6], there were 35,533 cases of violence against women throughout 2024, an increase of 2.4 per cent from the previous year. Femicide cases reached 290 in 2024. Yet government attention remains minimal," Mutiara stated.

She also highlighted the state's denial of past violence, including Culture Minister Fadli Zon's statements regarding the mass rapes targeting ethnic Chinese women in May 1998 [7], as well as the stalled investigation into the murder and rape of Marsinah [8], who has now been designated a National Hero.

"The neglect of past violence against women reveals the character of an anti-democratic regime with a vested interest in perpetuating gender inequality," she added.

Sarah, Coordinator of Free Women Jakarta, explained that conditions for young people are becoming increasingly uncertain. Young people are trapped under an authoritarian regime.

"Under this authoritarian and anti-democratic regime, young people live under immense pressure: shrinking employment opportunities, mass layoffs without security, increasingly expensive education, environmental destruction caused by extractive development, and the ongoing criminalisation of thousands of critical young people." [\[9\]](#)

She added:

"We live in vulnerability, uncertainty and crisis. That is why this action is important—to show that women and young people will not remain silent."

From Palu, Stevi, Coordinator of Free Women Palu, highlighted the increase in systematic violence.

"We are seeing a rise in violence against women, sexual violence and femicide in Palu. In Central Sulawesi, there were 2 recorded femicide cases in 2024 and 2 more in 2025. All of this demonstrates the weakness of state protection systems," she said firmly.

Stevi also described the conditions of women workers in nickel industrial zones [\[10\]](#):

"Women workers frequently experience sexual violence, and five victims of sexual violence were even dismissed in October. Pregnant women workers lack safe facilities. The police have yet to show any solidarity with victims."

Angelina Djopari, Coordinator of Free Women Manokwari, described the situation for women in West Papua, which remains far from safe and decent. [\[11\]](#)

"Female honorary government employees [\[12\]](#) in Manokwari are demanding decent wages and their basic rights. Sexual violence in universities and government institutions is very high, including in secondary schools. We are pushing for a Regional Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children, as well as counselling facilities for victims," she explained.

Meanwhile, Risna highlighted the tense situation in West Papua, particularly in conflict areas such as Bintuni.

"Access is very difficult and dangerous. Government funding has run out, and women and children are the most affected victims. To enter conflict areas, strict permission from authorities is required. This is not a safe situation for civilians," she said. [\[13\]](#)

She added that the cement and mining industries continue to receive accommodation from local government:

"Workers are paid below the provincial minimum wage and work in inhumane conditions."

Naya, Coordinator in Samarinda, explained that the 25 November action in Samarinda would take the form of symbolic actions at various public locations.

"We will unfurl our demands at universities and public spaces," she said.

She also emphasised the impact of extractivism in East Kalimantan [\[14\]](#):

"Research shows that water from former mining sites consumed by communities is dangerous. Many fish are contaminated with coal waste. In Balikpapan, six children drowned in mining pits, yet women are blamed as if they failed to look after their children. But the question that should be asked is: why are there such enormous pits without barriers near residential areas?"

Furthermore, opportunities for decent work for women remain minimal.

"Promises of job vacancies lead to the exploitation of women workers with long hours and very low wages. Additionally, criminalisation since August has created an unconducive situation—many comrades remain under city arrest or are political prisoners in Samarinda," Naya explained.

She concluded with aspirations for change:

"We want to live safely, free from all forms of violence, to have decent working environments, freedom to organise, and freedom from the threat of criminalisation."

Closing the press conference, Mutiara Ika reiterated the main message of the action:

"Tomorrow's action is an affirmation that decent work and freedom from violence will not be achieved without democracy. Under this anti-democratic regime, women no longer want to be the pillars propping up crisis—women want systemic change." [\[15\]](#)

She also warned that:

"Environmental destruction, land grabbing and intimidation against women defending their living spaces are worsening. Every anti-democratic regime always uses violence to maintain power." [\[16\]](#)

Mutiara also addressed the international situation, particularly the strengthening of anti-democratic governments in various countries, and the importance of cross-border solidarity. She stressed the need to support the people of Myanmar facing elections under the control of the military junta, as well as the people of Palestine who continue to experience genocide.

"The elections organised by Myanmar's junta are sham elections. And in Palestine, despite ceasefire commitments, genocide continues," said Mutiara.

24 November 2025

Source: [Free Women association](#). Translated for [ESSF](#) by Wendy Lim.

PS:

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[1] The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is observed annually on 25 November. The date was chosen in 1999 by the United Nations General Assembly to honour the Mirabal sisters, three Dominican political activists who were assassinated on that date in 1960 by the Trujillo dictatorship.

[2] On the activities of Free Women, see "Indonesia: Free Women and its activities", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières. Available at: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article42996>

[3] Palu is the capital of Central Sulawesi province; Samarinda is the capital of East Kalimantan province; and Manokwari is the capital of West Papua province.

[4] Indonesia's democratic decline has accelerated under President Prabowo Subianto. See Wendy Lim and Mark Johnson, "Indonesia Left Media Review: Confronting Deepening Authoritarianism", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, November 2025. Available at: <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article76766>

[5] Papua has experienced decades of armed conflict between Indonesian security forces and independence movements. See "Papua: Government not seen as serious about resolving armed conflict in Papua", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, December 2024. Available at: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article73194>

[6] The Federasi Pembebasan Perempuan (FPL) is the Federation of Women's Liberation, an Indonesian feminist organisation.

[7] During the May 1998 riots that preceded the fall of President Suharto, ethnic Chinese communities were targeted with widespread violence, including at least 85 documented cases of sexual violence, with 52 confirmed rapes. A government Joint Fact-Finding Team established by President B.J. Habibie verified these findings. In June 2025, Culture Minister Fadli Zon dismissed these documented atrocities as "rumours" and questioned whether they had ever occurred, prompting widespread condemnation from human rights organisations and survivors' groups.

[8] Marsinah (1969–1993) was a trade union activist at a watch factory in East Java who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered after leading a strike demanding minimum wage compliance. Her body showed signs of rape and brutal torture. The military is widely believed to have been responsible, but no one has ever been brought to justice. In November 2025, she was posthumously designated a National Hero, though her murder case remains officially unsolved.

[9] On the criminalisation of activists, see "Indonesia: Stop State Violence! Revoke Parliamentary Facilities and Allowances! End Repression Against the People! Deliver Justice for Victims!", Indonesian Women's Alliance (API), Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, September 2025. Available at: <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article76104>

[10] Indonesia is the world's largest nickel producer. The rapid expansion of nickel processing facilities, particularly in Sulawesi, has attracted significant investment but has also been associated with poor labour conditions, environmental damage and worker rights violations.

[11] On women's struggles in Papua, see "IWD rally in Jayapura take up theme 'Respect, protect and fulfill women's rights in Papua'", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières. Available at: <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article74453>

[12] *Pegawai honorer* are contract workers employed by the Indonesian government on temporary terms, typically without the benefits, job security or salary levels of permanent civil servants.

[13] See "Manokwari Student Alliance: Oppose Policies That Do Not Side with the Papuan People", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, September 2025. Available at: <https://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article76104>

[14] East Kalimantan is a major coal-producing province and has also been designated as the site of Indonesia's new capital, Nusantara. The region has experienced extensive environmental degradation from mining activities.

[15] See also Indonesian Women's Alliance (API), "Impoverished, Killed, Criminalised! Women Fight Back and Challenge the State!", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, March 2025. Available at: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article74468>

[16] See "Indonesia: Prabowo's golden Indonesia — oligarchy style militarism", Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières, January 2025. Available at:
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article73996>