

# Solidarity

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4 Juli 2020 · 8 menit baca



DOUG MILLS-POOL/GETTY IMAGES/AFP

U.S. President Donald Trump participates in a Fox News Virtual Town Hall with Anchor Bill Hemmer, in the Rose Garden of the White House on March 24, 2020 in Washington, DC. Cases of COVID-19 continue to rise in the United States, with New York's case count doubling every three days according to governor Andrew Cuomo.

Today, the 4th of July, the United States is commemorating its independence. Usually, the day is marked by leisurely celebrations. It is summer and families will go to the beaches. The US national flag adorns swimsuits. Some others will enjoy a barbecue picnic. Loud music and joy, all day long. At night, there will be state-sponsored fireworks displays.

However, this is a gloomy year, at least due to two major incidents. First is that the US has kowtowed to the COVID-19 onslaught. The US is No. 1 globally in COVID-19 deaths. It has not occurred in the country for such a long time that so many lives are lost to a single source of calamity.

Second, the mass Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that have gone on for weeks effectively open a new chapter in US history. BLM is no mere antiracism movement. It is a movement to condemn US police violence toward America's own citizens.

Black American George Floyd died in police custody in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. George was just the latest victim in a long line of similar crimes. What is worse is many police officers involved in race-based crimes often enjoy impunity. They are rarely brought to justice or merely receive light punishments.

From the US, BLM protests have gone global. People in many countries are tearing down centuries of racism. They demand resolutions not only for contemporary cases.



STEPHEN MATUREN/GETTY IMAGES/AFP

Former NBA player Stephen Jackson (R), a friend of George Floyd's, poses for a photograph at a memorial for Floyd on June 3, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The former NBA Player has joined other friends and family of George Floyd in calling for the prosecution of all four officers involved in the killing. Former police officer Derek Chauvin has been charged with second-degree murder and the three other officers who participated in the arrest have been charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder. Floyd's death, the most recent in a series of deaths of black Americans at the hands of police, has set off protests across the country.

Historians write and rewrite history books by debating factual texts or pictures in academic forums. BLM protesters are rewriting history on streets. They not only use yells, pamphlets or banners, but also topple down statues of national leaders deemed racists, including those some perceive as national heroes in the Americas, Europe and Australia.

BLM protests have also transcended ethnic boundaries. More than half of protesters in the US are white. Globally, the largest protests are found in white-majority countries. From Canada near the North Pole to New Zealand close to the South Pole. Mass protests outside the US reveal frustrations on similar cases in many countries. What is the relevance for Indonesia?

In mid-June, protests erupted in several Indonesian cities demanding the release of Papuan political prisoners. Pro-Papua protests always carry a huge risk. Other than the global risk of COVID-19 spread, there are also local risks.

It is not only the amount of space for freedom of speech that has narrowed. The issue of Papua is highly sensitive among political elites. It is understandable that the protests in Indonesia in May were not as large as BLM protests in other parts of the world. Public attention at the time was also drawn by other issues, such as the debates surrounding the Pancasila Ideology Guideline bylaw. The lack of mass BLM or racism protests in Indonesia is not because there is no racism here. It is not because Indonesia is free from excessive violence by the state on civilians. It is not because there is no impunity against perpetrators of state-sponsored violence.



*Also in May, the closure of a McDonald's outlet.*

If there is no mass antiracism protest in Indonesia other than for Papua, it is not because people are afraid of crowds in public places due to COVID-19 fears. Also in May, the closure of a McDonald's outlet

in Sarinah, Central Jakarta, drew an abundance of sympathy. This occurred as the world was concerned about the COVID-19 spread in Indonesia.

Is public attention centered on domestic issues only? Do we not care for global issues? This does not seem to be the case. A huge part of the Indonesian elite goes to college in the US. Our cinemas are dominated by US products – as is our music and lifestyle choices. The huge crowd during the closure of McDonald's Sarinah was just tiny proof of the Americanization of Indonesian culture for more than a century.

Centuries of globalization, currently spearheaded by the US, has left a deep impact on Indonesia. Indonesia was once the focus of prolonged global solidarity due to the unprecedented race-based crimes against Chinese minorities in May 1998.

Thousands of people in various fora protested, made petitions and held meetings to condemn the May 1998 violence. Some of them were in Asia (Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila, Beijing and Taipei). Others were in North America (Washington, DC, Chicago, San Fransisco, Boston, New York, Toronto and Vancouver), Europe (Amsterdam and Helsinki), New Zealand (Auckland) and Australia (Canberra). The governments of friendly countries censured the Indonesian government and our embassy representatives. The United Nations sent its delegates to Indonesia and almost sanctioned us.



GETTY IMAGES/AFP/DREW ANGERER

Traders and financial professionals work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) ahead of the opening bell, May 8, 2019 in New York City. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell about 33 points on Wednesday morning following a 470-point loss in the previous day's trading session. Recent volatility in the markets is driven by trade uncertainties between the United States and China. U.S. President Donald Trump said he is hopeful for a trade deal as a Chinese delegation arrives in Washington later this week for further trade negotiations.

In many empirical aspects, the May 1998 racism in Indonesia was a lot different from the May 2020 racism in the US. However, there are fundamental similarities. In both cases, the state was responsible. Both also drew months of global reactions. Similar to the US case, the May 1998 violence in Indonesia led to the emergence of domestic cross-ethnic solidarity. Despite the long history of racism against Chinese minorities, in 1998, urban, middle-class, non-Chinese people strongly rejected such violence. They condemned the violence in droves.

Most of them ended up helping Chinese minorities during or after May 1998. Not only individually, many of them built networks of organizations to help victims and demand state responsibility. Unfortunately, these fights have yet to rewrite the official history.



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Large-scale race-based crimes in Indonesia began in the year of independence. Tens of thousands of Caucasian people were murdered while another hundreds of thousands were either tortured or ran away. For some of them, Indonesia was a homeland that had just gained freedom recently. The period (1945-1946) was called “Bersiap” (Preparations). However, a majority of the educated class in Indonesia today has never known of this dark chapter in history. They have never heard of the widespread race-based crimes in Java in 1947, when thousands of Chinese were murdered and over 10,000 more were displaced.

Members of various races and ethnicities deemed “not purely Indonesian enough” became the targets of violence in the early years of independence. This assumption leads to a subsequent assumption: that they were not nationalist enough. In the beginning, nations emerged in various parts of the world as a form of new solidarity based on equality that resolves, instead of negates, ethnic, racial or religious differences. However, in many parts of the world, the history of national awakening or independence is often inseparable from racial violence, including in the Americas, Europe, Australia and Indonesia.

The difference is that, in some parts of the world, a new awareness on past large-scale racism has emerged. Common people are spearheading such initiatives on the street. Meanwhile, in other countries, histories of racism are kept shut, denied or even preserved.





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