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[A copy of this letter is sent for notification to: Indonesian Embassy in The Hague, Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Education, Indonesian and Dutch universities and research institutes, Dutch Foreign Affairs Committee, also via press release to Indonesian and Dutch media]

Subject: Questions about the Dutch research project "Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950"

Mr. President Rutte, Madam Bijleveld and Mr. Blok,

October 23, 2019

Again, we ask your attention to the open letter in which we criticized the Dutch research project "Independence, Decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia, 1945-1950". We already sent this letter with objections to the three ministries on November 27, 2017.¹ We received a reply on February 9, 2018 by Mr. A.J. van den Berg, Deputy Director of Asia and Oceania, which is part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²

In his reply, Mr. Van den Berg referred to a Parliament-letter of December 2, 2016, highlighting the paragraph about the court cases, which were initiated by Jeffry Pondaag and the *Komite Utang Kehormatan Belanda* (K.U.K.B., the Dutch Debt of Honor Committee). This reference is a red herring, since we already referred to this paragraph in our open letter of November 2017. Yet, in contrast to the State we argued that the court cases are misused to suggest good-will from the side of the government.

We did not reply the letter from Mr. Van den Berg at the time because his main argument was that not the government but the researchers themselves are responsible for the content of the study. He rejected the allegation that there are conflicts of interests and he did not address any of the thirteen points in the appendix, attached to the open letter. We therefore decided to start a public discussion first. Yet, this turned out to be extremely difficult because until today Dutch mainstream media never reported about the fact that the research project receives criticism. Besides that, we also contacted the project leaders via e-mail, leading to an extensive difficult correspondence that was

¹ See: <https://historibersama.com/questions-about-the-dutch-research-project/>

² See: <https://historibersama.com/dutch-government-replies-open-letter/>

not very productive. For example, we proposed a public debate, which they refused. Our argument was that the research was funded with tax money and that the researchers should publicly respond to our criticism. In the end, with great reluctance, they agreed to a *closed* round table discussion that took place on January 31, 2019, at the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) in Amsterdam. On our initiative this meeting was filmed in order to make it accessible for online viewers.³ Last March, as follow-up of the roundtable discussion, we published an extensive report in which we explained (again) our objections.⁴

Unfortunately, our criticism is consistently dismissed: the researchers continue the study and keep ignoring our objections. And this is the reason that we decided to send you another letter. We are not against research as such, but we are of the opinion that when the State funds research with tax money, important follow-up questions are: who carries out the research and what is the exact research question, what is the theoretical framework that is used? We have not yet received a satisfactory answer to these essential questions, as we explained in the open letter.

Before you continue reading, we should point out that the issue that we ask your attention for is not the same as the so-called "*Indische Kwestie*," (Indies Question/Issue). In our correspondence with Dutch politicians we noticed that many are unaware of the important difference between "Indisch" and Indonesian. The people behind the "*Indische Kwestie*" demand reimbursement of salaries that the Dutch colonial government did not pay during the Japanese occupation. The latter do not regard themselves as Indonesian, but as Dutch-Indies citizens. Their point of view is that the Dutch colonial presence in the archipelago was a given, they do not talk about occupation. In contrast, Jeffry Pondaag and his foundation K.U.K.B. defend Indonesian victims of Dutch colonial violence and as such he is also critical of Dutch-Indies people and descendants of KNIL-soldiers, as long as they do not recognize that their (ancestor's) role sustained Dutch colonial rule during 1945-1949.

In our opinion there is a direct link between the K.U.K.B. court cases and the decision of the Dutch government to finance new research. Our question is: how is it possible to see good-will in the countless rejections of Indonesian legal claims? The good intentions that the Dutch government pretends by funding new research turn out to be feigned, since the Dutch State has appealed the torture case of Yaseman and the rape case of Mrs. Tremini. The Dutch government also refused to apply the compensation arrangement *De Bekendmaking* (The Notice) to children of executed Indonesians. Further, Indonesian evidence is repeatedly being questioned by the government, with support and advice of the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH), which is one of the three institutions that is carrying out the research. The study focuses on brutal violence, but not on the victims. In fact, with the involvement of NIMH, the researchers are taking sides with the State, which at the time was not only the perpetrator of violence, but is currently still opposing justice to victims.

³ Video-registration Part I: <https://www.facebook.com/historibersama/videos/353950282106218/>
Part II: <https://www.facebook.com/historibersama/videos/1549193008517082/>

⁴ See: <https://historibersama.com/report-roundtable-discussion/>

Spokesperson research-project delivers conclusive evidence

Our main point of criticism is that there are conflicting interests. Recently, the spokesperson of the project gave conclusive evidence for our claim. On July 15, the spokesperson confirmed that the research is linked to the Indonesian lawsuits against the Dutch State. It turns out that the supporting role of the NIMH in the rejection of Indonesian claims serves as an important justification for the budget of the research project.

Previously the spokesperson referred to the appendix of a two-year-old government-letter, which then Foreign Affairs Minister Koenders sent to the House of Representatives in February 2017. The appendix clarifies that part of the budget that the NIMH receives is related to "the verification of the so-called Indië claims." On July 15th, the spokesperson wrote: "Yes, indeed this is about the verification research for the K.U.K.B. court cases."

Specifically, the appendix in question contains an explanation of the budget of € 4,1 million and provides convincing evidence that the research is connected to the successful lawsuits that the K.U.K.B. foundation (Jeffry Pondaag) has been filing against the Dutch State since 2008. What this clearly means is that the research represents the interest of the Dutch government and not of the Indonesian victims of the brutal violence that is now being investigated.

In his reply to our open letter, Mr. Van Den Berg (on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) defended the research program by stating that the researchers adhere to the requirements of independent academic standards and that an international scientific advisory committee ensures the academic quality. Up to this point, the three institutes KITLV, NIOD and NIMH (conducting the research) also stated that they are completely independent of the government. The fact that the NIMH falls directly under the Ministry of Defense was always dismissed as irrelevant. The government-letter of Minister Koenders provides compelling evidence that the study is not independent. The spokesperson further explains the reason why the verification of claims is mentioned in the budget:

"As you know, already in 2012, the three institutes submitted a research proposal to the Dutch government, which was rejected then. In the second grant application and budget (of 2016), the institutes showed that they worked hard in the past years and had continued to build up knowledge regarding the years 1945-1949 in several (own) projects. The NIMH also registered its activities for the years 2012-2016, which was: 2.5 FTE = 2.5 research years."

In comparison: the current research program consists of 38 FTEs / research years. This means that the preliminary work of the study was not only used to reject claims, but also that these activities served as important substantiation in determining the research budget.

Recent rejections of Indonesian claims

Once again, the immoral aspect of the conflict of interests is that the study focuses on brutal violence but not on the victims. In what way NIMH-employees assist in preventing justice for the Indonesian victims becomes clear from recent correspondence between the state lawyer (Pels Rijcken) and Mrs. Prof. L. Zegveld and Mrs. A. Vossenbergh from law firm Prakken d'Oliveira.

In one of the letters dated September 16, the State announces that they are questioning the claims of four Indonesian widows based on the lack of evidence. (This relates to the claims of: Mari, Tija, Ida, Sani and Nandong.) Subsequently NIMH is ordered to conduct additional research to verify the historical claims. Only after NIMH will complete the historical verification, the State is going to decide on the request for compensation.

Another case concerns the duel in Amparita on February, 11, 1947 in which the Indonesian man La Miru was executed afterwards. The recent rejection (September 4th) of this case also shows the decisive role of NIMH. On one hand, NIMH confirms that the location and date of the duel correspond with the facts in the literature that they consulted, however, on the other hand they state that the sources do not provide conclusive evidence about the participants in the duel and which person was executed by the Dutch army afterwards. So, the State adopts the conclusions of NIMH and then claims that there is no proof that La Miru was executed after the duel took place. The problem is that NIMH employees only consult Dutch archives. This means that their view (and evidence) is one-sided to begin with, because the proof is primarily based on the documentation of the perpetrator. Obviously, the Dutch at the time did not document all their crimes.

Although the advice of NIMH is decisive (preventing justice for the victims in the legal system) their incomplete and one-sided approach is not a point of discussion. NIMH-employees do not consult Indonesian witnesses, nor do they include Indonesian writings or history books. This is exactly what K.U.K.B. is doing, over the years they compiled a large collection of testimonies recorded on tape. However, the Dutch State consistently questions the verification of Indonesian oral testimonies. The State argues that Indonesian testimonies are unreliable because they are produced through intervention by K.U.K.B. Thus, although the Dutch State does not acknowledge that the research method of NIMH is incomplete and one-sided, they accuse Indonesian victims of unreliability, stating that their proof is incorrect. Further the Dutch government also complains about the language barrier, they say that not all statements have been completely translated in Dutch. Yet, during colonial times it was the Dutch colonial policy not to teach the Dutch language to colonial subjects and the Dutch colonial authorities never registered non-European subjects either. Hence, many Indonesian people born before 1942 do not know exactly when they were born. This means that when there is unclarity regarding birth place and date of Indonesian plaintiffs, this is not a question of reliability, it shows the responsibility of the Dutch colonial system for creating the situation.

In summary, these are the various reasons of the Dutch State in the attempt to disqualify Indonesian evidence. This does not only prove the immoral and double role of NIMH, but it also shows the actual unwillingness of the Dutch State, which uses the research project to feign

responsibility.

On October 1, the Dutch Court in The Hague handed down another judgement regarding the cases of children of executed Indonesians from South Sulawesi. Last June, two of them (Mr. Monji and Mrs. I Talle) traveled all the way to the Netherlands to testify in the Court in The Hague. Now the Court dismissed the argument of the State that the statute of limitations has passed. The Court also recognizes the importance of the work of K.U.K.B., arguing that it is reasonable when Indonesian victims decide to sue the Dutch State after the foundation explained them about their legal rights. The Court also shows understanding and respect for the fact that K.U.K.B. is depending on two volunteers traveling Indonesia, searching for potential claimants, explaining them about their rights within the Dutch legal system. The recent court ruling acknowledges that this is a relatively slow process. The judgement is in stark contrast with the way in which the State dismisses evidence of Indonesian victims.

In general, what is striking from the defense of the Dutch State is that they repeatedly emphasize that not all Dutch acts of war in Indonesia were illegal. They depart from the idea that "where two parties fight, there are two parties to blame." In fact, the State denies that the colonial occupation was not legitimate to begin with. Whereas the UN stated that colonialism is unlawful, a violation of human rights in all cases.

Dutch research disrespects Indonesian involvement

The latter issue came to light when Jeffry Pondaag wanted to know which Indonesian universities and researchers are involved in the Dutch project. As the 4.1 million euros concerns tax money, he demanded insight into the payments. The spokesperson for the research project then referred to the appendix of Minister Koenders' letter.

The particular document does not reveal names, yet it shows that Indonesian researchers earn substantially less than their Dutch colleagues. For example, a Dutch senior researcher earns € 68,000 a year while an Indonesian researcher earns only € 16,500 a year. Previously, the research team announced that they are paying for 4 Indonesian researchers, now the spokesperson says that currently 12 Indonesian researchers are involved, plus the Indonesian project leader Prof. dr. Bambang Purwanto. But how much of the total budget has been transferred to Indonesian universities, still remains unclear. Apart from Universitas Gajah Mada (UGM) it also remains vague which other Indonesian universities are involved. The research team uses the argument that the Indonesian team operates completely independent from the Dutch team, hence it would be up to the Indonesians themselves to answer the questions.

The latter secrecy is explained by NIOD director Van Vree as follows: he says that if "the Indonesian nationalists" would find out the names of the Indonesian historians participating in the Dutch research, their safety would be at stake. This is the problem in reverse. First: who is Van Vree referring to when he talks about "the Indonesian nationalists"? What does it say about Van Vree when he rejects his own responsibility, meanwhile pointing fingers at so-called Indonesian nationalists? As one of the project leaders, it is his responsibility to be open about the Indonesian names and universities that are involved, because the research budget of 4.1 million euros is tax

money. If this was an open and honest research, there would be nothing to hide. In fact, when Van Vree point fingers at the Indonesian nationalists: are Dutch "nationalists" not responsible for creating this problem in the first place?

The so-called "independence" does not correspond with the "close cooperation" that was announced during the kick-off event of the research in 2017. According to the spokesperson, the close cooperation means that the Indonesian final results will be included in an article bundle. That is, of course, not the same as close cooperation. For that you need to have at least regular contact, sit together around the table, consult each other on a regular basis, and the decision about research questions should happen on an equal footing. All this time, the Indonesian involvement has been wrongly presented as being a "close collaboration", not only during the kick-off event, but also in the media.

Initially, the independent team that Bambang Purwanto requested was not even announced at all. His involvement was framed as close collaboration instead. Only after Jeffry Pondaag wanted to know the names of the Indonesians involved, the research team replied: you should ask the Indonesians themselves; they are independent. In this way, "close cooperation" versus "independence" is used by the Dutch researchers whenever it suits them, clearly to avoid answering difficult questions. It is not right that the Dutch researchers refuse to take responsibility by hiding behind the so-called independence of the Indonesians, the Dutch researchers have to be open about the names of the Indonesian researchers and universities that are involved. Once again, this concerns public money, we therefore demand openness. We kindly, but urgently, request you to disclose the names and the universities involved.

Theoretical framework

Another point from the open letter that has still remained unanswered is the question regarding the theoretical framework that the researchers are using. The violence of 1945-1950 is not analyzed against the background of three centuries of colonial occupation of Indonesia, which should be the departing point. We find it problematic that racism is not included as the leading theme in the nine sub-projects. Our fear is that the concepts of independence, decolonization and violence are only explained from the Eurocentric view, and that non-Western approaches and historiography are disqualified. (As proven by the condescending manner in which the Dutch State questions Indonesian evidence in the court cases.) Based on the research outline we do not see any attempt to decolonize Western colonial ideas. Apart from the fact that the Dutch colonial regime was already defeated by the Japanese in 1942, decolonization is only described by the researchers as a military process that was completed in 1949. However, according to us, decolonization is also a mental process that aims to deconstruct centuries of colonial lies that each of us has internalized.

Finally, we would like to know if it is true that Prof. dr. Bambang Purwanto and Prof. dr. Henk Schulte Nordholt were questioned by the Indonesian security service about their role in the Dutch research. We also want clarity about the funding of the Indonesian translation of Rémy Limpach's book. The Indonesian edition states that the NIMH paid for the translation. Is it true that part of the 4.1 million euros research budget has been used to finance the translation? Is the research budget used to pay for Limpach's trip to Indonesia, and for the trip of Ireen Hoogenboom (KITLV), who

accompanied him?

Best wishes,

Jeffry Pondaag and Francisca Pattipilohy
(Initiators of the open letter of November 27, 2017)