

Hassan Wirayuda, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, head of the Indonesian Institute of History reacts to the Dutch research project on 1945-1950 and the apology of Prime Minister Rutte.

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*Forum Sejarah Diplomasi

Compilation of statements from Hassan Wirajuda:

“During the webinar we are going to talk about a very important part of Indonesian history, namely the relationship with The Netherlands. Today we discuss the history between The Netherlands and Indonesia that began 75 years ago.

History is very important element for the development of a national spirit. History is like looking into rear-view mirror that guides us on our journey into the future. Therefore, it is important to know the correct version of history, at least one that is closest to reality.

A revision, a reinterpretation of history by others, in this case by those we once fought against, should be dealt with in a serious, critical and careful way.

That the Netherlands reflects on their own history is their responsibility. The news about the results of the Dutch research published five days ago made headlines in Indonesia. What was striking about the news reports was the Dutch observation that Indonesia had not yet responded to Rutte's apology. We are people who easily forgive, we forgive, but do not forget. So what makes it so difficult to respond to the apologies made by The Netherlands?

Since our government has still not responded to the apologies from the Netherlands after five days, it is speculated that this webinar was set up as a response to the apologies of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. But this is not the case. Because Indonesian historians have closely followed the developments of the research conducted by The Netherlands and are prepared to respond to them. This webinar, being sponsored by *Pusat Studi Kebangsaan Indonesia* (the National Study Center for Indonesia) and *Universitas Prasetiya Mulya* and the *Forum Sejarah Diplomasi* (the Forum for Diplomatic History), is therefore an academic response to the Dutch study.

Based on the limited period and the subjects, it was impossible for the researchers to be truly independent. My explanation for this is as follows.

First, why is this research on 'decolonization' limited to the period of 1945-1950? When talking about 'decolonization', such a limited time period is a denial of 350 years of Dutch colonialism from the moment the VOC arrived in the archipelago in 1602. That is a denial of their moral, political and legal responsibility as a colonial power.

Second, the research's obsession with emphasizing the use of 'extreme violence' by Dutch military. They admit that the [Dutch] Civil Administration (NICA) was not functioning because of the power vacuum. Everything was arranged by the military, including the administration of justice. Extreme violence was accepted by the Dutch government, which led to impunity, ...and the occurrence of extreme violence on a large scale.

This dismisses the old argument that the two Dutch actions of 1947 and 1948 were 'police actions'. They now admit that it was indeed 'military aggression'. The research also states that what happened between 1945 and 1950 in Indonesia was a 'war'... 'War', and not just 'armed conflict.'

Third, the question of the illegality of the war that the Netherlands started against Indonesia. In an interview, after the presentation of the investigation in The Hague last Thursday, a journalist asked: 'was the war between the Netherlands and Indonesia illegal?'

The research team only answered the question with: 'it is irrelevant.' But does the question, about the illegality of the war that the Dutch waged, not matter? Or is the focus of the research deliberately limited to avoid that issue? It should come as no surprise given that the investigation was done in the country of the aggressor and Indonesia is the country that used self-defense.

Whatever particular reason, a military attack is illegal and 'self-defense' is therefore allowed. The Netherlands and other UN member states founded in 1945, ratified the UN charter which states that war and the use of force are prohibited, except in the case of self-defense.

Looking at the case of legitimacy, who gave the Netherlands the right to reoccupy a former colony? Was it the case that when Japan surrendered to the Allies that the Allies gave the Netherlands the right to forcefully re-occupy Indonesia? On the other hand, the UN charter stated that colonized countries had the right to self-determination.

Based on that the Indonesian leaders have called out the proclamation of the independent republic of Indonesia. One's own territory, people and government.

Fourth, we can appreciate certain aspects of the research results. First, it has been admitted that Dutch military have used systematic extreme violence. That it occurred on a large scale and that it was allowed by the Dutch government, politicians and the people. But why is systematic torture, murder, the artillery shelling of villages and impunity not qualified as grave violations of human rights?

There are many aspects of this research that we need to be critical of. We can talk about that later.

Finally, the issue of the Dutch apologies to Indonesia. The Netherlands has already apologized three times to Indonesia. The first time was in 2005 when Ben Bot, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed his regret. He stated that the Netherlands: "for moral and political reasons we recognize Indonesia's independence as of the 17th of August 1945." He expressed regret for the large number of casualties on the Indonesian side.

But what was not said at the time was that it was not a legal statement. It was only for moral and political reasons, not for legal reasons. Why was that?

If the Netherlands were to legally recognize Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945, that would mean that the Netherlands is legally responsible for everything that happened after that date. The second apology came from King Willem Alexander on March 10, 2020, for which there was no immediate reason. The third time was the apologies by Prime Minister Rutte last week, especially for 'extreme violence' committed by Dutch military.

In the end, all these apologies are partial in nature. Incremental. They did not include all the misery that took place during the Dutch occupation of Indonesia within 350 years. The issue of reparations has never been on the agenda of the Indonesian government since 1960. Indonesia is the only country that was occupied and did not demand reparations, in fact the opposite happened, whereby the compensation payments were made to the occupier. Based on the The Hague agreement, agreed during the Round Table Conference (RTC) Indonesia had to pay a compensation of 4.3 billion guilders to the Netherlands. Part of that concerns the costs of the Dutch military operation against Indonesia, including the 'extreme violence' that the Dutch government had approved.

Why didn't the research team address this in their research on decolonization? For a nation that is very legalistic, the inquiry should have found out whether these payments are legal or illegal.

Sukarno reversed the decision of the Round Table Conference in August 1950. The consequence of this from a legal point of view is that the agreements made about the repayments are invalid. If we calculate the payments of the debts, it seems we incurred a very big loss. We paid 4.3 billion guilders to the Netherlands.

Conversely, the Netherlands has made very small sums of payments to a small number of victims of Westerling's war crimes in Rawagede and South Sulawesi, only a few thousand dollars.

In summary, I want to say that if the Netherlands wants to take accountability, with regards to the question of how to deal with dear baggage of history, they should make a complete calculation for the 350-year occupation of Indonesia, not just for the five-year period between 1945 and 1950.

The total losses will be enormous if we calculate from 1602. Colonial occupation also includes the conquests, racism and slavery that are part of the colonial ideology...developed

by Hugo Grotius. Just as Germany had to make reparations for the full-scale occupation of the Netherlands. Do not claim that the Netherlands was a benevolent colonial power. If one wants to fully compensate, then apologies and payments cannot be applied to certain parts only. It cannot be partial or incremental. But it must be complete just like what Germany did. Only through this can the strategic cooperation between Indonesia and the Netherlands run smoothly without the constant periods of unrest as is now the case.”