

INDONESIA: RETURN TO BANDUNG SPIRIT?

By Darwis Khudori*

The rise of Joko Widodo as an incarnation of people's sovereignty, his adoption of Soekarno's concept of TRISAKTI (political sovereignty, economic self-reliance, cultural self-assertion), his strong statements against global injustice and for solidarity towards the victims of global injustice, do they mean the return of Indonesia to Bandung Spirit?

This year 2015, the Bandung Asian-African Conference celebrates its 60th anniversary. Activities of commemoration are organised along the year 2014-2015 in some places of the world, either by governments, academic institutions or civil society organisations. In Indonesia, the cradle of the Bandung Conference, the Indonesian government organised in April 2015 a Commemorative Asian-African Conference gathering 91 States of Africa and Asia, 21 heads of State or of government, 15 observers, 10 international organisations. It is the biggest gathering of States after the UN. The two heads of State and government of the economically most powerful nations of the world were there: the Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, beside the Indonesian President Joko Widodo. The commemorative conference produced three documents: the Bandung Message 2015, the Declaration on Reinvigorating the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership and the Declaration on Palestine.

Outside the official documents, Indonesian President Joko Widodo pronounced strong statements on diverse world issues.

On global injustice in the sharing of world resources:

The world that we inherited today is still fraught with global injustice, inequality and violence. Our common dream of a new world civilization based on social justice, equality, harmony, and prosperity, has yet to become a reality. Global injustice and inequality are clearly on display before us.

When the rich nations, which comprise a mere 20 percent of the world's population, consume 70 percent of the world resources, then global injustice becomes real. When hundreds of people in the northern hemisphere enjoy the lives of super rich, while more than 1.2 billion people in the southern hemisphere struggle with less than 2 dollars per day, then global injustice becomes more visible before eyes. When a group of rich countries think that they could change the world by the use of force, the global inequality clearly brings about misery, of which the United Nations looks helpless.

On the unilateral force practiced by militarily powerful countries:

The use of unilateral force without a clear UN mandate, as we have witnessed, has undermined the existence of our common world body. Therefore, we, the nations of Asia and Africa, demands the UN reform, so that it could function better, as a world body that puts justice for all of us before anything else.

On the obsolete international financial structure:

We also feel the global injustice when a group of established nations are reluctant to recognize that the world has changed. The view that the world economic problems can only be solved by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank, is an outdated view.

I am of the view that the management of the global economy cannot be left only to the three international financial institutions. We must build a new global economic order, that is open to new emerging economic powers.

We push for a reform of the global financial architecture, to eliminate the domination of one group of countries over other countries.

On global leadership and the role of Indonesia:

The world needs a collective global leadership which is exercised in a just and responsible manner. Indonesia as a new emerging economic force, as a country with the largest moslem population on earth, and as the third largest democracy, stands ready to play a global role as a positive to fulfill noble goal.

On the translation of Bandung Spirit into practice:

We can do all that by bringing the Bandung Spirit down to earth, by contextualizing the three core objectives that our predecessors had fought for sixty years ago.

First, prosperity. We must cooperate closely to eradicate poverty, improve education and health services, promote science and technology, and provide jobs for ours people.

Second, solidarity. We must grow together, by increasing and expanding trade and investment between us. We must develop inter-regional economic cooperation between Asia and Africa, by helping each other in strengthening connectivity among us, by building infrastructures that connect our ports, our airports, and our roads. Indonesia will strive to be a maritime bridge that connects the two continents.

Third, internal and external stability, and respect for human rights. We have to ask ourselves, what is wrong with us that many of our countries are plagued by internal and external conflicts that derail our economy.

On Palestine:

For me, the global injustice feels more suffocating, when the Bandung Spirit, that demanded freedom for all nations of Asia and Africa, still left one outstanding debt for six decades. We, and the world, still owe it the Palestinians.

The world is helpless before the suffering of the Palestinians, who live in fear and injustice, due to years of occupation.

We cannot turn away from the misery of the Palestinians. We have to continue to fight with them, to support the birth of a free Palestine.

It is the first time since the overthrow of President Soekarno in 1965 that an Indonesian president declared so clearly his attitudes expressing at the same time criticisms towards a group of States and institutions dominating the world, and solidarities regarding peoples and nations suffering from global injustice. Does it mean that Indonesia, under the presidency of Joko Widodo, is in return to the Bandung Spirit? But what is Bandung Spirit?

The 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference was a turning point in world history. For the first time representatives of the former colonised nations united forces and proposed alternatives to the world order dominated by the superpowers. It was the birthday of the so-called Third World, a term indicating their willingness to take up position outside the two blocks of superpowers. The conference triggered solidarity movements among the peoples, countries, states and nations of Africa and Asia. It made possible the representation of African and Asian countries in the UN, and the recognition of the voice of colonised peoples in the world order. It accelerated the complete re-conquest of independence of Africa and Asia. It led to the Non-Aligned Movement between the two blocks of superpowers. It contributed enormously to the prevention of a possible third world war and to the evolution of humanity,

towards a more just and peaceful world. It gave birth to an idiom: Bandung Spirit, which can be summarised as a call 1) for a peaceful coexistence between nations, 2) for the liberation of the world from the hegemony of any superpower, from colonialism, from imperialism, from any kind of domination of one country by another, 3) for the equality of races and nations, 4) for building solidarity towards the poor, the colonised, the exploited, the weak and those being weakened by the world order of the day, and 5) for their development.

Following the Bandung Conference, the participating countries led their respective national development and at the same time struggled for securing their independence and sovereignty between the two blocs of superpowers. It was the period when Soekarno spoke at the UN “TO BUILD THE WORLD ANEW” and put forward the concept of NEFO (New Emerging Forces) and TRISAKTI (political, economic and cultural sovereignties) as the antithesis of OLDEFO (Old Established Forces),... He proposed concrete actions through CONEFO (Conference of the New Emerging Forces) and GANEFO (Games of the New Emerging Forces). However, the period of development generated by the Bandung Conference started to end tragically sometime between 1965-1970 by the overthrow or assassination of the leaders inspired by the Bandung Spirit (Patrice Lumumba, Soekarno, Modibo Keita, Kwame Nkrumah, Ben Barka, Che Guevara, Amilcar Cabral...), the abortion of their development projects, the entry of their country into the Western Block circle. This historical period (1955-1970) was called later the Bandung Era.

Now, 60 years after the Bandung Conference, colonisation has officially disappeared, the Cold War has ended, and the Non-Aligned Movement has almost lost its *raison d'être*. Yet, similar systems of domination by the powerful in the world order persists, wars continue to threaten humanity, mass hunger, diseases and poverty still characterise many parts of the world, and injustice has appeared in more sophisticated forms and larger dimensions.

Meanwhile, a paradoxical phenomenon occurred. On one hand, 25 years after the end of the Cold War, the most serious economic crisis in world history hits the heart of the OLDEFO — the “First World” of the Bandung Era, the “North”, the “Centre” of world capitalism and imperialism. On the other hand, some countries of NEFO shows an ascending economic evolution. Academics, analysts, activists, media speak about the rise of the “South”, the “Periphery”, the “EMERGING” economies, exemplified by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, known as BRICS, but also Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey... which have entered into the circle of the G20: the club of the 20 largest economies in the world.

The word “EMERGING” is striking since it was put forward by Soekarno in the 60s in the historical context of Bandung Era. Is it a coincidence or a continuity of the Bandung movement? What are the challenges the “emerging” countries have to face in the present

world order? Are the antagonisms “OLDEFO-NEFO”, “centre-periphery”, “North-South”, “capitalism-socialism”, “capital interest-people’s interest” still relevant? Do the present “emerging” countries incarnate ou share the Bandung Spirit? Are they bearer of alternatives to “neo-liberal” globalisation? Or, do they constitute a compromise between NEFO and OLDEFO, between idealism and pragmatism, between research for ideal model and catching-up of Western model? Or, are they so heterogeneous in such that they cannot have a true common ideal? And Indonesia, where is it in this paradox?

Those questions are beyond the subject of this essay. What we can say at minimum and with certainty is that the Indonesian President Joko Widodo is a man of people, was born in a slum neighbourhood, hard worker for his success in life, studies, enterprise, politics, simple in his behaviour, transparent in leading the government... During the presidential election, it was the popular mass who mobilised themselves and collected money for his success as presidential candidate. Fifty years after the end of the Bandung Era in Indonesia, he is the first president who does not belong to the political elite. It is the end of Indonesian oligarchy and the beginning of a new era. Now he is at the head of a vast country of 17500 islands, of a maritime territory of 5000 on 2000 kilometers, of 250 millions inhabitants, of 400 ethnic groups, of 5 world religions and hundreds of indigenous beliefs, and of 15th world economy. His first priority is to build and secure POLITICAL, ECONOMIC and CULTURAL SOUVERIGNITY as was conceptualised by Soekarno under the name of TRISAKTI. And for this purpose, he is aware that his country has to have a solid foundation: PEOPLE’S SOUVEREIGNTY of which he is an incarnation. He was elected eight months ago. It is too early to judge his performance. (Paris, August 28, 2015)

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