

Press Release  
Kassel, June 24, 2022

STATEMENT BY TARING PADI ON DISMANTLING “PEOPLE’S JUSTICE”

“We deeply regret the extent to which the imagery of our work *People’s Justice* has offended so many people. We apologize to all viewers and the team of documenta fifteen, the public in Germany and especially the Jewish community. We have learned from our mistake, and recognize now that our imagery has taken on a specific meaning in the historic context of Germany. Therefore, we removed the banner from our exhibition, together with documenta fifteen.

As a collective of artists who denounce racism in all its forms, we are shocked and saddened by the media furor that has labelled us as anti-semitic. Through this statement, we want to reaffirm our respect for all human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, race, religion, gender or sexuality. We also seek to offer some context to the history and creation of our dismantled artwork.

The 8 x 12 meter banner *People’s Justice* was produced in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2002, by many members of our collective. The banner was born out of our struggles of living under Suharto’s military dictatorship, where violence, exploitation and censorship were a daily reality. Like all of our artwork, the banner attempts to expose the complex power relationships that are at play behind these injustices and the erasure of public memory surrounding the Indonesian genocide in 1965, where more than 500,000 people were murdered.

During the time of the cold war, after the anti-communist war in Korea and during the one in Vietnam, Suharto’s coup d’état and the subsequent installation of his regime has known vast support from all over the world. Various western democracies, among them our former coloniser, favoured—openly or secretly—a military regime rather than a young democratic republic, that had developed close ties to other socialist and communist countries in the region. The CIA and other secret services allegedly supplied weapons and intelligence.

The imagery of *People’s Justice* presents these internal and external powers in a pictorial scene and tries to capture the complex historical circumstances through a visual language that is at once as disturbing as the reality of the violence itself. *People’s Justice* was painted almost twenty years ago now, and expresses our disappointment, frustration and anger as politicized art students who had also lost many of our friends in the street fighting of the 1998 popular uprising that finally led to the stepping down of the dictator.

The imagery that we use is never intended as hatred directed at a particular ethnic or religious group, but as a critique of militarism and state violence. We depicted the

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involvement of the government of the state of Israel in the wrong way—and we apologize. Anti-semitism does not have a place in our hearts and minds.

We came to documenta fifteen in solidarity with the global struggles that are dismantling colonial legacies that gave rise to state-backed authoritarianism and violence. We welcome documenta fifteen’s courage and ruangrupa’s vision to interrogate this legacy and believe that an open and honest dialogue is the best approach to find solutions and act together. Over the past few days, visitors have come to our exhibition space in Hallenbad Ost to view and engage with our artwork. Many of them have made the time to talk to us and convey both their appreciation and their criticism, and we hope that this will continue.”

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