

Firms becoming more hostile in agrarian conflicts: Report

Hans Nicholas Jong

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Companies in land-use conflicts have turned increasingly hostile towards local communities, a year-end report from the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) found.

KPA secretary-general Iwan Nurdin said that 2015 marked the first time companies accounted for the largest number of cases of violence in agrarian conflicts, overtaking the Indonesian Military (TNI) and National Police.

"In the past, there was no such thing as companies committing violence. The most violent institutions [in agrarian conflicts] were

the military and the police. But now, it is companies that commit most violence and murder in their areas," Iwan said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

In 2015, there were 35 cases of companies committing violence, followed by the police with 21 cases, the military with 16 cases, other government institutions with 10 cases, gangs with eight cases and local communities with three cases.

In 2014, police were responsible for most violent cases in agrarian conflicts with 34 cases, followed by local communities with 19, companies with 12, gangs with six and the military with five cases.

"So 2015 was the first time companies became the main violent actor in agrarian conflicts," Iwan said.

In 2015, the KPA recorded 252 agrarian conflicts concerning 400,430 hectares of land and involving 108,714 households, down from 472 conflicts in 2014.

The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) confirmed the trend.

"The trend [of companies becoming more hostile] has actually been ongoing for the past few years," Komnas HAM commissioner Dianto Bachriadi said on Tuesday.

Dianto said companies usually hired civilian security forces (Pamswakarsa), first established by the

TNI in 1998 to secure the General Session of the People's Consultative Assembly.

"After the New Order regime, there has been a shift. The police and thugs are being hired to suppress people's demands and resistance. This is wrong, their duty is to find the root cause of the problems [in agrarian conflicts], not to suppress it," said Dianto.

He added that companies were becoming more hostile after hiring members of Pamswakarsa, as they expanded their businesses.

Dianto also said that KPA's findings matched with those of Komnas HAM.

"The violators of human rights

that are most reported to us by the public are companies. In 2015, we received more than 6,000 reports and 25 percent of them were related to agrarian conflicts," he said. "And these conflicts mostly involved companies."

In the past, Pamswakarsa had been reported to commit human rights violations, with some of members of the group convicted for murdering local residents.

One of the most prominent cases was the Sungai Sodong incident in Mesuji district, Ogan Komering Ilir, in 2011, where Pamswakarsa members hired by PT Sumber Wangi Alam (SWA) committed sadistic murders.

In 2012, five Pamswakarsa members were sentenced to between eight and 10 years in prison for murdering Syaktu Macan and Indra Sya-fei, who came to the plantation of PT SWA to claim land ownership in early 2011.

Indra tried to block the Pamswakarsa members from taking over the land, because the local court had not decided the status of the land yet. The move was responded to with beatings, stabbings and shooting, with Indra's throat being slit. "This is extremely worrying, because it is one more step from becoming a full-blown horizontal conflict. So this trend needs to be arrested," Iwan said.