

Compensate the victims of Rawagedéh

This week a delegation of Dutch Members of Parliament is visiting Indonesia. The biggest opposition group, the Socialist Party (SP), will also participate in this delegation. In our view, while it is of the utmost importance that the Netherlands and Indonesia have good relations with each other, this can only be achieved via the recognition, at the same time, of mistakes made in the past. In this respect the expression of regret by former Foreign Minister Ben Bot, regarding the military actions of 1945-1949, represents an important step forward. But this must not stop at such a declaration. A gesture must be made towards the people who suffered as a result of this war which in the Netherlands was referred to, completely incorrectly, as a series of “policing actions”. Compensation must be offered to the victims of mass murder during this war, and to their descendants. This would principally involve ordinary citizens, including women and children, who were put to death in the course of serious breaches of human rights committed by Dutch soldiers. In the first place we are thinking of the village of Rawagedéh in Java, where in December of 1947 hundreds of people were murdered. Dutch soldiers were responsible for these extra-judicial executions. Given the fact that there is no statute of limitations for war crimes, it is strange that these soldiers have never been prosecuted. The Dutch government has never made any kind of gesture towards these families, neither in writing, nor in face-to-face meetings, nor in any other fashion. So it was completely unexpected when, in December 2007, the Dutch ambassador, sixty years after the event, was present at the commemoration of this bloodbath. This form of recognition of guilt over the Netherlands’ responsibility for these crimes is, in our opinion, not sufficient. The Dutch government must be prepared to express its official regret to the descendants of the victims of Rawagedéh and to pay them compensation throughout the rest of their lives. My party proposed this in parliament last winter. Unfortunately our resolution did not win the support of a majority. We therefore welcome the fact that recently some of the survivors have announced that they will bring a legal action before the Dutch courts. We hope that compensation for the victims of Rawagedéh can provide the beginning for a thoroughgoing reconciliation process with the victims of the colonial war unjustly fought by the Netherlands

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