

58th Asia-Africa Conference: Politicians Have to Fight for Economic Democracy

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Some would say that year 2013 is the year of politics, so, political education needs to be encouraged. One main agenda to be delivered is politician's support to generate political policy that gives room to the development of small and medium enterprises.

"Before 2014, many politicians will make use of the year to gain votes. People have to be able to elect which politicians will really fight for economic democracy for SMEs," said Dr. Hempri Suyatna, lecturer in Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, in an international seminar to commemorate the 58th Asia-Africa Conference with the theme *Economic Democracy in Asia, Opportunities and Challenges*, on Thursday (25/4).

After dozens of years of independence, Hempri said Indonesia was still facing poverty issues. Poverty needs to be handled with the right political policy.

Unfortunately, policy programmes and policy makers are often unable to empower people with economic policy.

"In the past there were government claims saying to alleviate poverty, but in real fact, this did not happen. For example, during Soekarno's term, there was the term called *Alibaba*, those who were allowed opportunities would instead sell permit to Chinese and Indian businessmen, or in the New Order the spirit of development had also failed," Hempri said at UGM.

After reform, there was decentralisation programme that created populist policy in regions. But the policy was only image building and it did not open ways for prosperity for the wider public.



Hempy reminded that it's time to boost SMEs sector if we are to establish a welfare state. Politicians who will compete in 2014 and be elected have to take side with democratic economy. "Economic policy is no longer used for the interest of the elite group, those in power or those with assets. It's time to stop economy that sides with capitalists," he said.

Dr Revrison Baswir, MBA, Head of Centre for Democratic Economy of Universitas Gadjah Mada, said that Indonesia needs economic democracy in the future. This would require the state to reinforce cooperatives, reforming state enterprises to be able to give prosperity to people.

"Neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism are still strong and become a barrier for democratic economy implementation. We need to make the agenda of people opposing neo-liberalism and imperialism," said Revrison.

Pablo Solon, Director of Focus on Global South Thailand, former Bolivian Ambassador to the UN, said with the world's economic crisis, Indonesia still attracts the world market.

"What happened in Greece is due to speculations in the market, which should have been abandoned. We need economic democracy," he said.

Henry Saragih, coordinator of La Via Campesina, world farmers organisation, chairman of SPI, expected the state to pay attention to farmers. It happened in Thailand, India, South Korea or Japan, agricultural lands have decreased in terms of size. Many countries now depend on the free market to meet domestic food commodities. Japan can only supply for one meal daily while the other two portions have to be fulfilled from imports.

"Different from Indonesia which is facing conversion of agricultural lands into residential areas, mining, etc, in other countries, agricultural lands are converted into areas for high-tech factories that create industrial machines," Henry said.

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