
SUKARNO'S PROCLAMATION OF INDONESIAN INDEPENDENCE

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Many readers of Indonesian history have been surprised at how Spartan was the statement with which Sukarno declared Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945. I am as guilty as anyone for having given such short shrift in previous writing to the full speech and limiting its reproduction to only the final proclamation declaration, issuing from both Hatta and Sukarno, following Sukarno's actually quite significant preamble.

When I was in Indonesia in October 1948 I had been aware of the brevity and reticence of Sukarno's reported statement, and in a discussion with Haji Agus Salim, the foreign minister of the Republic, on October 17, 1948, had asked about this curious circumstance. It was hard for me to accept that Sukarno would pass up an opportunity for a bit of eloquence. Haji Salim had then dispatched one of his assistants to a particular file to fetch a document which gave the full text of Sukarno's statement on August 17, 1945. That statement I incorporated with papers that I planned to bring back with me to the United States.

Unfortunately when the Dutch attacked Yogyakarta on December 19, 1948, the Dutch military police seized my papers and held them temporarily when they arrested me and sent me back to Jakarta (Batavia). My friend, Mohd. Yunus, who lived directly across Jalan Terban Taman from the house where I was staying, was kind enough to volunteer to look after my possessions after I was arrested. (He was serving as Indian consul and had been sent to Yogyakarta as a gesture of Indian support of the Republic by Jawarhalal Nehru, whom he had previously served as private secretary.) He did his best, but when I was able to return to Yogyakarta about three weeks later to claim my sequestered possessions he told me that he had seen the military police pawing through my substantial collection of documents. Consequently, when I recovered them I found they were no longer in the order I had left them, and I was unable to put them in order before I sent the lot of them back to the United States.

Later, when I was writing a book about the revolution I was handicapped by the disorder in which the Dutch police left my files, and it was because of that that I mislaid the document pertaining to the declaration of independence. I only found it again recently when I was attempting to write further about some of my experiences during the revolution. Even though it is very long since my book was published, in any case I do feel now it is important to bring to the attention of scholars of Indonesia what I had been unable to incorporate in the all too brief account of Sukarno's role in my book. And so here I wish to make available the full text of his statement when he proclaimed Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945, with Hatta standing by his side.

Brothers and Sisters All!

I have asked you to be in attendance here in order to witness an event in our history of the utmost importance.

For decades we, the People of Indonesia, have struggled for the freedom of our country—even for hundreds of years!

There have been waves in our actions to win independence which rose, and there have been those that fell, but our spirit still was set in the direction of our ideals.

Also during the Japanese period our efforts to achieve national independence never ceased. In this Japanese period it merely appeared that we leant upon them. But fundamentally, we still continued to build up our own powers, we still believed in our own strengths.

Now has come the moment when truly we take the fate of our actions and the fate of our country into our own hands. Only a nation bold enough to take its fate into its own hands will be able to stand in strength.

Therefore last night we had deliberations with prominent Indonesians from all over Indonesia. That deliberative gathering was unanimously of the opinion that NOW has come the time to declare our independence.

Brothers and Sisters:

Herewith we declare the solidarity of that determination.

Listen to our proclamation:

PROCLAMATION
WE THE PEOPLE OF INDONESIA HEREBY DECLARE THE INDEPENDENCE OF
INDONESIA. MATTERS WHICH CONCERN THE TRANSFER OF POWER AND
OTHER THINGS WILL BE EXECUTED BY CAREFUL MEANS AND IN THE
SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME.
DJAKARTA, 17 AUGUST 1945
IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE OF INDONESIA
SUKARNO—HATTA

Sukarno then concluded:

So it is, Brothers and Sisters!

We are now already free!

There is not another single tie binding our country and our people!

As from this moment we build our state. A free state, the State of the Republic of Indonesia—evermore and eternally independent. Allah willing, God blesses and makes safe this independence of ours!¹

¹ Address of Insinjur [Engineer] Sukarno in announcing the PROCLAMATION OF INDONESIA'S INDEPENDENCE on 17 August 1945, lodged in the archives of the Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yogyakarta, as of October 1948, when a copy was given to me by Haji Agus Salim, Minister of Foreign Affairs. (Translation into English as it had been earlier rendered by its staff.)

It has been my assumption that the full text of Sukarno's statement—and not just the spare four lines attributed to both him and Hatta—was withheld from the contemporary press either because the Japanese still had that medium firmly under control or else because it was believed by the Indonesians that publication of the rest of the statement would provoke a harsh Japanese reaction, which it almost surely would. The Japanese army and its Kempetei certainly had much less tolerance for any assertive Indonesian nationalism than did the head of Japan's naval presence in the Indies, Admiral Maeda, who on the basis of his other supportive actions, might well have encouraged the forthright tone of Sukarno's full statement.

