

When will the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia End?

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On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared 2019-nCoV to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), due to the significant increase in confirmed new cases in various countries.¹ In Indonesia, the first confirmed *Coronavirus* disease 2019 (COVID-19) case was a female who had had close contact with the 24th confirmed case in Malaysia, with the second case being the mother of the first case.² As time goes by, the number of new cases has increased significantly, reaching 160,165 confirmed cases with 6,944 deaths by August 27, 2020.³ The time when the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia will end is not known. Although some studies are attempting to predict it, such as in articles, journals, newspapers, and other medias.

With the significant numbers of new cases continuing to be announced by the Government of Indonesia daily, which are spread out across 34 provinces and in almost all districts in Indonesia, the current administration needs to take impactful actions. Since the first case of COVID-19 in Indonesia announced in early March 2020, policymakers and some ministers have made various proposals and suggested regulations for fighting against the pandemic. The government policies which have been announced to the public include the formation of a special COVID-19 taskforce; instructions on how to use face masks; physical and social distancing rules; an announcement to encourage research and innovation related to fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic; daily announcements of new national cases and the number of fatalities and recoveries across all districts in Indonesia; social awareness of COVID-19 by experts in online webinars; extensive data collection and processing; and open seminars for the public on subjects related to the

disease.

The government's daily COVID-19 updates have been made by a single spokesperson to maintain consistency and to avoid confusion due to unconfirmed data announcements. For this, the government has officially formed a COVID-19 Countermeasure Taskforce, which is led by the website named *covid19.kemkes.go.id*. The hotline for COVID-19 is 119, extension 9. The announcements on COVID-19 cases are updated daily and include the number of fatalities and the daily new confirmed cases.

World Health Organization suggests a safe physical distance of at least one meter from other surrounding people (physical distancing).⁴ In Indonesia, physical distancing has been implemented, although not very successfully. It is intended to avoid direct contact with infected people and possible virus transmission from those who are asymptomatic (*Orang Tanpa Gejala/OTG*). The policy of physical distancing was followed by social distancing, which banned people from gathering close to schools, or in workplaces wet markets, malls, public transport, and religious and wedding ceremonies, amongst others. Unfortunately, the facts show that a considerable number of people continue to gather in crowds, some of which are occasionally dispersed, by government officials.

Some factors led to the government being late in responding and taking action to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. In handling and creating policies for COVID-19, the government is continuing using an approach and procedure based on natural disasters, meaning that contact tracing, laboratory tests and test capacity, and patient treatment and medical staff protection, which includes their health, physiologi-

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cal and social aspects, are not being properly measured and controlled. Some normative and empirical recommendations which have been made to the government to improve and strengthen its current policies in handling COVID-19 are intended to empower the legal aspects as a normative instrument to integrate and balance all interested parties in devising public policies for handling the current pandemic. Moreover, more theoretical and rational thinking is required, as well as the principal of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, responsibility, full-public participation, properness, and good ethics in formulating and creating appropriate public policies to avoid producing black-box public policy. Constitutionally, the government needs to restructure the role and functions of the institutions in the Ministry of Health so that they can play a bigger role and have a greater impact on handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Not necessarily shifting the role of handling COVID-19 to *Badan Nasional Penggulangan Bencana* (BNPB), the Ministry of Health should allocate the public health budget transparently and sufficiently to prepare, build and improve the related infrastructure, facilities, equipment, and human resources.

Concerning the fatality rate (CFR), if the number is too low or too high, this could mean different things. If it is too high, this could create panic and fear amongst society, while if it is too low, people could ignore and underestimate the dangers of COVID-19, resulting in the spread of the virus becoming even wider as people will ignore the procedures for eliminating its transmission. For these reasons, the daily update announcements on new pandemic cases should be done systematically and diligently, so that people fully understand the complexity of the condition.⁵ It must be ensured that the population obtains accurate information and is protected from misleading sources, false data, and unreliable recommendations.⁶ Displaying data without further explanation can lead to information bias in the community which has the potential to lead to detrimental interpretations and conclusions. Therefore, health information, especially about the size of the community health problems, an explanation needs to be presented with strengths and weaknesses.⁵ The fatality rate in some countries has flattened and is under control, while in Indonesia the number of reported new cases is still increasing, in terms of number and rate.

There is a significant concern for economic wellbeing, especially in fulfilling people's basic needs, such as for food and other necessities, due to job layoffs, the closing of factories, unproductive farms due to farmers being reluctant to go outside, and temporary halting of rice imports from COVID-19-affected countries. This food supply issue could jeopardize the country's Zero Hunger target during the pandemic.⁷

The increased impact of COVID-19 on the political, economic, social, cultural, defense and security aspects, as well as the welfare of the people in Indonesia, so it is necessary to accelerate the handling of COVID-19 in the form of restrictive measures.⁸ There are provisions for this Large-Scale Social Restrictions (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB) that can be obeyed by the Indonesian people because we know that the COVID-19 is a real and irreversible threat.⁹ The action of the PSBB include restricting the activities of certain residents in areas suspected of being infected with COVID-19, including restrictions on the movement of people and/or goods to a certain province or district and city to prevent the spread of COVID-19.⁸ However, the people whose livelihoods are officially informal asks for ways to fulfill their daily needs. It would be nice if the government pays attention to the life of the lower class people who try to meet basic needs and provide guarantees for goods and society that are capable of.⁹ Many PSBB policies are ineffective because of course, the people feel that they have not received legal protection for the policies made by the current government.¹⁰

With the publication of this paper, it will have a contribution of skills and knowledge to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Indonesia. In dealing with COVID-19, civil society must play an active role.¹¹ Following the health information, this is an opportunity to provide more education to the community to remember that 50% of Indonesia's population is connected to the internet and almost all Indonesians can access television.⁵ Thus, this difficult pandemic will not just pass away but also provide a learning effect for all Indonesian people.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia has been seven months, since March 2020. The confirmed cases of COVID-19 still tend to increase, although the number of deaths have continued to decline. Thus, when will this pandemic end in Indonesia?. The government has been launched many policies, health protocols have been enforced, penalties and sanctions have been implemented, but the cases of the COVID-19 continue to rise. It seems that the government must be more serious in fighting against pandemic to reduce the economic and health losses. The Government of Indonesia may learn any countries that succeeded in reducing the mortality and number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, such as New Zealand, Denmark, Cheko, etc. Rapid, science-based assessment of the risks associated with early and decisive government action is essential. Each country should decide on the best path forward. However, we can learn from each other, and the approaches are, in reality, very similar.¹² The implementation of interventions at multiple levels (border control measures, community transmission control measures, and case-based control measures) is effective.

tive.¹³ The swift support from the government and swift handling of the crisis are not the only elements that explain the success of this small kingdom in coping with the pandemic. Indeed, other factors have also contributed to the low rates of confirmed cases and deaths across the country.¹⁴

Many efforts have been made by the government, but many more need to be improved and implemented. Besides, the government has tried to synergize many ministries, including the Ministry of Research and Technology/National Research and Innovation Agency and Ministry of Finance of Indonesia through Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education to encourage research and innovation related to COVID-19 countermeasures to manage the pandemic and solve this disaster as soon as possible. The role of scientists, educators, and researchers is vital in the fight against COVID-19, hopefully allowing us to know when the pandemic will end very soon.

Abbreviations

WHO: World Health Organization; PHEIC: Public Health Emergency of International Concern; COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019; OTG: *Orang Tanpa Gejala* (asymptomatic people); BNPB: *Badan Nasional Penganggulangan Bencana*; CFR: Case Fatality Rate; PSBB: *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (Large-Scale Social Restrictions).

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not Applicable

Competing Interest

Author declares that there are no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have affected the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials

All the articles used for the analyses are seen in the references.

Authors' Contribution

Dewi Susanna conceptualized the idea, collected data, wrote the manuscript and worked out the relevant details.

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