

The story of Munti: Tortured to death in Malaysia

Suparmo, 47 years old, still cannot forget his wife's condition. Her teeth were broken. Her backbone was fractured. She had bruises and stab wounds on her face and body. His wife's name was Munti. She was only 36 years old and was in a coma. "I couldn't believe that she could still be alive with all those severe injuries," Suparmo recalled. "She had been severely tortured by her employers."

Munti, a resident of Probolinggo, East Java, went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, four years ago to work as a migrant domestic worker. But her first employer often beat her, so she moved to a new job. However, she never told her husband about the job change.

Trying to maintain regular contact, Suparmo had sent eight letters with no reply. He did not know that Munti never received the letters as they were confiscated by her employer. When Munti finally found her husband's letters in a drawer, she contacted him. She told Suparmo that her first employer often beat her. "I asked her if I should sue the employer. She forbade me to do so, saying that if I did, she would never get her outstanding salary."

One day, Munti telephoned Suparmo, asking him to send Rp. 2 million for the processing of a new passport. He sent the money to an account named Krishnamurti. She then asked for another Rp. 4 million, but Suparmo did not have any more money. Five days later, he was informed that his wife was in hospital. It was reported that she had been tortured by her second employer. She had been locked in a room, without food, by her employer for two days. She was found and rescued by a domestic worker next door.

Munti passed away on 26 October 2009 after being treated at Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital, hub Klang, Selangor, for six days. Doctors said her death was caused by severe injuries to her body, such as a broken backbone, rib and hand, as a result of heavy blows. Munti was believed to have been tortured for long time, judging by her injuries.

The torture of Munti became headline news in newspapers and on television in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Indonesian ambassador in Malaysia visited her in the hospital. The issue of torture was discussed when President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited his counterpart in Kuala Lumpur, last year. "Pak SBY even visited the hospital and asked the state officials to take care of my wife," Suparmo said.

"Legal or illegal, she is an Indonesia citizen," Suparmo quoted the President as saying. The President said that the Indonesian administration should take care of its citizens, regardless of whether they were documented or undocumented.

Suparmo said that the hospital and the Indonesian officials did not know the hometown of Munti. "It is a miracle that a person who happened to visit the hospital knew my wife. The man then gave them my address. Officers first visited Jombang regency, East Java, but my home was actually in Jombang village in Probolinggo, East Java. Eventually, they found my home," he said.

Suparmo was then taken to see his wife who was in coma at the hospital. One day after his visit, Munti passed away. "I couldn't stand seeing the condition of my wife. Her injuries were inflicted by people who do not believe in God. Many officials expressed their condolences. During a television interview, Manpower Minister Muhaimin Iskandar even said that he would authorize a condolence payment to me of Rp. 25 million.. However, up to now I haven't received anything, ," Suparmo said.

So far, he Suparmo has only received Rp. 14 million from Munti's first employer. Whereas,he did not receive anything from her second employer who had beaten her death. Neither did he receive compensation from Munti's insurance, nor from the recruitment company who deployed her abroad. A local newspaper quoted Malaysian Bernama news agency as stating that a migrant worker organization in Malaysia had collected a total of Rp. 28 million from migrant workers to be donated to Munti's family.

"However, I repeat that up to now, I have received nothing. People took advantage of the death of my wife. It was reported that many people gave money but I never received a single rupiah. I hope that her former employer will pay compensation of 150.000 Malaysian ringgit so that I can raise our children. We are poor people. We have to continue to live our life."

Munti had worked abroad for a total of six years, yet she had only been able to send home a total of Rp. 2 million, as most of her salary was never paid by her employers. The legal process against the employer did not really matter to Suparmo. The important matter for him and his family now is how to continue their life.

One of his children is still in a senior high school. "We need money for the education of my son. The money would also be used for my other children." He also hopes migrant workers' organizations and the government will help him getting the unpaid salary and compensation from Munti's former employers. (*)

