

Report shows police tear gas main cause of Indonesia football tragedy



A riot police officer fires tear gas inside the Kanjuruhan stadium in Malang, East Java province, Indonesia [File: Antara Foto/Ari Bowo Sucipto/Reuters]

Jakarta, November 3 (RHC)-- The excessive and indiscriminate use of tear gas by police was the main cause of a deadly crush at a football stadium in East Java last month that left 135 people dead,

Indonesia's human rights commission has found.

Officials from the commission (Komnas HAM) released findings on Wednesday of their inquiry into the October 1 tragedy at Kanjuruhan stadium in East Java's Malang city after the defeat of the home side Arema FC to Persebaya Surabaya. Komnas HAM Commissioner Beka Ulung Hapsara told a news conference that an estimated 45 tear gas rounds were fired inside the stadium, local media organisation Tempo reported, causing panic and chaos, with people dying in the crush. "There needs to be legal responsibility," Komnas HAM chairperson Ahmad Taufan Damanik said.

The commissioners specified several violations of human rights in what was one of the world's worst stadium disasters, including the excessive use of force by police and violation of children's rights as there were 38 minors among the dead.

The rights body concluded that organisers had favoured commercial interests over safety standards despite warnings from Malang police the match was high risk because of a fierce rivalry between fans of the two participating clubs.

On its list of recommendations, Komnas HAM urged Indonesian President Joko Widodo to form an independent team to audit all stadiums across the country to ensure adherence to FIFA regulations. If no improvements were made in three months, football matches in the country should be suspended, the commissioners said.

The Komnas HAM report echoed similar conclusions made last month by a government fact-finding team, which found multiple factors including the excessive use of tear gas by police, locked gates, spectators that exceeded the stadium's capacity, and failure to properly implement safety procedures.

Indonesian authorities and the Indonesian football association (PSSI) have faced questions and criticism in recent weeks over the use by police of tear gas within the stadium, a crowd control measure banned by world football's governing body FIFA.

Officials concluded in a report published last month that the leading cause behind the incident was the police's use of tear gas in the stadium. The clouds of choking gas triggered chaos, as panicked spectators rushed to exit gates, which several witnesses told Al Jazeera were either locked or blocked by police.

President Widodo said last month that his government will demolish and rebuild the football stadium where the fans and spectators died.

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