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## Disabled voters demand better facilities at runoff

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**Votes for all:** A patient at Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital in Central Jakarta sits near the polling station at the hospital on July 11. A survey carried out by Agenda, a coalition of several civil society organizations and disabled people's organizations in Indonesia, found many disabled people still faced difficulties and received poor treatment from polling station officials. (JP/Jerry Adiguna)

Latifa, 34, went to the polling booth near her home on Jl. Bendungan Jago, Central Jakarta, on July 11 with one thing on her mind; she wanted her vote to count in the gubernatorial election.

But all of her enthusiasm went out the window in an instant, quickly replaced with bitterness as she could not get to choose which one of the staffers of the election committee would assist her at the polling booth. The staff also did not give her the C7 form for disabled people.

Latifa, who is visually impaired, was immediately taken by one of the polling station officials to the polling booth and told to cast her vote quickly.

"It took me some time to read the Braille template to avoid my vote going to the wrong candidate," Latifa, who works as a cell phone voucher vendor, said over the weekend. "But as I was reading the template, the staff told me in a rude manner to be quick and to vote for any candidates since it was just for the sake of formality."

Latifa said that she did not expect to be treated that way because she believed that despite being an ordinary citizen her vote carried the same weight as the President's.

"I know that I'm disabled. But don't treat me like I'm a nuisance just because I can't see," she said.

Latifa is one of many unhappy disabled voters, who are demanding their constitutional rights be respected in the election's second round, slated to be held on Sept. 20.

Advocates for the disabled, such as Agenda, a coalition of several civil society

organizations and disabled people's organizations in Indonesia, are pushing for respect for the electoral rights of persons with disabilities.

Agenda recently released a joint survey conducted at 92 polling stations across Jakarta during the election's first round. The survey showed that many disabled people still faced difficulties and received poor treatment from polling station officials.

Yusdiana, a member of the Indonesian Disabled People Association (PPCI), said that this was due to a lack of knowledge among polling station staff of the rights of disabled voters.

"There were only about 10 percent of Regional Election Organizer Committee (KPPS) officials who really understood about the rights of disabled voters," she said, adding that the survey found that 25 percent of the monitored polling booths did not provide Braille templates for visually impaired voters.

Yusdiana gave an example of KPPS staff who opened election logistics boxes without mentioning that they provided logistics for disabled voters. "Nor did they explain that disabled voters had the right to be assisted by them."

The Jakarta General Election Commission (KPU Jakarta) member Sumarno, meanwhile, said that the commission had trained all polling booths officials prior to the election's first round.

"We have more than 120,000 staff. If there were some staff who didn't treat voters properly, then it was just a matter of human error," he said recently, adding that the commission would reaffirm the training for its staffers once more.

People with wheelchairs also found obstacles such as voting tables that were too high or tables with no space under them.

The Election Committee for the Disabled (PPUA Penca) program manager, Heppy Sebayang, pointed to another jarring problem that happened during the

election's first round. The commission, he said, had scrapped a column in the finalized voters list, containing information on voters' disabilities.

"How can they provide access for disabled voters if they don't even know how many there are."

To address these problems, Agenda has submitted their survey to the Jakarta branch of the Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu Jakarta), to be passed on to the city election commission.

Sumarno, however, said that the commission had not received any report from the committee. "But if there are any suggestions from outside parties, of course we will take their advice," he said last week.

Yusdiana, meanwhile, said that KPU Jakarta could invite organizations working for the disabled to train polling station officials ahead of the scheduled runoff. "We hope that KPU Jakarta will involve us in staff training for the second round," she said. "All we can do at the moment is to wait and see whether there is an improvement during the second-round runoff." (han/riz)



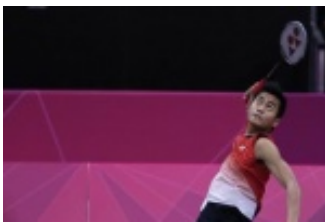
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