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Beranda Migran Celebrate Mary Jane's Release and Demands Justice for All Criminalized Female Migrant Workers

Beranda Migran welcomes the release of Mary Jane Veloso following Philippine President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s confirmation on Friday, September 25, 2026, that Mary Jane had been granted an *absolute pardon*. After more than 16 years in detention across two countries, Mary Jane is finally free.

Her freedom is the result of a long and relentless struggle led by Mary Jane and her family, migrant workers' organizations, women's groups, civil society organizations, religious groups, human rights organizations, lawyers, activists, and international solidarity networks.

For years, people and organizations across different parts of the world have continued to organize campaigns, petitions, street actions, prayer gatherings, political lobbying, legal advocacy, media campaigns, international mobilization, and various forms of public pressure directed at the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines. Even after Mary Jane was transferred from Indonesia to the Philippines in December 2024, the struggle did not stop. In June 2026, Mary Jane's family and supporting organizations once again took to the streets to demand her full release. At the same time, Mary Jane was finally able to provide testimony in the human trafficking case against her recruiter, after the proceedings had been delayed for years.

Mary Jane is free today not simply because the government eventually granted her an *absolute pardon*. She is free because her family, civil society organizations, migrant workers' movements, women's groups, human rights defenders, lawyers, activists, and solidarity networks never stopped demanding her freedom. The decision to grant her an *absolute pardon* must therefore be understood within the context of a struggle that had been ongoing for years. The humanitarian grounds for Mary Jane's freedom were not newly discovered by the government. They had been continuously raised, fought for, and defended by people and movements long before the government took action.

Since Mary Jane was arrested in 2010, her family and civil society organizations have repeatedly emphasized that her case cannot be separated from the vulnerability of women migrant workers to human trafficking, illegal recruitment, deception, and exploitation by criminal networks. In 2015, international pressure contributed to the suspension of her execution, allowing Mary Jane to provide testimony against those suspected of recruiting and entrapping her.

Even after returning to the Philippines in 2024, Mary Jane was not immediately free. She remained in detention, while the struggle for a full pardon continued. In July 2025, her family and civil society organizations submitted a clemency petition to the Philippine government, supported by more than 13,000 signatures.

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Beranda Migran honors Mary Jane's family, who have never stopped demanding justice throughout these years. We also extend our solidarity to migrant workers' networks, women's organizations, human rights groups, religious communities, legal networks, and all organizations and individuals across countries who have continued to keep Mary Jane's case alive in the public sphere and on the political agenda.

This victory is a powerful reminder of what organized, coordinated, and sustained international solidarity can achieve. Mary Jane's case shows what can happen when people and organizations from different backgrounds come together around a shared demand, carry that struggle forward for years, and refuse to let it fade. When people continue to stand together and hold the state accountable, even what once seemed impossible can become a reality.

Mary Jane is free not because the government finally chose to show mercy. Mary Jane is free because the people never stopped demanding her freedom.

This victory must not be the end of the struggle. The Philippine government must ensure that the *absolute pardon* is truly translated into full restoration for Mary Jane and her family. Legal proceedings against those suspected of being involved in human trafficking and her recruitment must also continue, while ensuring Mary Jane's rights and safety as a victim.

Furthermore, Mary Jane's case must be a reminder for the Indonesian Government, the Philippines, and the sending and receiving countries for migrant workers that the protection of migrant workers cannot depend on how much attention the public is giving towards a particular case. Many migrant workers remain facing criminalization, detention, human trafficking, exploitation, and even the death penalty without support and shown solidarity, as in Mary Jane's case.

Mary Jane's release marks an important moment of hope for other women migrant workers facing similar circumstances, including those who remain at risk of the death penalty abroad. This moment should also encourage the Indonesian government to pay greater attention to migrant workers who are facing legal proceedings or the death penalty.

One such case is that of Merry Utami, a former Indonesian migrant worker in Taiwan who worked to support her two children. She became entangled in a drug case after falling victim to a trap set by an organized drug crime syndicate and was subsequently arrested in Indonesia. Merry Utami was sentenced to death in May 2002 and later received clemency through Presidential Decree No. 1/G of 2023, which commuted her sentence to life imprisonment.

Beranda Migran urges the Indonesian government to grant clemency in the form of full release for Merry Utami, after she has spent more than 20 years in prison. This effort is an important step toward strengthening protections for migrant workers who become victims of human trafficking and drug syndicates.

The struggle does not end with Mary Jane's freedom. The next step is to ensure that no migrant worker has to wait for years or even decades to obtain justice.

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Free and protect all migrant workers from human trafficking and criminalization!
Free Merry Utami!
Long live international solidarity!
Long live the unity of the oppressed classes of the world!

Beranda Migran,
September 25, 2026

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Beranda Migran is a civil society organization established in 2022 with a vision of building a strong movement of Indonesian migrant workers, returnee migrant workers, and their family members who actively defend their fundamental rights, build cross-border coordination, and advance solidarity with people's movements in Indonesia.

Through research, advocacy, campaigning, and case assistance, we are committed to supporting the empowerment, organizing, and movement-building of Indonesian migrant workers, returnee migrant workers, and their family members to defend and fight for their fundamental rights.

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