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WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. government should urge the government of Indonesia to protect the embattled Ahmadiyah religious community and to repeal laws prohibiting the Ahmadiyah community from manifesting their faith, said the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today.

Since 2008, a joint ministerial decree prohibited Ahmadis from spreading their faith and promised protection of their communities' worship activities. USCIRF's statement comes as three Indonesian provinces issued decrees that prohibit the Ahmadiyah from publicly manifesting their faith. Provincial governments in West and East Java and South Sulawesi issued their decrees following a mob attack that killed three Ahmadiyah followers in Banten almost one month ago. The Minister for Law and Human Rights and the Minister of Religious Affairs have supported the provincial decrees claiming that they are necessary to maintain public order. The provincial decrees appear to violate Indonesia's constitution, which guarantees religious freedom. President Yudhoyono has not yet called for the decrees to be repealed, though he did call for the protection of Ahmadiyah followers, the arrest of perpetrators of violence, and an investigation into whether police provided sufficient protection for the Ahmadiyah community of Banten.

"The Obama Administration is right to commend Indonesia's tradition of tolerance, but it should condemn the enactment of these discriminatory laws and other recent trends that threaten the country's stability, pluralistic culture, and democratic future," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "The banning of a peaceful religious group in three provincial areas contradicts Indonesia's reputation for religious tolerance. The Indonesian government needs to protect, not ban, the Ahmadis."

USCIRF traveled to Indonesia last year and wrote to President Obama asking him to raise the issues of protection for religious minorities, the existence of anti-Ahmadiyah and blasphemy laws, and the ability of militant groups to use violence with impunity. USCIRF also urged the Administration to emphasize religious freedom in bilateral engagement, given the prominence religious organizations, actors, and political parties play in politics and civil society. That letter can be found at www.uscirf.gov.

"Extremist groups were repudiated at the polls, but continue to seek power by spreading violence and hate," said Mr. Leo. "The Indonesian government should get tough on militant groups that use violence to intimidate religious minorities and swiftly prosecute those who carried out the gruesome killings of Ahmadis in Banten. Indonesia's government should see its blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyah laws as breeding sectarian violence, not social stability. These laws should be repealed if Indonesia is to remain true to its long commitment to religious freedom. As has happened in Pakistan and other places, sectarian violence will continue as long as militant groups expect the government to enforce their version of orthodoxy, instead of religious freedom for all."

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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