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Factsheet



INDONESIA

Indonesia: A New Culture of Intolerance Threatens Religious Minorities



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THE U.S.
COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

According to Indonesia's 2000 census, 86.1% of the country is Muslim, 5.7% Protestant, 3% Roman Catholic, and 1.8% Hindu, but its tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism has come under increasing strain in recent years. Indonesia has experienced serious and occasionally violent disputes over religious identity and religious policy that undermines its reputation for religious moderation and threatens both democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Groups espousing religious intolerance under the banner of Islamic orthodoxy repeatedly have targeted religious minorities for intimidation, discrimination, and societal violence. Provincial police and government officials often tolerate these acts, with the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono coming under increasing criticism for not doing enough to combat the activities of extremist militias, such as the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) and similar organizations.

President Yudhoyono has made public statements about the need to preserve religious tolerance and pluralism as the cornerstones of Indonesian democracy. He, and other members of his Cabinet, repeatedly also have promised to protect religious minorities. Yet, his Administration has contributed to the rising tide of intolerance--through discriminatory legislation, inflammatory rhetoric on the part of some cabinet ministers, failure to enforce court orders requiring the re-opening of closed religious venues, use of a blasphemy law to jail individuals considered "deviant," and the repeated failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of religiously-related violence.

This Factsheet highlights incidents from January 2012 to September 2013 of violence against religious minorities, efforts to close religious venues, and the use of the Indonesian blasphemy law to intimidate and arrest individuals considered religiously "deviant."

Attacks on Christian Churches/Church Leaders and Closure of Churches

Attacks on churches and Christian religious leaders consistently occur across Indonesia. In many instances, they are perpetrated by extremist militias, with little or no state intervention or effort to arrest the perpetrators after the attack. Indonesia also has struggled to find ways for religious minority groups to build and renovate places of worship without undue restrictions, with dozens forcibly closed each year since 1999. In 2006, the government issued a new law intended to make it easier to get permits for religious sites. However, FPI and similar groups, particularly in West Java, South Sumatra, Aceh, Lombok, and South Sulawesi, have politicized the permit process. Local officials are pressured to reject applications and close some venues that do not have necessary permits (though many have been in operation for years.) In addition, the national government does not enforce court decisions that have voided the forced closure by local officials of churches and other religious venues. In parts of West Java, Muslims have protested weekly at the venues of both Christian and Ahmadiyya Muslims.

January 2012 – December 2012

- January 1, 2012 - Bogor, West Java: Muslim groups prevented the GKI Yasmin Church from conducting a New Year's service on the grounds of their already closed church.
- January 22, 2012 - Bogor, West Java: A mob, organized by FPI and joined by police and local authorities, stopped Sunday services at GKI Yasmin church.
- February 2012 - Bekasi, West Java: The local government closed three churches affiliated with the Batak Protestant Church (HKBP), the Merciful Christ Church of Indonesia (GKRI), and a Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (GPdI) due to lack of required permits. The churches had tried unsuccessfully to submit permits.
- March 21, 2012 - Padang, West Sumatra: Authorities and police raided and forcibly halted construction of the St. Ignatius Catholic Church citing opposition from Muslim residents. The Church completed all the legal requirements needed to receive permits.
- March 16, 2012 - Indramayu, West Java: Unidentified gunmen fired 20 shots into a local Catholic Church. No one was killed or injured.
- April 15, 2012 - Bekasi, West Java: The pastor of a HKBP Filadelfia Church was threatened with physical violence as a mob tried to stop worship services. Police officers were present but took no action
- April 22, 2012 - Bekasi, West Java: Muslim groups staged additional protests at the HKBP Filadelfia Church, throwing feces and rocks at those gathered.
- May 2012 - Singkil, Aceh province: From March to May authorities closed 20 Protestant house churches and four Catholic Churches in the Singkil regency of Aceh due to the threat of mob violence. Ten Protestant churches belonging to the ethnic minority group Pakpak Dairi also were closed and another attacked with a firebomb.
- August 6, 2012 - Bogor, West Java: Officials sealed St. Johannes Catholic Church citing problems with a permit application submitted in 2007.
- November 4, 2012 - Central Tapanuli, North Sumatra: An armed attacker killed three children and wounded five others attending Sunday service at the Simanosor Maranatha Batak Protestant Church. The attacker died of injuries received while being apprehended.

January 2013 – September 2013

- January 27, 2013 - Bandung, West Java: FPI organizers forcibly closed the Banua Niha Keriso Protestant church (BNKP).
- January 27, 2013 - Sumedang, West Java: Members of the Islamic Forum, the Islamic Reform Movement, and FPI protested the Pentecostal Protestant Church (GPdI), claiming

that the church did not have a permit to operate. Members of the groups threatened violence unless the church was closed. Authorities arrested the pastor (and later his wife) and held them until April, 2013 for “operating a church without a permit.”

- February 10, 2013 - Makassar, South Sulawesi: An attacker firebombed two Christian churches in Masakassar. No one was injured in the attacks.
- March 7, 2013 - Bogor, West Java: City authorities closed the facilities of the GKI Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church to prevent Sunday services, despite a Supreme Court ruling allowing the church to re-open.
- March 21, 2013 - Bekasi, West Java: The local government demolished a Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) due to lack of a building permit.
- March 23, 2013 - Tambora, West Jakarta: The Damai Kristus Catholic Church was attacked by a mob and closed. Police officers guarding the church did not stop the protestors from entering and vandalizing the church.
- September 25, 2013 - South Tangerang, West Java: FPI mounted a campaign against the parishioners of Saint Bernadet Catholic Church, successfully stopping construction of a new facility and pressuring local officials to close temporary meetings places in the area because they did not have permission to meet. St. Bernadet received a permit to build a new facility in August 2013 after having submitted applications for 23 years.

Attacks on Ahmadiyya Mosques and Closures

A 2008 Joint Ministerial decree prohibited “proselytization” by and the further growth of the Ahmadiyya community. The same decree also prohibited violence against them. However, the decree has neither limited violence nor slowed the closure of Ahmadiyya mosques and places of worship. Since the decree was issued, at least 37 mosques and meetings points have been closed and there have been at least 50 other acts of violence and vandalism directed at the Ahmadiyya community, including 2011 mob attacks in Central Java that left three Ahmadiyya dead. In parts of West Java, South Sulawesi, East Java, and Lombok provinces, FPI and other extremist groups interpret any visible Ahmadiyya activity as “proselytizing” and pressure local officials to close mosques or places of worship.

Despite strong statements from some Indonesian officials, including the President, about the need to arrest and hold accountable perpetrators of violence against the Ahmadiyya, attacks continue to occur with impunity. The individuals charged with the February 2011 mob violence that killed three Ahmadiyya followers in Banten province were given sentences ranging from seven to five months in prison. In West Java, only one person has been sentenced for what have been dozens of attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques and meeting points.

January 2012-September 2013

- February 17, 2012 - Cianjur, West Java: A mob attacked and destroyed an Ahmadiyya mosque.

- April 20, 2012 - Tasikmalaya, West Java: A mob of local residents vandalized an Ahmadiyya mosque. Police at the scene outnumbered the vandals, but did not stop them.
- July 13, 2012 - Cisalada village, West Java: A mob attacked an Ahmadiyya compound causing injury and property damage. Local government officials reportedly later forced Ahmadiyya leaders to publicly apologize for angering the community.
- October 25, 2012 - Bandung, West Java: An FPI group attacked and destroyed the An Nasir mosque during an Idul Adha celebration. Police later arrested one person for the attack, who was given a three-month sentence.
- February 14, 2013 - Bekasi, West Java: Municipal officials sealed the Al-Misbah mosque, after they received reports that Ahmadiyya followers were meeting for worship. Local authorities said such public displays are “illegal.”
- May 5, 2013 - Tasikmalaya, West Java: A mob attacked an Ahmadiyya community and destroyed many buildings and a worship site. Two suspects were detained by local police but released 20 days later.
- April 4, 2013 - Bekasi, West Java: Local officials seal an Ahmadiyya mosque, 20 Ahmadiyya protesters remain inside until the government agrees to unseal mosque.

Attacks on Shi’a Muslims

Shi’a Muslims have been publicly labeled as heretical by the Minister of Religious Affairs, and the government-supported Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has referred to Shi’a as deviant Muslims. The Shi’a population of Madura province has come under increasing pressure and experienced violence in recent years. Though some provincial officials in East Java have condemned violence against the community and promised to resettle those who lost homes and businesses in mob attacks, little has been done to this day. There continue to be reports that Shi’a are asked to renounce their faith in exchange for resettlement. The leader of the community in Sampang, East Java, also was jailed on charges of blasphemy (see “Arrests/Imprisonment” section below). Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali said recently that the Shi’a are “free to practice their religion” but must first go through a period of “enlightenment” carried out by a government selected reconciliation team. President Yudhoyono has not repudiated the Minister’s statements.

- December 29, 2011 - Sampang, East Java: Militants attempted to burn down a Shi’a community. Police arrested and charged only one individual for the arson attack.
- January 2, 2012 - Sampang, East Java: An anti-Shi’a mob attacked and looted the home and shop of a Shi’a family. Police detained one suspect in the attack and the East Java governor promised to restore and protect Shi’a properties.
- August 26, 2012 - Sampang, East Java: A group of roughly 500 militants attacked the Shi’a community of Sampang. One Shi’a follower was killed and 300 people displaced.

While police officers at the scene did not intervene, they later arrested eight individuals for participating in the attack. The Surabaya Municipal Court later acquitted them all.

- June 20, 2013 - Sampang, East Java: Authorities evicted Shi'a families living temporarily in a sports complex and relocated them to Sidoarjo, East Java due to "security concerns." As of mid-September 2013, the displaced Shi'a families from the August, 2012 attack have been unable to return to their homes.

Attacks on Other Religious Minorities

Other religious minorities and religious sects also have been targets of intimidation, discrimination, and violence, most often in the province of Aceh, the only province in Indonesia allowed to enforce Sharia law through a court system and "vice patrols."

- October 2012 - Banda Aceh, Aceh: Provincial officials, under pressure from FPI leaders, ordered the closure of six Buddhist temples. Local government officials claimed the religious venues failed to meet permit requirements, although some had been in operation for decades.
- November 16, 2012 - Bireuen, Aceh: Local villagers attacked and burned the home of a Sufi religious leader, Tengku Aiyub Syakuban, reportedly because of his "heretical teachings." Four people died. No one was arrested for taking part in the attack.
- March 4, 2013 - South Aceh, Aceh: South Aceh regency government ordered all students to leave the Al-Mujahadah Foundation boarding school because its teaching of the Sufi interpretation of Islam was "strange...false and misleading." The school's top administrators also were banned from having guests in their homes as a way to stop any home-schooling efforts.
- July/August 2013 - South Aceh, Aceh: The Al-Mujahadah Foundation boarding school was burned down and the remaining school buildings were vandalized several weeks later. No one was arrested in the incident.
- August 4, 2013 - West Jakarta, Jakarta: A bomb exploded at a Buddhist vihara during a religious service.

Arrests/ Imprisonments for Blasphemy or Other Charge

According to the Indonesian Institute on Democracy and Peace (SETARA) and the Wahid Institute, two Indonesian think tanks tracking human rights conditions in the country, the use of Indonesia's "blasphemy and deviancy" law has expanded in the past decade. Since 2003, over 150 individuals have been detained and dozens sentenced to up to five years under Article 156(a) of the criminal code, according to which "expressing feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt against religions" and "disgracing a religion" are punishable by up to five years in jail.

The Wahid Institute reported that in the past year local religious leaders, police, and government officials continued to pressure religious leaders or sought to disband religious groups because

their religious teaching or practices fall outside what is believed to be accepted Islamic thought. Most charges have been brought against allegedly heterodox Muslims, although a few also have implicated Christian groups. Groups disbanded include al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah, Jamaah Alamulla, Satria Piningit Weteng Buwono, Daifillah, Santriloka, Lia Eden, and the Sion City of Allah.

- January 2012 - Cianjur, West Java: Hasan Suwandi, a guardian of the Ahmadiyya Cipeuyeum mosque, was given a two year sentence for “criminal defamation” after he claimed publicly that the local police chief gave permission to reopen the mosque.
- February 2012 - West Sumatra: Civil servant Alexander Aan was attacked by an FPI group and later arrested on charges of blasphemy for starting a Facebook page advocating atheism. He later was given a two-year sentence for “incitement,” allegedly for provoking his attackers.
- March 2012 - Andreas Guntur: Leader of the spiritual group *Amanat Keagungan Ilahi* is sentenced to four years’ imprisonment for blasphemy because of his allegedly heterodox Islamic teachings.
- July 12, 2012 - Sampang, Madura: Shi’a cleric Tajul Muluk was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for blasphemy. The sentence then was extended to four years after an appeal by Muluk.
- April 2013 - Tolitoli, Central Sulawesi: Five high school students who recorded themselves dancing and praying to a song by the band Maroon 5 were expelled from school, charged with blasphemy, and may face time in juvenile detention. They have not been sentenced and are not being detained at this time. The young women were prohibited from taking the national exam, which accounts for 60 percent of a student’s high school grade.