

Table of Contents

- *Anti-Christian incidents nearly doubled in Indonesia in 2011*
- *A bad year for religious rights*
- *Religious tolerance bill creates news problems*
- *Church denied site as new bill threatens freedoms*
- *Indonesia cuts jail term of cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir*
- *Indonesian church denied site as new bill threatens freedoms*
- *Why is Islamic extremism growing in Indonesia?*
- *Australian, Indonesian activists detained researching minority Muslim sect*
- *Station reporting on human rights is forcibly closed by Indonesian authorities*
- *Motives for church burnings in Indonesia questioned*
- *Mayor again balks at granting church permit*
- *Indonesian 'blasphemy law' a weapon for radical Islam*
- *Fears of Indonesia's Ahmadiyah sect*
- *Ahmadi gets 9 months in prison*
- *Ahmadi leaders call for pluralistic and tolerant*
- *Revoke provincial decrees to ban a faith*
- *Light sentences for attack on Christians in Indonesia condemned*
- *Religious violence result of authorities consent in past cases*
- *Indonesia demands probe into attack on Muslim sect*
- *Mob attacks 'heretic' Muslims, kills three*
- *Indonesian blasphemy law sparks Muslim violence in Java*
- *Religious violence result of authorities consent in past cases*
- *Footage of deadly mob attack emerges*
- *Police, Islamists put up obstacles to worship*

Anti-Christian incidents nearly doubled in Indonesia in 2011

Attempts to institutionalize intolerance, close churches increase

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (04.01.12) / HRWF (18.01.12) – Acts of violence and intolerance against Christians in Indonesia almost doubled in 2011, with an Islamist campaign to close down churches symbolizing the plight of the religious minority.

The Indonesian Protestant Church Union, locally known as PGI, counted 54 acts of violence and other violations against Christians in 2011, up from 30 in 2010.

The number of such incidents against religious minorities in general also grew, from 198 in 2010 to 276 in 2011, but the worst is perhaps yet to come if authorities continue to overlook the threat of extremism, said a representative from the Jakarta-based Wahid Institute, a Muslim organization that promotes tolerance.

Rumadi, who goes by a single name, said his Wahid Institute also observed an attempt to institutionalize intolerance in this archipelago of about 238 million people, of whom about 88 percent Muslim. At least 36 regulations to ban religious practices deemed deviant from Islam were drafted or implemented in the country in 2011.

A Jakarta-based civil rights group, the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, noted that both the government and groups in society were responsible for the incidents, with the main violators including religious extremist organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

Indonesia's hot-bed of extremism is West Java, the most populous province that includes the nation's capital city of Jakarta. This province alone witnessed 160 incidents against religious minorities. In the 1950s, West Java was the base of an Islamist group, Darul Islam, whose splinter groups are still active, fighting the "secular" government and religious minorities.

Church Closures

Churches in West Java, which has about 520,000 Christians, also suffered the most last year. On Christmas Day, two churches in West Java's Bogor city bore the brunt of growing extremism.

"Islamist vigilantes screamed and yelled at us and threatened us, as we sought to hold a Christmas service," a leader of the Gereja Kristen Indonesia, also known as the GKI or the Yasmin Church, told Compass in an email.

"We could not hold Christmas service in our own church for a second year," said the source, who requested anonymity.

The city administration, allegedly under pressure from local extremist groups, sealed off the half-constructed building of the church, situated in the Taman Yasmin housing complex on a street named H. Abdullah Bin Nuh, in 2010. Before Christmas that year, the Supreme Court ordered the city mayor, Diani Budiarto, to unseal the church building, and later an ombudsman also recommended the same, but the official refused to oblige. The church has held worship services on a sidewalk, with police cordoning off the compound, since April 2010.

On Dec. 25, church members insisted they wanted to celebrate Christmas in the building, which is legally theirs, but police prevented them from even going near the structure, the source said. The congregation met in a church member's home.

Showing solidarity with the church were members of Ansor, youth wing of one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU); interfaith activists, including the sister and youngest daughter of former president Abdurrahman Wahid; and members of the Asian Muslim Action Network. But they could do little to help.

"The police first allowed the vigilantes to stand next to us, and then moved them just about three meters away," the church leader said. "The vigilantes issued threats to us, but the police did not arrest them."

Having overseen the sealing of the Yasmin church, Muslim extremists are now targeting a 2,000-member Catholic church in Bogor city's Parung area. The Santo Joannes Baptista (St. John the Baptist) church was able to hold its mass on Christmas Eve, followed by a Christmas Day service, although authorities had formally ordered the church to stop all activities.

The church building was constructed six years ago, but days before Christmas the head of Bogor district, Rachmat Yasin, issued the cessation order arguing that its construction violated planning rules due to its proximity to a residential area. Soon after the order, a group called the Muslim Community of Parung Bogor placed a banner near the church, stating that it was in support of Rachmat's move to ban church activities, according to *The Jakarta Globe*.

"The site is not for a church, but it was a house turned into a house of worship. It is a violation," Rachmat told the daily. "Moreover, they worship on a regular basis. It is a mistake."

The head of the Indonesian Bishops Conference, Benny Susetyo, said there had been no conflict between the church and the people living in its vicinity for six years.

"The problem arose when a group of people started to disturb the calm in the region around the house of worship," he told *The Jakarta Globe*.

Susetyo added that district authorities had repeatedly rejected demands made by the church for a permit, without giving any reason.

"This is despite us having clearly followed the procedure for the construction of houses of worship."

Islamist groups have demanded a similar action against five other churches in Pracimantoro town in Central Java province, the source added. These churches – Pentecostal Church of Indonesia in the Ngalu Wetan area, Church of all Nations and Bethel Tabernacle Church in the Gebangharjo area, Javanese Christian Church in the Godang area, and Nazarene Christian Church in the Lebak area – have operational permits to hold church services. They had applied for building permits, but authorities never responded.

Central Java is also a hub of Islamist extremists. Last Sept. 25, a suicide bomber said to be an Islamist terrorist blew himself up at the gate of the Sepenuh Injil Bethel Church (Bethel Full Gospel Church) in Solo city, injuring about 20 people.

Sealing of church buildings and the refusal to grant building permits top the list of major violations of Christians' religious rights in Indonesia, according to the Setara Institute. A 2006 joint ministerial decree requires signatures from congregations and residents living nearby, as well as approval from the local administration, to build a house of worship.

Government Inaction

The Setara Institute criticized President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for inaction. The president urged people to be tolerant in at least 19 of his speeches in 2011, but he has not backed his words with action, it noted in a recent report.

Intolerance has steadily been increasing in Indonesia, whose constitution is based on the doctrine of *Pancasila* – five principles upholding the nation's belief in the one and only God and social justice, humanity, unity and democracy for all.

The Setara report cited a February incident in which a mob of about 1,500 Muslim extremists brutally killed three members of the Ahmadiyah community, which is seen as heretical by mainstream Muslims, in the province of Banten near West Java.

"Cases of intolerance have intensified this year, numbering more than last year, and at the core of the problem is poor law enforcement by the government," Setara deputy chairman Bonar Tigor Naipospos told *The Jakarta Globe*.

A bad year for religious rights

By Anita Rachman

Jakarta Globe (26.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) - This year alone, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono used 19 of his speeches to encourage people to embrace tolerance, the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace has counted.

However, action has yet to follow his words. The reality on the ground, Setara says, is that intolerance has been steadily on the rise in Indonesia.

The country was shocked in February when a mob of some 1,500 people brutally attacked a handful of Ahmadiyah members in Banten, killing three.

Authorities in the West Java city of Bogor continued to seal a church there, GKI Yasmin, and more recently, the Bogor district authorities have also outlawed worshiping activities at the Roman Catholic Santo Joannes Baptista church in Parung.

Another report from Tawangmangu, Central Java, spoke of the desecration of a statue of Mary at the Goa Maria Sendang Pawitra (Maria's Cave of the Holy Waters) there last week.

"Cases of intolerance have intensified this year, numbering more than last year, and at the core of the problem is the poor law enforcement by the government," Setara deputy chairman Bonar Tigor Naipospos told the Jakarta Globe.

The institute reported 244 violations of religious rights this year. Last year, Bonar said, Setara recorded around 200 cases.

Although the increase was not dramatic, the fact is that the numbers remain too high.

Violations cited by Setara included discrimination, intimidation, banning of religious activities, dismissals and arrests, and violators were both the government and citizens.

The No. 1 rights violator, however, was the police, followed by the military, district heads and mayors and governors, as well as the officials at the Religious Affairs Ministry. Hard-line religious groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) were the main violators among civilians.

"Public officials sometimes could not stay neutral in the implementation of policies.

Secondly, there is the problem of political interests. We know that religion here is seen as a political commodity," Bonar said.

Separately, the Indonesian Protestant Church Union (PGI) reported the same trend.

In 2010, the PGI recorded 30 acts of violence and other violations against Christians in Indonesia. This year, the PGI's Jeirry Sumampow said, there were 54 violations across the archipelago.

He said that in many of those cases the government was actively involved, including in the worst and most high-profile one, that of the GKI Yasmin church.

"The worst cases [this year] were the attack in Cikeusik against Ahmadiyah and the closure of the GKI Yasmin church," Bonar said.

Anti-Ahmadiyah violence

On Feb. 6, a group of 1,500 people beat to death three Ahmadis and badly injured five others in the Cikeusik subdistrict of Banten's Pandeglang district.

The local and international outcry did not stop at the brutality of the attack itself. The sentencing of the perpetrators to just a few months in jail by the Serang District Court was well below the maximum of 12 years for assault resulting in death.

The judges also insisted that it was the Ahmadiyah group that provoked the attack by ignoring calls by police to leave their building and instead allegedly challenging the mob to a fight.

Twelve men found guilty of "participation in a violent attack that resulted in casualties" were only sentenced to three to six months. An Ahmadi survivor who almost had his hand hacked off was charged with provoking the attack and sentenced to six months in prison as well.

The wave of condemnation not only came from prominent domestic figures and organizations, but also from overseas.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide and British MP Siobhain McDonagh, who in the United Kingdom also chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, for instance, expressed their concerns about the light sentences.

In a news release, CSW stated that the astonishingly lenient sentences led it to call into question the integrity of Indonesia's judiciary system.

Human Rights Watch criticized the police and prosecutors, stating that they did not conduct a rigorous investigation, failed to call key eyewitnesses to the stand and erroneously blamed the Ahmadi for provoking the attack.

Indonesia's House of Representatives and the government responded with a push in deliberating a religious harmony bill, touted as a long-term solution to the religious conflicts plaguing the country and to give a stronger legal basis to joint ministerial decrees that now regulate certain religious matters.

GKI Yasmin church closure

In September, members of the House's Commission III, which deals with legal affairs, lashed out at Bogor Mayor Diani Budiarto for his continued defiance of a Supreme Court ruling on the closed GKI Yasmin church.

Eva Kusuma Sundari, of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), said Diani's "misleading logic is the logic of a sick person."

The mayor has revoked a permit he had issued for the church and has since ignored verdicts from various courts, including the Supreme Court, which have ordered him to lift the ban and allow the congregation to worship in its building.

He also refused to follow a recommendation from the Ombudsman, despite the fact that a recommendation is the highest verdict the Ombudsman can issue and that it is binding.

The Ombudsman also sent a letter to the president to take over the case, but Home Minister Gamawan Fauzi insisted that the president's involvement was unnecessary and that the case should be left to the West Java governor to handle.

As the GKI Yasmin congregation continued to face problems in conducting worship, international criticism kept up. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, for instance, sent a letter to US President Barack Obama calling on him to speak out against Indonesia's growing religious tensions.

GKI Yasmin church spokesman Bona Sigalingging told the Globe: "The congregation has been praying on the sidewalk every Sunday since April 2010. The one responsible for this is the entire nation, including the mayor, governor and the police."

He hoped that in 2012, the government would finally enforce the law and push for a deradicalization program aimed at groups spreading hatred.

'Isolated incidents'

Besides the cases mentioned above, Indonesia also witnessed other conflicts with a religious dimension in the past year, such as calls to take down a six-meter Buddhist statue from the top of a three-story temple in Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra.

But according to a former chairman of the country's biggest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, the level of tolerance in Indonesia has actually improved compared to a couple of years ago. Hasyim Muzadi said the violence and other violations this year were just isolated incidents, and in general, people lived side by side in harmony.

"You cannot generalize what happened in Bogor. This is a violation of regulations, a [single] case," he said.

Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali also said he did not see any serious problems of intolerance and violations of religious freedom this year.

"The case with GKI Yasmin is not about religion or interreligious relations, but about a building permit," Suryadharma told the Globe.

He argued that people of different religions were still living in harmony, for example in Maluku or North Sulawesi, even though religious tension has been on the rise in Maluku in recent times.

"I don't think there is [a serious problem]. Small [incidents], of course, occur. But all people fight, even with their siblings at home," he said, laughing.

But the PGI's secretary general, Gomar Goeltom, said he was afraid that things were more complicated than the minister would like people to believe.

"This is systematic, with the same pattern," he said, adding that other cases did not get adequate exposure and had failed to grab people's attention.

He said that although in quantity the number of violations might be smaller today than in 2005 or 2006, when many churches were closed down, but in terms of severity, recent incidents were much worse. And the trend might get even uglier next year if the government still refuses to act firmly, Gomar said.

"There are groups that spread flyers carrying a message of hatred and intolerance," he said.

Is there hope for 2012?

Zuhairi Misrawi, director of the Moderate Muslim Society, told the Globe that there were two solutions that could be explored next year.

The first is hoping for the nation's top leader to take firmer steps. The second is to create a new, stronger law to regulate religious freedom, he said.

"The first option doesn't seem promising since he [the president] has already been defeated by a mere mayor," he said, referring to Diani.

Thus, the nation could only hope for the second option, a legal guarantee for all believers to worship based on their beliefs.

Zuhairi said the House could soon deliberate a bill on religious freedom. This is especially needed for beleaguered sects like the Ahmadiyah, because it has been proven that the joint ministerial decree on Ahmadiyah has failed to prevent violence, he said.

"Members of the House have proposed the Religious Harmony bill, but I don't think we really need that. We should steer the discussion of the bill into the direction of religious freedom," he said. "Can the problem be solved by a new law? Well, at least people will have a legal basis."

However, it seems that Zuhairi and the public will have to wait for at least another year. The chairman of the Legislative Body at the House, Ignatius Mulyono, has said the bill is not among those prioritized for deliberation in 2012. He claimed that House Commission VIII already had too much on its hands, with four bills awaiting passage next year. Among those are bills were legislation on the hajj and halal products.

"The Religious Harmony bill was initiated by the House, but it has a long way to go — absolutely not next year," Ignatius said.

Bonar said he was not very optimistic about next year, particularly when it came to the government.

"Our recommendations have never been followed up on by the government. There was no improvement," he said.

"The government should have punished those found guilty in cases of violence. That would be a preventive measure, so others won't dare do the same thing."

Suryadharma, however, insisted that his ministry would work harder to increase people's awareness of the importance of tolerance and peaceful interreligious relations.

"Religious diversity is God's creation. Denying his creation is just the same as denying him," the minister said.

Religious tolerance bill creates news problems

By Mathias Hariyadi

AsiaNews.it (28.10.2011) / HRWF (08.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Far from being a breakthrough, the religious tolerance bill has stirred controversy on fundamental issues. Drafted by the three government bodies, namely the Ministry for Religious Affairs, the Interior Ministry and the Ministry for People's Welfare, the bill on religious tolerance, known here as the Rencana Undang-undang (RUU) Kerukunan Beragama, was presented to the Indonesian House of Parliament earlier this year (February 2011). After a series of discussions between members of the Eighth Commission of the House and top government officials from the three ministries, the RUU Kerukunan Beragama has met with strong criticism in Indonesian civil society and it is unclear when it might be adopted.

What is more urgent is not to turn the bill on religious tolerance into law, but "to come up with a bill that guarantees the freedom to practice one's faith," said Fr Benny Susetyo Pr, from the Interfaith Commission of the Indonesian Bishops of Conference.

For the clergyman, the Indonesian Constitution 1945 has not yet settled several fundamental issues, including how to guarantee people the right to practice their faith. "In my personal opinion, the most urgent thing to do is to put into practice the bill on free religious practice," he said in an open discussion.

An open discussion was recently held by the National Awakening Party (PKB), a moderate Muslim party established by the late President Abdurrahman Wahid, in cooperation with the Asian Muslim Action Network to critique the bill.

The RUU Kerukunan Beragama does not address a number of concerns on several fundamental issues, some important scholars from different universities noted. For instance, instead of fostering interfaith tolerance and peaceful coexistence in a country prone to sectarian clashes between Muslims and Christians, the bill does the opposite by creating new problems between religious groups and in the relationship between citizens and the state over religious freedom.

Held in parliament in mid-October, the seminar saw three noted Muslim and Catholic scholars critique the bill from different perspectives. The three keynote speakers were Jesuit priest and philosophy and politics professor Fr Franz Magnis-Suseno from the High School of Philosophy Institute, Prof Siti Musdah Mulia from the Islamic State University, who is also the current chairwoman of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), and Dr Ali Munhanif, also from the Islamic State University.

All three agreed that the bill has created serious problems rather than promote religious tolerance, despite what its name says.

According to Prof Siti Musdah Mulia, the bill's name is misleading. "I have no idea what kind of religious tolerance it addresses," she said. "The bill has nothing to say about this fundamental issue".

A number of problems in relation to religious tolerance are evident. They include violent actions against other religious denominations or Ahmadis. Several hard-line Muslim groups view the latter as a false Islamic sect, Prof Mulia said. Such problems are not the result of many ideas on the issue but of government regulation.

Prof Mulia said that the Indonesian government only recognises five official religions, namely Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism (Kong Hu Cu).

"In fact, millions of Indonesians practice other religious beliefs that are not officially recognised," she noted. For her, adopting any particular religious belief is something very personal and "the state should not intervene". Instead, the Indonesian government has tended to project a biased image of religious tolerance in the country.

For Prof Franz Magnis-Suseno, the bill is easily subject to unexpected intervention by the state and from other parties with vested interests.

The Jesuit priest and philosopher noted that under Chapter 17, Paragraph 2, of the bill people can proclaiming their faith only to people who have not adopted a religion or who are atheists. "This is very problematic since the state has officially said that every Indonesian citizen is legally expected to adopt a particular religion," Magnis said.

Another legal and political problem is the fact that people with no religion can be easily become scapegoats. Communists, for example, were politically targeted under the regime of President Suharto (1967-1998). Being an atheist is politically dangerous in Indonesia.

The notion of "disseminating one's faith" is another problem issue according to the clergyman. Each party has its own definition of what proclaiming the faith means, Fr Magnis explained. Christians and Catholics have their own idea about it; Islam has its own, based on a different spirit and atmosphere.

Another issue concerns places of worship. It is ridiculous that building a place where people can worship needs the approval of neighbours. "The state should allow any place of worship as long as it can provide parking space and not disturb others," he said.

Church denied site as new bill threatens freedoms

Compass Direct news (25.10.2011) / (08.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Members of a church in Bogor, West Java, are determined to continue meeting outside their sealed building each Sunday until they are granted freedom to worship inside it, despite a ban on street meetings issued by the local mayor.

"The church will never give up meeting together," a local source who preferred to remain unnamed said of the Indonesian Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Indonesia, or GKI), in the Yasmin area of Bogor.

The ban on street meetings forced church members to worship at an alternative location on Sunday (Oct. 23).

Amid the stand-off, religious freedom for groups such as the Yasmin church would be dramatically reduced under a "Religious Tolerance Bill" under consideration by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, critics of the proposal say. A constitutional debate is raging in Indonesia over the bill.

On Oct. 9, Yasmin church members and police officers clashed on the street in front of the sealed church building over the Christians' right to meet there. According to local media reports, West Java police are now investigating complaints filed by both sides; a police

chief has accused church members of knocking him unconscious, while the church has countersued police for disrupting its service.

In defiance of a Supreme Court order early this year affirming Yasmin's constitutional right to freedom of worship, Bogor Mayor Diani Budiarto canceled the church's worship permit, locked and sealed their church building and banned church members from meeting on the street (see www.compassdirect.org, "Mayor in Indonesia Again Balks at Granting Church Permit," Aug. 15). The permit had been hard-earned; under terms of a 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree, all churches must meet strict criteria to qualify for a church worship permit, including proof of at least 90 church members, signatures of approval from at least 60 local residents, and approval from village officials and a local interfaith forum.

Yasmin church officials have since refused offers from local authorities to relocate to another building, citing the case of the Batak Christian Protestant Church in Bekasi, West Java, evicted from their previous premises and now denied a building permit.

Rights Experts Condemn Bill

Following a sharp rise in similar conflicts over the past two years, the Religious Affairs Ministry is considering the Religious Tolerance Bill, first proposed by the Ministry in 2003 and revived in February following the brutal murder of three members of the Ahmadiyah sect. The group has often been targeted by Islamic radicals for its claim that Muhammad was not the last prophet of Islam.

Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali, Home Affairs Minister Gamawan Fauzi and Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Agung Laksono met last week and announced their joint endorsement of the bill to local media.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos, deputy chairman of the Setara Institute for Peace and Democracy, said the bill will simply legitimize existing discriminatory regulations in the 1965 Anti-Blasphemy Law as well as those in the 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree. The decree has contributed to many conflicts, including the current clash in Bogor. The new bill places more stringent limits on proselytizing, constructing places of worship and religious education, according to The Jakarta Globe.

Elaine Pearson of Human Rights Watch fears that the law – proposed by the same ministry that has called for a complete ban on Ahmadiyah – will further entrench discrimination against religious minorities.

Dr. Musda Mulia, chair of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, told The Jakarta Post that many articles in this bill are not compatible with the principles of democracy, pluralism and human rights. Rather than limiting religious activities, the government should ensure that all religions receive equal treatment, he added. The success or failure of the bill rests on the terminology, Fajar Riza Ul Haq, executive director of the Maarif Institute, told the Globe. "They should have drafted a religious freedom bill instead of this one," he said.

Faith Out of Focus

A European Union delegation is holding a two-day seminar to discuss the conflicts, another local source told Compass on Monday.

"But only moderate Muslims are attending," he said. "If members of the Front Pembela Islam [Islamic Defenders Front, or FPI] and other radical groups had joined in, I'm sure the discussion would have been more helpful."

One participant who attended yesterday told Compass that speakers did not address violence against Christians at all; rather, they emphasized "organizing and maintaining inter-religious dialogue."

Organized jointly by the European Union Delegation to Indonesia and Brunei and Nahdlatul Ulama, one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, the seminar sought to "explore the contribution made by faith organizations to the fulfillment of human rights and the challenges in balancing respect for freedom of religion with other human rights, including the freedom of expression," according to a press release on the E.U. delegation's website.

"We must [ensure] ... that the legitimate assertion of religious belief is reconciled with broader human rights concerns," Julian Wilson, head of the delegation, wrote in the release.

Moderates Urge Government to Act

Moderates of all faiths, however, are frustrated by the government's failure to address these issues.

"I think Yasmin church will just have to stand firm, despite the risk of being roughed up by the police," the source close to the church said. "As we've seen in previous cases, it may take one or more casualties, drawing unwanted media attention locally and internationally, before the government moves in more seriously to protect the Christians."

Moderates were particularly annoyed at the government's failure to address forced church closures.

"As usual, the president sits by and does absolutely nothing, while the mayor of Bogor ignores the Supreme Court rulings and suffers no consequences," one online reader commented at the foot of a Jakarta Post story about Yasmin church on Oct. 11. Local authorities often adopt regulations or bylaws that are at odds with Indonesia's constitution (see www.compassdirect.org, "Christians Call for Rejection of Sharia-Inspired Bills," Aug. 19, 2009). Rahmat Effendi, acting mayor of Bekasi in West Java, recently banned the Ahmadiyah from "any activity that may be interpreted as an effort to spread its beliefs."

The ban – faithful to Indonesia's 1965 Anti-Blasphemy Law but contrary to constitutional guarantees of religious freedom – came into effect on Oct. 13. Ahmadi in Bekasi have since met under strict police surveillance.

Based on these inconsistencies and the apparent bias in application of existing laws, many Indonesians doubt that the new bill will improve conditions for religious minorities.

"Look at the rising mob crime and violence, the irrational sentencing in the February murders of three Ahmadi, the hate rhetoric in Bogor and the real Islamic violence towards anyone who is not a fundamentalist," a reader identified as Dr. Dez commented on a Jakarta Globe story posted yesterday. "These issues are all inter-related. The bill will drive a further wedge into divided communities, resulting in more violence. Then the new Intelligence Bill will allow victims to be detained as a threat to security.

"Please have a conscience and speak out," he added. "You are not just safeguarding groups like the Ahmadi, but your children too."

Indonesia cuts jail term of cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir

BBC (26.10.2011) / HRWF (05.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - An Indonesian court has cut the jail term being served by radical Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir from 15 years to nine.

He was jailed in June for backing an Islamist militant training camp.

A Jakarta High Court spokesman said the judge had verbally confirmed Ba'asyir's sentence had been cut.

Ba'asyir is seen as a spiritual leader of militant Islam in Indonesia but has always denied involvement in militant activities.

In March, the preacher was convicted of giving support to militants in Aceh province who were plotting to impose Sharia law in Indonesia through a campaign of violence and murder. He later received a 15-year term.

His lawyers appealed against the sentence, reports said, and on Wednesday said they were still awaiting official notification of the sentence reduction from the High Court. Ba'asyir's lawyer Mohammad Assegaf told AFP news agency he was confident his client would eventually be cleared and released from prison.

"We're very optimistic that the Supreme Court will find him not guilty [of] all terrorism charges. It has happened before," he said.

Most analysts agree that Ba'asyir has been the spiritual leader of the military jihadi network Jemaah Islamiah for a number of years.

But he was cleared of involvement with the group after a trial in 2003.

Indonesian church denied site as new bill threatens freedoms

'Religious Tolerance Bill' would only entrench discrimination, critics say

By Sarah Page

Compass Direct News (25/10/2011) / HRWF (05.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Members of a church in Bogor, West Java, are determined to continue meeting outside their sealed building each Sunday until they are granted freedom to worship inside it, despite a ban on street meetings issued by the local mayor.

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Amid the stand-off, religious freedom for groups such as the Yasmin church would be dramatically reduced under a "Religious Tolerance Bill" under consideration by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, critics of the proposal say. A constitutional debate is raging in Indonesia over the bill.

On Oct. 9, Yasmin church members and police officers clashed on the street in front of the sealed church building over the Christians' right to meet there. According to local media reports, West Java police are now investigating complaints filed by both sides; a police chief has accused church members of knocking him unconscious, while the church has countersued police for disrupting its service.

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Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali, Home Affairs Minister Gamawan Fauzi and Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Agung Laksono met last week and announced their joint endorsement of the bill to local media.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos, deputy chairman of the Setara Institute for Peace and Democracy, said the bill will simply legitimize existing discriminatory regulations in the 1965 Anti-Blasphemy Law as well as those in the 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree. The decree has contributed to many conflicts, including the current clash in Bogor. The new bill places more stringent limits on proselytizing, constructing places of worship and religious education, according to The Jakarta Globe.

Elaine Pearson of Human Rights Watch fears that the law – proposed by the same ministry that has called for a complete ban on Ahmadiyah – will further entrench discrimination against religious minorities.

Dr. Musda Mulia, chair of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, told The Jakarta Post that many articles in this bill are not compatible with the principles of democracy, pluralism and human rights. Rather than limiting religious activities, the government should ensure that all religions receive equal treatment, he added.

The success or failure of the bill rests on the terminology, Fajar Riza UI Haq, executive director of the Maarif Institute, told the Globe. "They should have drafted a religious freedom bill instead of this one," he said.

Faith Out of Focus

A European Union delegation is holding a two-day seminar to discuss the conflicts, another local source told Compass on Monday.

"But only moderate Muslims are attending," he said. "If members of the Front Pembela Islam [Islamic Defenders Front, or FPI] and other radical groups had joined in, I'm sure the discussion would have been more helpful."

One participant who attended yesterday told Compass that speakers did not address violence against Christians at all; rather, they emphasized "organizing and maintaining inter-religious dialogue."

Organized jointly by the European Union Delegation to Indonesia and Brunei and Nahdlatul Ulama, one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, the seminar sought to "explore the contribution made by faith organizations to the fulfillment of human rights and the challenges in balancing respect for freedom of religion with other human rights, including the freedom of expression," according to a press release on the E.U. delegation's website.

"We must [ensure] ... that the legitimate assertion of religious belief is reconciled with broader human rights concerns," Julian Wilson, head of the delegation, wrote in the release.

Moderates Urge Government to Act

Moderates of all faiths, however, are frustrated by the government's failure to address these issues.

"I think Yasmin church will just have to stand firm, despite the risk of being roughed up by the police," the source close to the church said. "As we've seen in previous cases, it may take one or more casualties, drawing unwanted media attention locally and internationally, before the government moves in more seriously to protect the Christians."

Moderates were particularly annoyed at the government's failure to address forced church closures.

"As usual, the president sits by and does absolutely nothing, while the mayor of Bogor ignores the Supreme Court rulings and suffers no consequences," one online reader commented at the foot of a Jakarta Post story about Yasmin church on Oct. 11.

Local authorities often adopt regulations or bylaws that are at odds with Indonesia's constitution (see www.compassdirect.org, "Christians Call for Rejection of Sharia-Inspired Bills," Aug. 19, 2009). Rahmat Effendi, acting mayor of Bekasi in West Java, recently banned the Ahmadiyah from "any activity that may be interpreted as an effort to spread its beliefs."

The ban – faithful to Indonesia's 1965 Anti-Blasphemy Law but contrary to constitutional guarantees of religious freedom – came into effect on Oct. 13. Ahmadis in Bekasi have since met under strict police surveillance.

Based on these inconsistencies and the apparent bias in application of existing laws, many Indonesians doubt that the new bill will improve conditions for religious minorities.

"Look at the rising mob crime and violence, the irrational sentencing in the February murders of three Ahmadis, the hate rhetoric in Bogor and the real Islamic violence towards anyone who is not a fundamentalist," a reader identified as Dr. Dez commented on a Jakarta Globe story posted yesterday. "These issues are all inter-related. The bill will drive a further wedge into divided communities, resulting in more violence. Then the new Intelligence Bill will allow victims to be detained as a threat to security."

"Please have a conscience and speak out," he added. "You are not just safeguarding groups like the Ahmadi, but your children too."

Why is Islamic extremism growing in Indonesia?

Expediency is behind government's reluctance to check the extremism that is fueling terrorism

By Vishal Arora

Compass Direct News (03.10.2011) / HRWF (05.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> – The suicide bombing of a church in Central Java on Sept. 25 pointed not only to a new level of attacks on religious minorities in the world's largest Muslim-majority country but to a political bent that accommodates Islamist extremism.

"Radicalization of Islamic teachings and understanding is a problem in Indonesia," admitted Dr. H. Nasaruddin Umar, director general of Islamic Community Guidance under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. "There's a need to re-explain the concept of jihad."

Pino Damayanto, aka Ahmad Yosepa Hayat, who blew himself up wounding over 20 members of the Sepenuh Injil Bethel Church (Bethel Full Gospel Church) in Solo on Sept. 25, apparently believed it was his religious duty to kill "the enemies of Islam," according to his understanding of "jihad."

National Police spokesman Anton Bachrul Alam linked the 31-year-old bomber to the Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (Partisans of the Oneness of God or JAT), a terrorist group believed to be founded three years ago by Abu Bakar Bashir. Bashir is serving a jail term for terrorism.

Bashir is well-known among the security apparatus in the United States. He is seen as close to al Qaeda and alleges that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and Israel's Mossad have carried out "false flag" attacks in Indonesia and elsewhere.

The Indonesian government can be expected to crack down on groups such as the JAT, as the United States is among the largest investors in Indonesia, and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono values his reputation in the West.

"He's a darling of the West," a senior journalist from The Jakarta Post told Compass.

Washington's war against terror has stakes in Indonesia, which came to light after the 2002 Bali bombings by the al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah group, of which Bashir is seen as the spiritual head. Bashir is co-founder of an Islamic boarding school, Al-Mukmin, near Solo. People linked to Bashir's school have been implicated in terrorist attacks.

Dealing with terrorists alone, however, may not help much. Extremism that breeds terrorism needs to be checked, hinted the Wahid Institute's Rumadi, who uses a single name. The Wahid Institute works towards "a just and peaceful world by espousing a moderate and tolerant view of Islam and working towards welfare for all."

There are extremist groups in Indonesia that are not known to have exploded bombs, but they practice violent moral policing and persecute minorities, sometimes beating members of minority communities to death. According to a human rights group in Jakarta, the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, there were at least 75 incidents, including violent attacks, violating religious freedom of the Christian community in 2010.

The most prominent name among these violent extremist groups is the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front or FPI), according to the Setara Institute. The FPI was founded in 1998 by Saudi-educated Muhammad Rizieq Syihab. These groups oppose the doctrine of "Pancasila," the Indonesian goal of "unity in diversity" in the Indonesian Constitution, which calls for religious freedom and democracy.

In March, an FPI member and eight others were convicted in the Sept. 12, 2010 clubbing of a pastor and the stabbing of a church elder of the Batak Christian Protestant Church in West Java. Christians and human rights activists, however, condemned the light sentences of only five to seven months. (See www.compassdirect.org, "Light Sentences for Attack on Christians in Indonesia Condemned," March 10.)

A leaked U.S. diplomatic cable dated May 9, 2006, published on the WikiLeaks website in May, revealed that a member of the National Intelligence Agency told the U.S. Embassy that a top official of the national police had "provided some funds" to the FPI, and that police were using the hard-line Muslim organization as an "attack dog."

Extremist groups and officials close to them flout laws and violate the rights of minorities with almost complete impunity, sources said. For example, the Yasmin Church in Bogor, a suburb of Jakarta, remains sealed by the city mayor, Diani Budiarto, despite a Supreme Court order against his action and recommendation by the ombudsman to give the church back to the congregation. (See www.compassdirect.org, "Mayor in Indonesia Again Balks at Granting Church Permit," Aug. 15.)

Sept. 18 was the deadline set by the ombudsman for the mayor to unseal the church, but it remains sealed, a church member told Compass.

"Higher authorities have taken no action against the erring mayor," he complained, saying Indonesia's largest Islamic party, the Prosperous Justice Party, known as the PKS, supported the mayor in the 2008 election. The PKS, which calls for a central role for Islam in public life, is seen as tacitly supporting some extremist groups.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos, vice-chairman of the Setara Institute, said his research shows that extremist groups have infiltrated at all levels, including the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulema Council or MUI), a clerical body representing all Indonesian Muslim groups to the government.

Thanks to the growing clout of extremist groups in street politics as well as in some mainstream Muslim organizations, the government seems to be extremely cautious in taking action.

"The government has no will to control extremist groups," said Rumadi of the Wahid Institute, adding that the government of Yudhoyono, who was re-elected for a second five-year term in 2009, doesn't want to be seen as "anti-Islamic."

He also noted, "The issue of extremism diverts attention away from the high level of corruption in the government."

The government shrugs off the threat from extremists, claiming they are tiny in number.

"Extremism in Indonesia has low support but high impact," said Dr. Abdul Muti, general secretary of Muhammadiyah, the country's second largest Islamic organization with more than 29 million members, mostly moderate.

The majority of the people in Indonesia say corruption is the country's most serious problem. In June, Muhammad Nazaruddin, former treasurer of President Yudhoyono's

Democratic Party, was accused of graft involving 32 government projects worth 6 trillion rupiah, or US\$700 million.

With a lack of will on the part of the government, extremism has constantly grown since the fall of the authoritarian President Suharto in 1999, who kept radical groups under control. A local Christian, a former member of the students' movement that played a key role in the fall of Suharto's government, said that while extremists used democracy to push their agenda, their goal was to eventually abolish democracy and establish an Islamic state.

Of Indonesia's population of 232.5 million people, more than 80 percent are Muslims, mostly Sunnis, according to Operation World, which puts the Christian population at nearly 16 percent. The vast majority of Indonesian Muslims are moderates.

"However, if not checked, the radicals may turn the moderate Indonesia into another Pakistan or Afghanistan in the future," the Christian warned.

Australian, Indonesian activists detained researching minority Muslim sect

By Ulma Haryanto & Nivell Rayda

The Jakarta Globe (20.09.2011) / HRWF (29.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Jakarta, Indonesia - Prominent Human Rights Watch activist Andreas Harsono and an Australian researcher were taken into custody by police in Sampang, East Java, on Monday as they attempted to investigate the local Shia Muslim population.

The Shia and Ahmadiyah, another minority Muslim sect, are facing growing persecution and discrimination from local people in Indonesia. The rising intolerance against minority groups in the country has received international condemnation, including from HRW.

Setara Institute and Democracy researcher Ismail Hasani, said Andreas and his colleague — who did not wish to be identified for fear of further recriminations — were interviewing a Shia follower in Nangkernang village when a group of people blockaded the access road leading to the village.

"These people, for a long time, have despised Shia followers in the area and have long sought to isolate the village," Ismail said.

He said the pair were taken to Sampang Police headquarters and interrogated for nine hours but then released because the Police could not charge them with anything.

"However, since [the Australian researcher] had left her passport in their lodgings, the pair were handed over to the Surabaya Immigration office," Ismail continued. "The questioning in Immigration continued until dawn and they were asked to come back again earlier today."

Ismail believed the Immigration office in Surabaya was attempting to deport the Australian for not having a research permit and for failure to notify the government about the purpose of her visit.

Andreas told the Jakarta Globe that they were still waiting for the Australian's passport at the Tanjung Perak immigration office in Surabaya.

"The Sampang police handed us to the immigration office at 3 a.m. today. We were questioned at the police station for entering a 'conflict area' midday Monday," he said by text message.

"These are small town cops, it's quite messy in Sampang and Surabaya. I want to get rid of these problems soon."

Station reporting on human rights is forcibly closed by Indonesian authorities

By Paul Riismandel

Radio Survivor (18.09.2011) / HRWF (29.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Indonesia - Radio Era Baru has been broadcasting from the Indonesian city island of Batam since 2005. The station has been consistently denied a license from the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission but has a case in front of the country's Supreme Court contesting the denial. Despite this the station was raided by Indonesian authorities on Sept. 13, who seized broadcasting equipment but failed to produce a warrant.

The station is operated by followers of the Falun Gong, which is outlawed in China. Era Baru's broadcasts, which are in both Mandarin Chinese and the local language, can be heard in part of China. The station frequently reports on human rights issues in China, especially those involving the Falun Gong movement. It's widely believed that a letter from the Chinese consulate in 2007 first led the Indonesian government to begin cracking down on the station.

Era Baru was closed down by police before, in March of 2010. After that incident the station was able to acquire new equipment.

International press freedom group Reporters without Borders has condemned the closure of Era Baru, calling on local authorities to respect the judicial proceeding still underway. The station's website is offline as I write this on September 17, though there is still an accessible Google cache of the site. The cache shows a press release dated September 13 reporting on the raid and closure.

The September 13 raid may have been brought on by the Sept. 6 conviction of Radio Era Baru's station manager Gatot Machali on charges of broadcasting without a license. Machali was given a six-month suspended sentence and one year of probation, along with a fine equivalent to US\$5,800. Machali has appealed the verdict.

Reports without Borders has written to Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Minister of Law and Human Rights asking them to intercede on Machali's behalf. The group says that "there are many reasons for thinking that Radio Era Baru and its manager were in fact prosecuted for political reasons," in violation of the Indonesian Constitution.

Motives for church burnings in Indonesia questioned

Outside Islamist groups use lack of permits as pretext for violence

By Victor Raqual Ambarita

Compass Direct News (17.08.2011) / HRWF (18.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Suspected Islamists were behind the burning of three homes used as churches on Sumatra Island's Riau Province this month, though a political motive may also have played a role, Christian leaders said.

Muslim mobs burned the meeting places of a Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) congregation and a Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (GPDI) group on Aug. 1, and that of a Methodist Church of Indonesia on Aug. 2, all in Kuantan Singingi district.

Provincial GBKP leader Sahat Tarigan reportedly said about 100 people on motorcycles arrived at the home at 11 p.m. on Aug. 1, throwing stones, threatening church members with knives and ultimately pouring gasoline and setting it on fire. A number of church members were inside painting at the time of the attack, but there were no casualties, Tarigan told Radio 68H News Agency.

The same mob also set the GPDI home on fire some five kilometers (three miles) away, he said.

"We do not know where they came from, but certainly we have no problem with local people," he told Radio 68H. "Those who burned the churches are not residents who live around us."

Tarigan said the home where the GBKP church meets was built about three years ago, and area resident have never objected to any worship there. He said he did not know the reason mobs set the home on fire, though Metrotvnews reported that an area Muslim said the site lacks a permit and that the singing bothers Muslims fasting by day for Ramadan.

But the executive secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Jeirry Sumampow, said he suspected political motives. An election in April in which all churches in the Kuantan Tengah sub-district backed the winning regent may have played a role, he said.

"I regret that the church has been the victim of political in-fighting," Sumampow told Compass.

He said those who burned the house churches were not dressed as hard-line Muslim demonstrators customarily are. He noted that the incident occurred only in the one sub-district where the churches backed the victorious candidate.

"At the time of the election there was tension, because the Christians in the sub-district openly stated their support for the candidate who is now elected," he said.

Sumampow said he regretted that police were slow to react to the attacks of Aug. 1, which contributed to the third house church burning on Aug. 2.

The governor of Riau Province urged citizens to refrain from vigilante violence. Riau Provincial Administration spokesman Chairul Rizky said the governor ordered the regent of Kuantan Singingi to urge residents to resolve conflicts with dialogue rather than force.

Rizky said that although the house churches do not have permits, arson cannot be tolerated. Though the governor ordered police to protect church sites that have permits, this does not mean that people can attack those that do not have permits, he said.

"The governor ordered police to protect places of worship that have been permitted, and to not let anyone take the law into their own hands to solve problems," Rizky told Radio

68H. "So, we hope this problem can be resolved in a short time, so that Christians can pray without being disturbed."

He added that the three house churches did not have permits because their leaders sought only housing authorization, rather than church permits.

The head of Criminal Police in Kuansing, AKP Darmawan, confirmed the attacks, telling Vivanews.com the structures set on fire were not church buildings but private homes made of wood.

The vice chairman of the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, Bonar Tigor Naipospos, said he regretted the burning of churches during Ramadan, adding that Muslims who are fasting during the month are supposed to be able to restrain their passions.

The former chairman of the Muhammadiyah socio-economic reform movement in Indonesia, H. Ahmad Shafi Ma'arif, was furious over the church burnings.

"Only crazy people want to burn churches, and no matter what the reason, such incidents cannot be tolerated," Ma'arif reportedly said, adding that such incidents continue to occur because law enforcement is weak.

At press time Riau Provincial Police had reportedly questioned 21 witnesses and arrested two suspects.

Church Shuttered

In West Jakarta, about 100 hard-line Muslims from the Betawi Rempug Forum (FBR) went to a three-storey shop where Maranata Bible Church meets in Jalan Kacang Tanah, Bojong Indah, on July 31 and demanded that it close because it was operating without a permit.

After meeting with the Islamist group for half an hour, church leaders agreed to stop worship services and remove the church sign until it obtains a permit, though no area residents had complained about the church.

Promising to obtain the permit from the mayor of West Jakarta immediately, Pastor Silas Kusah said he had already obtained permission from local residents for the church to operate. Area residents have never complained about the existence of the church, which has been active for three-and-a-half years, he said.

The head of the Cengkareng sub-district reportedly said the church had no permits because residents had presented no objections.

The Setara Institute's Bonar said that as no one in the area disputed the existence of the church, there should be no problems with the processing of its application for a permit.

Mayor again balks at granting church permit

Bogor chief dismisses ombudsman's recommendation to obey Supreme Court ruling

By Victor Raqual Ambarita

Compass Direct News (15.08.2011) / HRWF (22.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - A mayor in West Java who disregarded a Supreme Court ruling to reinstate the building

permit of a church in Bogor has now dismissed a recommendation by the National Ombudsman Institute to do so.

Bogor Mayor Diani Budiarto rejected the recommendation to reinstate the permit for the Indonesian Christian Church (Gereja Kristen Indonesia, or GKI) Yasmin Bogor Church last month, leaving the congregation to worship on a small strip of land as 15 to 20 Muslim demonstrators taunted them.

"The Ombudsman's recommendation is only a suggestion," the mayor told Tempo magazine.

Church spokesman Bona Sigalingging said at a press conference last month that 15 people who claimed that they were from the neighborhood near the church site disrupted services on July 3 and 10.

"They demonstrated and insisted that the church stop services that were already underway," Sigalingging said.

He said the mayor sent two letters to the church, one in May and one on July 9, urging the congregation to cease services on the roadside strip. In the letter he claimed that the church created a general annoyance and suggested they worship at the Harmony Building some 500 meters from the sealed GKI Yasmin Church building.

The congregation paid no heed to the letter, Sigalingging said, because the church's worship on the roadside is a result of the mayor's own doing.

"We worship in the roadside strip because the mayor has locked and sealed our church, which is against the Supreme Court decision," he said. "If Budiarto had not locked and sealed our church, we would certainly not worship by the roadside."

Sigalingging said holding services at the Harmony Building is not an appropriate solution because it was not designed for worship, even though church members do not like worshipping on the roadside in the torrid heat and unexpected rain showers.

Sigalingging acknowledged that the congregation had used the Harmony Building in early January for worship, a temporary arrangement the mayor had offered while awaiting a final decision from the Supreme Court.

"And the mayor promised that he would abide by whatever decision was handed down by the Supreme Court," he said.

Rather than complying with the Supreme Court decision, he said, the mayor made revocation of the GKI building permit permanent.

"Based on this experience, we no longer believe the mayor," he said.

In addition, Sigalingging said, on March 7 the Bogor City government verbally offered the church relocation to one of four locations.

"We did not respond to this offer, because relocation is not the solution," he said.

The Supreme Court decision was final, he said, and the mayor should have complied instead of "trying to bargain."

He cited the experience of another church in West Java, the Batak Christian Protestant Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, or HKBP) in Ciketing, Bekasi, which has been promised a building permit but has received nothing. The church is still meeting in a

community organization building, and the Bekasi City government has declined to issue a building permit.

"Referring to the law that exists, we reject the offer of relocation," Sigalingging said.

The GKI Yasmin Bogor congregation is determined to continue worshipping on the roadside if the government refuses to open the seal on the church. "As long as the mayor refuses to take off the seal, we are going to continue worshipping on the roadside," he said.

The vice president of the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, Bonar Tigor Naipospos, said that there is suspicion that the Bogor City government intends to prevent the existence of the GKI Yasmin church by all possible means.

The demonstrators against the church give reasons that are artificial and senseless, Naipospos said.

"Why are they demonstrating now, and not two years ago, when the church was in the planning stages?" he said.

Budiarto has staged an attack because he has clearly broken the law, he added.

"The decision of the Supreme Court is final; why did he revoke the GKI Yasmin building permit?" he said. "Similar problems are going to arise, if this is left [unresolved]."

Naipospos speculated that if the problem remains unaddressed, other conflicts could appear.

"This is very dangerous, and I worry that if this problem languishes there will be incidents such as occurred at Ciketing [where a church elder was stabbed], or at Cikeusik [where three members of the Ahmadiyah sect were beaten to death by a mob]," he said.

Indonesian 'blasphemy law' a weapon for radical Islam

Rarely-used law in 'moderate' nation could provide alternate force against Christians

By Sarah Page

Compass Direct News (12.04.2011) / HRWF (30.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On Feb. 6 in Indonesia, Muslim hardliners armed with machetes brutally murdered three members of a "blasphemous" Muslim sect in the village of Cikeusik, West Java. Five other members escaped with severe injuries; police were present but did not intervene.

The attack followed two years of violence sparked by a June 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree banning public worship for the Ahmadiyah, whose members believe that their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was the last prophet of Islam, rather than Muhammad.

On Feb. 8, a large mob gathered outside a courthouse in Temanggung, Central Java, chanting "Kill, kill!" after judges awarded Antonius Richmond Bawengan, a Roman Catholic, the maximum five-year sentence for blasphemy. By nightfall some 1,000 people had rampaged through the town burning vehicles, two churches and a church-run school, injuring nine people in the process. (See www.compassdirect.org, "After Attacks, Christian Leaders in Indonesia Decry Law Security," Feb. 11.)

Three days later, prosecutors in Jakarta sentenced Murhali Barda, a regional leader of the hardline *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI or Islamic Defenders Front) to only five-and-a-half months in prison and fined him the equivalent of 10 US cents for orchestrating an attack on a Protestant church in which two Christians were seriously injured. (See www.compassdirect.org, "Light Sentences for Attack on Christians in Indonesia Condemned," March 10.)

These events, occurring in a single week, provide a snapshot of the rising fanaticism that has seriously damaged Indonesia's reputation as a moderate Islamic nation.

"The real root of the country's religious intolerance is the 1965 Blasphemy Law," wrote Armando Siahaan in a recent *Jakarta Globe* report. Many observers agree that the 1965 law and associated legislation, coupled with a lack of political will to curb hard-line groups, are to blame for the steep climb in religious violence.

'Enmity' Towards Religion

Last October, Bawengan distributed a book he'd written that criticized the Catholic faith and allegedly handed out pamphlets that described sacred Islamic symbols as phallic images, according to local news reports.

Catholics, while offended – and falsely blamed for Bawengan's remarks about Islam – did not accuse him of blasphemy against the Catholic Church. The state, however, found him guilty of blasphemy against Islam under Article 156(A) of the penal code, which stipulates up to five years in prison for anyone who publicly shows "enmity" or "abuses or stains" a religion adhered to in Indonesia, or prevents other people from adhering to such a religion.

The maximum sentence under Article 156(A) is surprisingly lenient compared with blasphemy punishments in other countries, but this is likely due to Indonesia's founding principle of *Pancasila*, which strives for "unity in diversity."

Protestants are rarely prosecuted under this law, although police in April 2007 arrested 41 members of the Indonesian Students Service Agency and charged them with blasphemy under Article 156(A) for allegedly depicting the Quran as the "source of all evil" in Indonesia. A court in East Java sentenced all 41 defendants to the maximum five years in prison in September 2007, although they were granted a reprieve in August 2008, according to *The Jakarta Post*.

In December 2008, a student in Masohi, Maluku, claimed that his Christian teacher, Welhelmina Holle, had insulted Islam. When the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI or Indonesian Clerics Council) filed a complaint with police, a mob of at least 300 protestors gathered outside the local regent's office; a riot broke out, with the mob burning dozens of homes, a church and a village hall.

According to local media reports, one of the protestors carried a banner that stated with inadvertent irony, "Don't destroy the peace with blind fanaticism!"

Military and riot police eventually stopped the violence, but Holle was detained, found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to a year in prison, along with former parliamentary candidate Asmara Wasahua, who was charged only with inciting the riot.

Insult v. Incitement to Hatred

Article 156(A) is based on Law No. 1/1965, introduced by President Sukarno in 1964 and more commonly known as Indonesia's 1965 Blasphemy Law. Article 1 of Sukarno's law prohibits anyone from intentionally trying to gain public support for a religion or

participating in religious activities that might be considered a deviation of a recognized religion.

Sukarno enacted the law after critics said that *Pancasila* offered little protection for the Muslim majority.

The law officially recognized six religions – Islam (88 percent of the population of 238 million), Protestantism (6 percent) Catholicism (3 percent), Hinduism (2 percent) Buddhism and Confucianism (both less than 1 percent) – but orders the state not to interfere in the practice of other religions such as Ahmadiyah, currently numbering between 100,000 to 400,000 adherents. These figures are based on a census carried out in 2000; the results of a 2010 census have not yet been released.

In 2005, however, the MUI issued a *fatwa* or religious opinion against the Ahmadiyah and urged President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to ban the sect. Under pressure from hard-line groups and Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali, the government issued a Joint Ministerial Decree in 2008 forbidding Ahmadis to worship publicly on the grounds that they had deviated from true Islam – an act qualifying as blasphemy under the 1965 law.

The decree drove adherents underground and gave tacit permission for hardliners to attack Ahmadi communities throughout Indonesia with little fear of prosecution – culminating in the Cikeusik murders on Feb. 6.

The 1965 law, Article 156(A) of the penal code and the 2008 Ahmadiyah decree clearly contravene international law, which differentiates between simple religious insult and incitement to hostile and violent actions, according to an October 2010 Freedom House report entitled “Policing Belief.” Only incitement to hatred can be legitimately restricted, whereas freedom of expression includes the right to offensive or controversial religious comment.

International law also allows for freedom of belief, contradicted by Indonesia’s requirement that every citizen choose one of the six official religions and display it on his or her identity card. Atheism or adherence to an unrecognized religion is simply not an option, clashing with Article 29 of Indonesia’s constitution, which stipulates that all citizens may choose and practice their own religion.

State-Sanctioned Violence

In 2010 the FPI and a new group, the Bekasi Islamic Presidium, launched a campaign against “Christianization” in West Java, accusing local churches of aggressively trying to win Muslim converts – a behavior that could be labeled blasphemous under Article 156(A).

The hardliners pledged to set up a youth army in order to monitor and attack churches suspected of “Christianization.” While this act in itself could be regarded as “enmity” under Article 156(A), Yudhoyono simply appealed for tolerance and took no action against the organizers. (See www.compassdirect.org, “Indonesian Muslims Call for Halt to Christianization,” July 2, 2010.)

The charge of “Christianization” was also leveled against three Christian teachers in Indramayu, West Java in 2005, after they allowed Muslim children to attend a Sunday school program with spoken consent from their parents. Busloads of Muslim hardliners chanting “*Allahu Akhbar* [God is greater]” surrounded and filled the courtroom, threatening to carry the teachers out in coffins if they were not found guilty. The teachers served three years in jail. (See www.compassdirect.org, “Teachers Appeal ‘Christianization’ Conviction in Indonesia,” Sept. 23, 2005.)

The FPI has also used the term in multiple protests against unregistered churches in West Java. In response, the government in 2006 revised a Joint Ministerial Decree governing places of worship, making it virtually impossible for congregations to obtain a worship permit and leaving them vulnerable to attack.

Setara researcher Ismail Hasani has said he believes a new wave of radicalization is sweeping through the suburban regions of Jakarta, partly due to new legislation built on existing blasphemy laws, and partly due to the implied or actual support provided by police and government officials. For example, after West Java Gov. Ahmad Heryawan banned Ahmadiyah worship on March 3, by mid-April at least 400 Ahmadis had converted to Islam, according to the *Jakarta Globe*.

Officials in West Java arranged public conversion ceremonies for the Ahmadis, despite this practice being contrary to provisions in Article 156(A). In one ceremony, 13 Ahmadis in Bogor recited the Muslim confession of faith, accepting Muhammad as the last prophet. Their confession came just days after local residents repeatedly hurled rocks at their homes, the *Globe* reported.

Local official Eros Kusniawati, however, told reporters that the 13 had converted willingly.

"We'll hold another ceremony for the seven others who wanted to convert but couldn't attend today, and for the five others who still refuse to repent," he said.

Courts Bow to Mobs

Last September, a mob led by local FPI head Barda confronted members of the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church* (HKBP) in Ciketing, West Java, which has struggled for years to obtain legal permission to worship. During the clash, hardliners stabbed church elder Hasian Lumbantoruan Sihombing in the stomach and beat the Rev. Luspida Simanjuntak over the head with a wooden beam in a clear case of "enmity" against another religion.

Judges on March 10 awarded sentences of just five to seven months to the perpetrators.

In this climate of impunity, attacks on churches and religious sects have increased dramatically over the past three years. The Setara Institute of Peace and Democracy recorded 75 religious attacks in 2010, up from 18 in 2009 and 17 in 2008. In the same year, the Wahid Institute recorded 196 cases of religious violence, an increase of almost 50 percent from 2009, while the Moderate Muslim Society recorded 81 cases, an increase of more than 30 percent from 2009.

A significant percentage of these attacks were against Christian churches, with others directed against the Ahmadiyah, but neither Christians nor Ahmadis have invoked the "enmity" clause in Article 156(A).

"The FPI have established fear in so many hearts, including the courts and the government, that we all feel it would be less troubling to just 'let it go,'" a local Christian leader who requested anonymity told *Compass*. "Also, this is Indonesia – justice depends on who is bringing someone to court and who they know. And in religious cases, the radicals pressure the judges and let them know when they're not happy with a verdict."

In practice, he concluded, the blasphemy law only works for the benefit of Muslims in Indonesia.

"There are many Christian lawyers," one such lawyer confirmed to *Compass* on condition of anonymity, "but many don't defend Christians out of fear, because they know it's a Muslim country."

While not all Muslims support the hardliners' agenda, a September 2010 survey by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society found that among 1,200 randomly sampled Muslim men and women, 57 percent were against the construction of church buildings and other non-Muslim places of worship – the highest rate the center has recorded since 2001.

With its history of *Pancasila*, Indonesia is still generally considered a moderately Islamic country even as radical elements gain force, and one source said the blasphemy law would be invoked more often were it not for a general sense that the courts and officials are corrupt and/or ineffective. Some observers believe groups like the FPI and the Bekasi Islamic Presidium have gained momentum by protecting and promoting Islamic interests in a way that government officials will not.

Furthermore, the blasphemy laws are not often invoked due to a general impression that prisons are full enough.

"Everyone knows that our prisons are overflowing," the anonymous source said. "Why put more people into these prisons with longer sentences? That's why a murderer can sometimes get away with a sentence of less than 10 years, and get out on parole after six years on good behavior."

Interestingly, while the Christians found guilty under Article 156(A) were sentenced to five years and one year, Muslims who displayed "enmity" were generally charged with misdemeanors and sentenced to six or seven months despite causing physical harm.

Blasphemy Laws Upheld

In October 2009, the Advocacy Alliance for Freedom of Religion, a coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations and activists, asked Indonesia's Constitutional Court to review and repeal the 1965 Blasphemy Law and Article 156(A) of the penal code, citing violations of the constitutional rights of freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

FPI members staged loud demonstrations outside the hearing, while extremists inside the courtroom shouted insults at speakers arguing for the repeal, the *Jakarta Globe* reported. Although regarded as moderate, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's two largest Muslim organizations, also opposed the review, as did Religious Affairs Minister Surhadharma Ali, who insisted that the law was needed to "maintain social harmony and prevent an explosion of new religions," according to the *Globe*.

Ali in fact met with leaders of the FPI and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia – an organization supporting global Islamic rule – in February 2010 to discuss concerns about the review, according to *The Jakarta Post*.

The court upheld both laws in April 2010, echoing Ali's claims that the laws were necessary to maintain public order.

Following the violence in February, however, Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) Deputy Chairman Choirul Anam told the *Jakarta Globe* that HRWG would appeal for a second review on the grounds that "attacks on religious minorities have increased and continue to rise." He also pointed out that some judges had referred to the Quran during the hearing, proving unacceptable bias in a secular court.

"The next step will be to push the government and the legislature to draft a law on religious freedom, not religious harmony as has been discussed until now," Anam said.

Fears of Indonesia's Ahmadiyah sect

By Kate McGeown

BBC (18.04.2011) / HRWF (19.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Bogor, Indonesia - In the Indonesian city of Bogor, members of a small Islamic sect called the Ahmadiyah tried to ignore the police patrol car parked opposite their mosque as they walked to Friday prayers.

Peering in through the window, I could see them kneeling, facing Mecca, listening to a sermon.

But at any slight noise, several heads turned round nervously.

The Ahmadiyah are afraid and it is obvious why. Hardline Islamic groups want the sect to be banned - they say it deviates from the tenets of Islam, and therefore has no place in Indonesian society.

Over the past few months these hardliners have become increasingly vocal in their demands - holding rallies in central Jakarta and airing their views in the media.

But some have taken it even further. In February, a violent mob bludgeoned three Ahmadis to death. Since then, houses and mosques have been attacked and protesters have vowed to escalate the violence if they do not get their way.

And it is not just hardliners who want the Ahmadiyah disbanded.

In TV talk-shows and internet chat-rooms, it is obvious that an increasing number of Indonesians, while not condoning the violence, would like to see an end to the Ahmadiyah in their country.

One man we spoke to, who lived opposite the Ahmadis' mosque in Bogor, said he thought it would be better if they just went away. Even the local authorities are making life difficult for them.

In common with some other provinces, officials in West Java - which includes the city of Bogor - have recently issued a new set of decrees restricting the Ahmadiyah's activities.

The Ahmadiyah are not allowed to promote any of their activities, or convert anyone to their faith. They are also being encouraged to attend meetings to re-integrate themselves into mainstream Islam.

Low profile

So what have the Ahmadiyah done that is causing so much offence?

When I watched their prayers through the window, there did not appear to be any obvious differences between the Ahmadis and the mainstream Sunni Muslims who make up the majority of the Indonesian population.

The men were modestly dressed, and the women - confined to the balcony - wore the hijab. The format seemed virtually identical to Islamic prayers I have seen in other mosques.

Afterwards, when I spoke to Muhammad Harris, the local Ahmadiyah leader, he agreed that his faith was actually very similar to that of his Sunni neighbours.

"The prophet Muhammad is the last prophet - there is no other prophet after him," he said.

"But unlike others Muslims, we believe our founder was a loyal disciple who was chosen to continue the teaching of Islam that came through Muhammad."

Hardline Islamic groups, though, insist the Ahmadiyah faith disputes that Muhammad was the last prophet, and is therefore nothing short of blasphemy - an offence against Islam and a violation of Indonesian law.

And Mohammad Harris is suffering for it.

There used to be a sign outside his mosque saying it belonged to the Ahmadiyah, but that has been taken down now, after officials asked for it to be removed.

People he knows have had to flee their homes after being threatened, and having their mosques and homes attacked.

His own mosque has not been affected, but given the presence of the police patrol outside the building - one plain-clothed officer was even inside, mingling with the congregation - it is obvious that it might be a target.

'Took an oath'

While local authorities have been announcing decrees against the sect, the national government has so far shied away from making any definite pronouncements against the Ahmadiyah.

After all, although Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country, it has a secular constitution - including the right to freedom of religious expression.

Nasarudin Umar, the religious ministry's director general for Islamic guidance, said he wanted to explore other measures before banning the Ahmadiyah.

"We're asking Islamic groups, clerics and experts to give comprehensive guidance to both Ahmadiyah members and mainstream Muslims. We believe that the more they understand their religion, the more co-operative they'll be.

"In terms of whether the Ahmadiyah should be banned, we're still studying whether it will be the best."

Other officials, though - including the religious affairs minister Suryadharma Ali - have already decided that the sect should be disbanded.

For human rights groups, this is a very worrying sign. In the past, Indonesia has often been praised for its religious tolerance, allowing many different faiths to live together side by side.

Poengky Indarti, executive director of the rights group Imparsial, said that if the government decided to ban the Ahmadiyah, other minority groups might meet the same fate.

"In the near future I think that it's also dangerous for the Shia groups here in Indonesia, because many Indonesians are majority Sunni - I'm afraid this will become a clash between Islam versus Islam," she said.

But whatever the government tries to do to limit the Ahmadiyah, the one thing it will not be able to do is convert the faithful, Muhammad Harris among them.

"God willing I'll always be an Ahmadiyah," he said. "I took an oath to follow it and I'm going to stick to it."

Ahmadi gets 9 months in prison

The Jakarta Post (19.04.2011) / HRWF (19.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Bogor, Indonesia - A devotee of the religious sect Ahmadiyah, Ahmad Nuryamin, has been sentenced to nine months in prison for attacking a fellow resident of Cisalada, Bogor, West Java.

Nuryamin was found guilty by a panel of judges at Cibinong District Court of stabbing Rendy Apriyansah, who had been part of a mob that had previously attacked the Ahmadiyah compound in Cisalada.

Nuryamin said in his defense statement that he had been protecting himself.

Nuryamin's defense team said their client would appeal the decision.

The stabbing incident prompted a mob attack on the Ahmadiyah compound, in which a mosque and houses in the neighborhood were torched.

Supporters of Rendy said the defendant should have been given a harsher punishment.

"It should have been nine years instead of nine months," Cisalada local Jubaedah said as quoted by tempointeraktif.com.

Ahmadi leaders call for pluralistic and tolerant

By Mathias Hariyadi

AsiaNews (19.03.2011) / HRWF (22.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia needs "people with a strong sense of State", capable of maintaining a "strong leadership" who have "a long term vision" to promote a pluralistic and civil society "in the spirit of" tolerance of others, and especially minorities. " So two Ahmadi leaders tell AsiaNews, a sect that is considered heretical in many Islamic countries because it does not recognize Muhammad as the last prophet. Meanwhile, the defence ministry denies there is a campaign - initiated by a fringe of the army and police - to force "infidels" to "convert to the original and pure Islam." However, the government's statements do not suffice to restore a climate of peace and security in civil society.

An Ahmadi leader in Jakarta, speaking on the condition of anonymity, comments on the latest rumours that the government is in favour of banning the sect. "I personally believe that the same Minister Djoko Suyanto [responsible for internal security] is opposed to the idea of banning any religious belief. He is opposed to outlawing Ahmadis". In provinces that are favourable, he explains, local leaders do not have the legal authority to target groups or religious movements. "Behaviour contrary to the teachings of Islam or the doctrine can be banned - says the source from Jakarta - not a religious group that promotes a certain type of 'faith'."

AsiaNews also spoke to a second Ahmadi leader, a native of Central Java. He, too, on the guarantee of anonymity for fear of retaliation, points out that the Ahmadis practice the spirit of love and tolerance taught by the Prophet Muhammad. "Love for all - said the leader of the sect - and hatred towards no-one." Reaffirming that the provincial and district officials have no powers to ban religious movements, the Ahmadi leader instead calls for "security for religious minorities, affected by the violence promoted by other groups."

On the political front, meanwhile, attempts are being made to defuse the controversy that has erupted around rumours of "proselytizing" in the army and police. A few days ago in Bogor, some members of the military and security forces launched a secret campaign on Ahmadis, inviting them to "convert" to the pure and original Islam. At a Parliament meeting, Defence Minister Purnomo Yusgiantoro denied the existence of the so-called "operation Sajadah" - the Arabic for prayer, ed - and said the military are not "proselytizing."

To date, only three provinces in Indonesia have declared the Ahmadi sect lawful: Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Jambi. Most provinces have not espoused themselves on the issue, while in other areas of West Java, including Bogor and Kuningan, incidents "of violence" against the faithful are frequent, with raids and targeted attacks. Aan Ashore, an activist of Islamic Anti-Discrimination Network (JIAD) - a movement based in Surabaya, East Java - stressed that "we must safeguard the supreme value of human rights" in any government intervention that deals with Ahmadi question.

Revoke provincial decrees to ban a faith

Religious Affairs Minister should be removed for promoting discrimination

Human Rights Watch (15.03.2011) / HRWF (15.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia should void decrees recently adopted by two provinces that ban activities by the Ahmadiyah religious community, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch repeated its call for the president to revoke the national anti-Ahmadiyah 2008 decree, which bars public propagation of the Ahmadiyah faith.

On February 28, 2011, the provincial government in East Java, which has a population of 37 million, banned the activities of the Ahmadiyah community, outlawing the display of their mosque and school signs and the use of "electronic media" to extend their teachings. On March 3, the government in West Java, Indonesia's most populous province, with 43 million people, also banned the Ahmadiyahs' activities. Both provincial governments based their laws on the June 2008 national decree by the Yudhoyono administration, violations of which can result in prison sentences of up to five years. Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia, the religious group's leadership, reports that 16 provinces and regencies in Indonesia have issued anti-Ahmadiyah decrees since 2006.

"Indonesian national and provincial authorities risk being complicit in anti-Ahmadiyah violence by stripping this religious community of their basic rights," said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "These decrees place officials on the side of militants who increasingly have been carrying out attacks on the Ahmadiyah."

The Ahmadiyah movement was founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The Ahmadiyah identify themselves as Muslims but differ with other Muslims as to whether Muhammad was the final monotheist prophet. As a result, some other Muslims perceive the Ahmadiyah as heretics. Approximately 300,000 Indonesians follow the faith.

On February 6, a mob of 1,500 people attacked 21 Ahmadiyah members in Cikeusik, a village in the Banten province in western Java, killing three people and seriously wounding five others. About 30 police officers were present but did little to stop the attack. A videographer recorded the brutality, and the video was later posted by various individuals and organizations on YouTube. Widespread national and international condemnation of the attack ultimately prompted the Indonesian police to investigate the attack and arrest 12 suspects.

Additional attacks on Ahmadiyah communities soon followed. On March 11, villagers attacked four Ahmadiyah houses in Ciareuteun village, in Bogor. The police took no action against the assailants but arrested and questioned seven Ahmadiyah members and forced them to sign a document to renounce their faith. On March 13, in the nearby Bogor village of Cimanggu, assailants attacked four Ahmadiyah houses, causing the residents to flee. Local police later assigned guards around the Ahmadiyah properties in Cimanggu.

Since the February 6 attack, Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali has repeatedly urged the cabinet to issue a total ban on the Ahmadiyah, claiming justification in a 2005 fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulemas' Council and the 2008 national anti-Ahmadiyah decree. Ali has also recommended that the government declare the Ahmadiyah faith a new religion that is not permitted to make use of Islamic symbols such as the Quran, its rituals, and the Prophet Mohammed. He also has frequently urged Indonesia to follow the "Pakistan road," to ban and criminalize Ahmadiyah activities.

"Repeated calls by Religious Affairs Minister Suryadharma Ali to ban the Ahmadiyah fan the flames of violence against the group," Robertson said. "President Yudhoyono should signal that such discrimination has no place in a society that promotes religious tolerance and remove Suryadharma Ali from his post."

At least one senior Indonesian military officer has similarly called for restrictions on the rights of Ahmadiyah. On March 9 the West Java military commander, Major General Moeldoko, openly asked his soldiers in Bandung to support banning the Ahmadiyah and urged Muslims "to invade" and "to occupy" Ahmadiyah mosques. Soldiers under his command and police officers went to an Ahmadiyah mosque in Bandung during Friday prayers on March 11 and demanded that the Ahmadiyah imam, Ahmad Sulaeman, be replaced by Asep Zaenal Ausof of the Indonesian Ulemas' Council's Bandung branch.

"Indonesia's top army commander, General George Toisuta, should order all officers to respect the rights of all religious communities and take immediate action against those harassing the Ahmadiyah or other faiths," Robertson said.

Indonesian law facilitates discrimination against the Ahmadiyah. The June 2008 decree, the "Joint Ministerial Decree on Warning and Ordering the Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia and Others," requires the Ahmadiyah to "stop spreading interpretations and activities that deviate from the principal teachings of Islam," including "spreading the belief that there is another prophet with his own teachings after Prophet Muhammad." Human Rights Watch has consistently called for the government to rescind this decree, as it violates the right to freedom of religion. At the time the decree was signed, officials said it was necessary to help stop further violence.

Since the national anti-Ahmadiyah decree was issued, violence against the Ahmadiyah community has increased dramatically. The Setara Institute, a respected nongovernmental organization that monitors religious freedom in Indonesia, recorded a rise from three attacks in 2006 to 50 in 2010.

Prohibiting the Ahmadiyah from practicing their religion is in violation of Indonesia's

obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Indonesia in 2006, which protects the right to freedom of religion and to engage in religious practice "either individually or in community with others and in public or private." The treaty also protects the rights of minorities "to profess and practice their own religion." It provides that the protections in the treaty shall extend throughout a state "without any limitations or exceptions," thus obliging provincial and other local governments to abide by its provisions.

Human Rights Watch urged concerned countries to call on the Indonesian government to protect the rights of religious minorities in the country. Specifically, foreign embassies in Jakarta should raise their concerns and seek reforms not only in contacts with national officials, such as Yudhoyono and Home Affairs Minister Gamawan Fauzi, but with provincial leaders, including the West Java governor, Ahmad Heryawan, and the East Java governor, Soekarwo.

"Provincial officials are no less responsible than their counterparts in Jakarta for ensuring that the rights of their populations are fully protected" Robertson said.

To read the February 2011 Human Rights Watch news release, "Indonesia: Protect Ahmadiyah Community From Violence," please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/02/02/indonesia-protect-ahmadiyah-community-violence>

To read the November 2010 Human Rights Watch letter to President Yudhoyono regarding the Religious Affairs Minister's comments on the banning of the Ahmadiyah, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/11/03/indonesia-guarantee-freedom-religion-and-stop-attacks-ahmadiyah>

To read the April 2010 Human Rights Watch news release on Indonesia's blasphemy law, "Court Ruling a Setback for Religious Freedom," please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/04/19/indonesia-court-ruling-setback-religious-freedom>

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on Indonesia, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/asia/indonesia>

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Timeline of Ahmadiyah Banning

2011

South Sulawesi province (March 3, 2011)

West Java province (March 3, 2011)

Bogor regency (March 3, 2011)

Banten province (March 2, 2011)

Banjarmasin city (March 1, 2011)

Palu city (February 2011)

East Java province (February 28, 2011)

Samarinda city (February 26, 2011)

Pandeglang regency (February 21, 2011)

South Sumatra province (February 8, 2011)

2010

Pekanbaru city (November 16, 2010)

Before 2010

Sukabumi regency (2006)

Cianjur regency (2005)

Garut regency (2005)

Kuningan regency (2002)

East Lombok regency (1983)

Light sentences for attack on Christians in Indonesia condemned

Prosecutors' refusal to file felony charges said to encourage more violence

By Victor Raqual

Compass Direct News (10.03.2011) / HRWF (14.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Human rights and Christian leaders said a West Java court's light sentence for Islamic extremists who injured a church pastor and an elder will encourage more violence and religious intolerance.

After those involved in the Sept. 12, 2010 clubbing of the Rev. Luspida Simanjuntak and the stabbing of elder Hasian Lumbantoran Sihombing of the Batak Christian Protestant Church (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, or HKBP) in Ciketing received sentences of only five to seven months, the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace released a statement asserting that the judges' panel was acting under pressure from Muslim extremists.

"The public will think that violence, intolerance, and obstruction of worship are part of their religious worship and duties," the institute stated regarding the Feb. 24 sentences.

After prosecutors decided to file minor charges citing "insufficient evidence" for assault charges, the judges issued verdicts that have injured people's sense of justice, and the light sentences set a "rotten" precedent for strengthening the rule of law in Indonesia, according to the institute.

"Specifically, the verdict neither is a deterrent nor does it educate the public that violent acts in the name of religion are serious matters," according to the Setara statement.

Saor Siagian, attorney for the church, told Compass that the facts of the case had shown that the assailants should have been charged with joint assault under Section 170 of Indonesia's penal code, which could have resulted in sentences of five to nine years. Instead, prosecutors opted to charge them only with maltreatment under Section 351.

The alleged planner of the attack, Murhali Barda, head of the Bekasi chapter of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), received a sentence of only five months and 15 days for "disorderly conduct" (Section 335) even though he should have been prosecuted for incitement and joint assault, Siagian said.

"The trial brought to light facts that pointed toward incitement by Murhali Barda via Facebook, text messages, and orders to the defendants to attack the congregation of HKBP on Sept. 12, 2010 at Ciketing," said Siagian. "If he had been charged with Section 170 he would have been facing a five-to-nine-year sentence, and Section 160 [incitement] carries a six-year sentence. These are both felonies."

Judges of the State Court in Bekasi, West Java handed down a seven-month sentence to Adji Ahmad Faisal, who stabbed church elder Sihombing; the prosecutor had asked for sentence of 10 months. Ade Firman, who clubbed Pastor Simanjuntak hard enough to send her to the hospital for treatment, was given a six-month sentence; prosecutors had requested an eight-month sentence. Two under-age defendants were found guilty and turned over to their parents.

Along with Barda of the FPI, eight other defendants received sentences of five months and 15 days: Ismail, Dede Tri Sutrisna, Panca Rano, Khaerul Anwar, Nunu Nurhadi, Roy Karyadi, Kiki Nurdiansyah, Suprianto and one identified only as Ismail; prosecutors had asked for six-month sentences.

During the trial, 100 members of the FPI demonstrated in front of the courthouse, demanding that Barda and the others be immediately released. As each sentence was read out, the demonstrators shouted "*Allahu Akbar* [God is greater]."

The lawyer for Barda, Shalih Mangara Sitompul, said the verdicts brought about peace between both parties. His client was found guilty of incidents that took place on Aug. 1 and 8, 2010, he said, questioning why the Sept. 12 attack became the basis for criminal prosecution as Barda did not even encounter Pastor Simanjuntak on that date.

Sitompul said he would appeal the verdict.

Pastor Simanjuntak said the light sentences showed that the state was unable to fully enforce the law.

"This country is more afraid of the masses than standing for justice," she said. "That's what happened in the state court in Bekasi. With heavy hearts we accept the verdict."

The stabbing victim, Sihombing, said that he was not surprised by the light sentences.

"The verdicts were not just, but I don't know what else to do," he said. "I've just got to accept things."

Indonesia is a country that follows the rule of law, he said, and therefore it is not right to give a light sentence for stabbing.

"Even so, as a Christian and elder of the congregation, I have forgiven the person who attacked me," he said.

Attorney Siagian said the sentences will fail to act as a deterrent.

"It passively encourages future violence in the name of religion by radical groups against minorities – not only against the HKBP church, but also against citizens in other areas," he said. "Also, the verdict shows that the judge sides with those who committed violent acts in the name of religion, and it is a threat to pluralism and diversity in Indonesia."

Religious violence result of authorities consent in past cases

AHRC (08.02.2011) / HRWF (07.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) urges a full investigation into the killings of at least three followers of the Ahamadiyah Islamic minority sect that occurred on Sunday February 6, 2011 in Umbulan village in Banten. As incidents of religious violence have been repeated

in the last year, the AHRC cannot help but notice the lack of police action to prevent violence against religious minorities.

The aggression against the Ahamadiyah is justified by the local residents based on the Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI) declaration that labelled the Ahamadiyah as heretic. However, it is the duty of the police to protect the rights of every person to exercise their freedom of religion as a human right and a fundamental right in Indonesia. In past attacks and mob violence against religious minorities the police often claimed not have had enough personnel in the place to avoid the eruption of violence. Indonesia saw a series of attacks including violence against members of religious minorities and burning of places of worship.

"The police can no longer hide behind the claim not being able to stop such violence" Wong Kai Shing, the Executive Director of the AHRC said. Such incidents do not typically come as a surprise and the police is often aware of such clashes ahead.

The negligence of the authorities, which in many cases amounts to consent to such violence, has resulted in a serious deterioration of the situation of religious freedom and has encouraged agitators to take more drastic measures of violence against minorities.

The 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree against promoting activities by the Ahamadyas has labelled them as a target and presents a major set-back for religious freedom and plurality in Indonesia.

Violence broke out in Temanggung Central Java in a blasphemy trial against Antonious Richmond Bawengan. After prosecutors demanded a five year prison sentence for the blasphemy charge a mob of fundamentalist Muslims demanded the death penalty, burned churches and cars and attacked the court room. The situation in Temanggung is reportedly chaotic.

The AHRC sees the increasing use of extreme violence in cases of fundamentalist religious views as a result of the inaction of the authorities in the last years in similar cases and blatant negligence by the government against fundamental rights.

The AHRC demands an impartial investigation into all cases of religious violence and expects the government of Indonesia and the police to take a strong stance against any religious intolerance. Democracy is not the rule of majorities over minorities but must be based on the uncompromised protection of fundamental rights including the freedom of religion.

Indonesia demands probe into attack on Muslim sect

By Ali Kotarumalos

AP (07.02.2011) / HRWF (21.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia's president ordered an investigation Monday into an attack on members of a minority Muslim sect after a gruesome video emerged of a mob beating several victims to death with machetes, sticks and rocks.

About 1,500 people stormed a house in Banten province on Sunday to stop 20 Ahmadiyah followers from worshipping.

They killed three men and badly wounded six others, while destroying the house and setting fire to several cars and motorbikes.

Indonesia is a secular country and has a long history of religious tolerance, but in recent years a hard-line fringe has grown louder and the government - which relies on the support of Islamic parties in Parliament - has been accused of caving in to it.

The latest attacks on Ahmadiyah - which drew rare condemnation from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono - were captured on video and circulated widely on national television and the Internet.

The most disturbing clip, posted on YouTube, showed assailants repeatedly pounding two victims - who appeared to be dead - with heavy sticks.

A policeman came to the scene but his screams of "stop" were almost inaudible among dozens who shouted "Allahu Akbar" or God is Great.

The Ahmadiyah, thought to have 200,000 followers in Indonesia, are considered deviant by many Muslims and are banned in many Islamic countries because they believe that Muhammad was not the final prophet.

"I have ordered a comprehensive investigation to find out the real cause of the incident so that those guilty, or violating the law, can be penalized," Yudhoyono told a news conference.

He also called on security forces as well as local governments to be proactive in taking action against the instigators of such violence.

"Don't wait until the conflicts and clashes have already happened," Yudhoyono said.

Many attacks on religious minorities in recent years have been carried out by members of the Islamic Defenders Front.

The hardline group pressured local authorities late last year to shutter a Christian church located in a densely populated Muslim area, and assailants stabbed a Christian worshipper and beat a minister on the head with a wooden plank as they headed to prayers.

Thirteen members of the Islamic Defenders Front have gone on trial in the case, and state prosecutors on Monday sought a six-month prison term for Murhali Barda, a local group leader, for instigating the Sept. 13 attack.

The Setara Institute for Peace and Democracy, a human rights group, says attacks on religious freedom by hard-liners are steadily increasing.

It says in 2010 there were 64 incidents, ranging from physical abuse to preventing groups from performing prayers and burning houses of worship, up from 18 in 2009 and 17 in 2008.

Mob attacks 'heretic' Muslims, kills three

AP (06.02.2011) / HRWF (21.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Jakarta, Indonesia - A machete-wielding mob of Muslims on Sunday attacked the home of a minority sect leader in central Indonesia, killing three and wounding six others, police and witnesses said.

Local police chief Lt. Col. Alex Fauzy Rasyad said about 1,500 people - many with machetes, sticks and rocks - attacked about 20 members of the Ahmadiyah Muslim sect

who were visiting their leader in his house in Banten province on Indonesia's main island of Java.

He said the crowd demanded that the sect members stop their activities, but the request was rejected. As a result, the crowd stabbed to death at least three men, destroyed the house and set fire to their cars and motorbikes.

Six others were hospitalized, four with critical injuries.

The police were called, "but the attackers came faster," Rasyad said.

The attack was the latest targeting the Ahmadiyah sect in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation. Many Muslims see followers of Ahmadiyah as holding heretical beliefs.

Indonesia is a secular country with a long history of religious tolerance. But in recent years a hard-line fringe has grown louder and the government - which relies on the support of Islamic parties in Parliament - has been accused of caving in to it.

The Islamic Defenders Front pressured local authorities late last year to shutter a Christian church located in a densely populated Muslim area, and assailants stabbed Christian worshipper and beat a minister in the head with a wooden plank as they headed to prayers.

The Setara Institute for Peace and Democracy, a human rights group, says attacks on religious freedom by hard-liners are steadily increasing.

It says in 2010 there were 64 incidents, ranging from physical abuse to preventing groups from performing prayers and burning houses of worship, up from 18 in 2009 and 17 in 2008.

Ahmadiyah, believed to have 200,000 followers in Indonesia, is considered deviant by most Muslims and banned in many Islamic countries because of its belief that Muhammad was not the final prophet.

Indonesian blasphemy law sparks Muslim violence in Java

By Bruno Philip

Guardian (15.02.2011) / HRWF (14.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia has been shocked this month by two outbreaks of religious violence on the island of Java, involving Muslim fundamentalists who attacked members of the Muslim Ahmadiyya sect and, in a separate incident, three Christian churches.

On 8 February an angry mob condemned a court in Temanggung for its "lenient" sentence against a Christian convicted of blasphemy. Antonius Banwengan, 58, was arrested last year for handing out a Christian book and leaflets poking fun at some of the most sacred Islamic symbols. The five-year prison sentence for blasphemy, the maximum allowed under Indonesian law for this type of offence, was not enough for the crowd. "Kill him," chanted more than 1,000 demonstrators who attacked the building and police, threatening the judges and prosecutor, the accused and his counsel.

Muslims account for 80% of the country's total population of 230 million but the Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion. However, human rights organisations stress that violence against religious minorities has been on the rise.

The riots in Temanggung came two days after another outbreak of violence, also in Java. On 6 February about 1,000 extremists armed with stones and machetes attacked members of the Ahmadiyya community, a Muslim sect founded in India in the 19th century that does not recognise Mohammed as the last prophet and is considered heretical by orthodox Muslims.

Three people were killed and six others seriously injured. A video showing the attack prompted a public outcry. The next day President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said he was "deeply shocked" by the violence, which erupted just before the start of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Religious violence result of authorities consent in past cases

AHRC (08.02.2011) / HRWF (14.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Asian Human Rights Commission urges a full investigation into the killings of at least three followers of the Ahmadiyah Islamic minority sect that occurred on Sunday February 6, 2011 in Umbulan village in Banten. As incidents of religious violence have been repeated in the last year, the AHRC cannot help but notice the lack of police action to prevent violence against religious minorities. (archive photo, Ahmadiyya homes in Indonesia set on fire, source: Ahmadiyya Times)

The aggression against the Ahmadiyah is justified by the local residents based on the Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI) declaration that labelled the Ahmadiyah as heretic. However, it is the duty of the police to protect the rights of every person to exercise their freedom of religion as a human right and a fundamental right in Indonesia. In past attacks and mob violence against religious minorities the police often claimed not have had enough personnel in the place to avoid the eruption of violence. Indonesia saw a series of attacks including violence against members of religious minorities and burning of places of worship.

"The police can no longer hide behind the claim not being able to stop such violence" Wong Kai Shing, the Executive Director of the AHRC said. Such incidents do not typically come as a surprise and the police is often aware of such clashes ahead.

The negligence of the authorities, which in many cases amounts to consent to such violence, has resulted in a serious deterioration of the situation of religious freedom and has encouraged agitators to take more drastic measures of violence against minorities.

The 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree against promoting activities by the Ahmadiyahs has labelled them as a target and presents a major set-back for religious freedom and plurality in Indonesia.

Violence broke out in Temanggung Central Java in a blasphemy trial against Antonious Richmond Bawengan. After prosecutors demanded a five year prison sentence for the blasphemy charge a mob of fundamentalist Muslims demanded the death penalty, burned churches and cars and attacked the court room. The situation in Temanggung is reportedly chaotic.

The AHRC sees the increasing use of extreme violence in cases of fundamentalist religious views as a result of the inaction of the authorities in the last years in similar cases and blatant negligence by the government against fundamental rights.

The AHRC demands an impartial investigation into all cases of religious violence and expects the government of Indonesia and the police to take a strong stance against any religious intolerance. Democracy is not the rule of majorities over minorities but must be based on the uncompromised protection of fundamental rights including the freedom of religion.

Footage of deadly mob attack emerges

By Arlina Arshad

AFP (07.02.2011) / HRWF (07.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Disturbing video has emerged of a bloody religious mob attack in Indonesia that killed three members of a minority Muslim sect, showing extremists beating and stoning their victims to death.

The incident, involving more than 1000 Muslims who stormed a house in West Java yesterday to stop the minority Ahmadiyah Islamic sect from holding worship, has been condemned by the government and rights activists.

Footage of the attack - which came at the start of "interfaith harmony week" in the mainly Muslim country - shows police doing nothing as scores of Islamic fanatics go berserk with stones, knives and sticks.

Shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) and "kafir" (infidel), the mob brush aside a lone police officer and launch a sustained attack on the house, as a small group of Ahmadi try briefly to defend the property.

Defenceless and half-naked Ahmadi men are then shown being beaten and stoned to death in the mud outside the house. Their bodies are pelted with stones and desecrated as members of the mob laugh and take pictures.

Throughout the attack police are either absent or standing amid the mob doing nothing to intervene, with the exception of a lone police officer, who is seen attempting to stop people beating and stoning one of the dead men, but he is ignored.

National police spokesman Boy Rafli Amar said eight people are being questioned in relation to the violence but no one had been charged.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has instructed police to capture the perpetrators and "haul them to court if need be", his senior adviser, Daniel Sparingga, said.

"The president is deeply concerned and condemned the violence and said that the country must be firm in defending the constitution, that would never allow small groups to use religion to attack groups of different faiths," he said.

Ahmadiyah spokesman Zafrullah Ahmad Pontoh said the mob committed murder and appealed to the government for protection. Similar appeals have been ignored in the past.

"We're saddened because innocent people were killed. The mob committed murder and Islam never taught people to attack and kill," he said.

"We hope the government can provide us with protection so we can practise our faith in peace."

Indonesia's constitution explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and the country of some 240 million people, 80 per cent of whom are Muslim, has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

But a government decree adopted in 2008 under pressure from Islamic conservatives bans the Ahmadiyah sect from spreading its faith, which includes the belief that its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was the final Muslim prophet.

Orthodox Muslims hold that Mohammed was the last prophet of Islam.

The group, which claims hundreds of thousands of members in Indonesia and millions in South Asia, has been repeatedly targeted with violence by Islamic extremist organisations.

National Human Rights Commission chairman Idris Kasim said the incident was "embarrassing" as the police had made no effort to stop the mob.

"The police are biased and ignored their ultimate responsibility which is to protect the people," he said.

"The government has no right to make judgments on whether a religion is heretical or not. Its job is to protect the people."

The violence comes less than three months after US President Barack Obama visited Indonesia and praised its "spirit of religious tolerance" as an "example to the world".

Police, Islamists put up obstacles to worship

Church services over Christmas season blocked; property seized

By Victor Raqual

Compass Direct (10.01.2011) / HRWF (11.01.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Government officials in West Java Province blocked one church from worshipping, and Islamic groups pressured authorities to seize the property of another during the Christmas season.

The Bogor Regency Administrative Leadership Council tried unsuccessfully to forbid the Gereja Kristen Indonesia (Indonesian Christian Church, or GKI) in Bogor's Taman Yasmin area from holding a Dec. 25 Christmas service, but authorities did block it from its regular Sunday service on Dec. 26. In Rancaekek, Bandung, Islamic demonstrators on Dec. 19 got police to remove items from a Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) church building that had already been sealed.

In Bogor, GKI Yasmin spokesperson Bona Sigalingging said police telephoned church leaders to forbid Christmas services that were to begin at 7 p.m. on Dec. 25.

"At that time the leaders rejected the police order," Sigalingging told Compass.

Church leaders went to a strip of land in front of the GKI Yasmin building, which the Bogor city government has sealed, to set up a rented tent for the Christmas service. Local police arrived and ordered that the service be cancelled, but again church leaders refused, Sigalingging said.

They continued setting up the tent and arranging benches, and at about 5:30 p.m., 10 women wearing Muslim head coverings (hijabs) arrived to demonstrate against the Christmas service. Male demonstrators in Muslim clothing joined the demonstration at 7 p.m., and protestors from the Islamic People's Forum (FUI) pressured police to stop the service.

At 8 p.m., the Christmas prayer and reflection service began, with demonstrators screaming, "Allahu akbar [God is greater]!" and "Break it up!" They also yelled, "Arrest the provocateurs," Sigalinging said.

Though upset, the congregation continued to worship, he said. As they sang "Silent Night" and lit candles, the demonstrators shouted all the louder, moving toward the worshippers. They came within three meters of the worshippers before police were finally able to restrain them.

The congregation continued in solemn prayer and song, with the mob yelling until the service finished at 9 p.m.

Church leaders were meeting at 12:45 a.m. to plan the next morning's 8 a.m. worship service when a member of the legal team received a phone call asking them to meet with members of the army and intelligence services, as well as with Bogor city and West Java police. At the meeting, a soldier speaking for the Bogor municipality requested that the GKI cancel Sunday morning worship scheduled for Dec. 26, Sigalinging said.

"The soldier also spoke about the growing issue of defamation of religion [Islam defaming Christianity], and how this would be very embarrassing if the issue spread," Sigalinging said. "Because of this, he asked the church to cancel services."

Church leaders rejected the request, saying that the way to resolve religious defamation problems was to enforce the law and stand firm against intolerance and intimidation, Sigalinging said.

"They could also obey the decision of the State Administrative Court, which had found that the church had a legal building permit and had the right to worship even by the roadside," said Sigalinging.

The roadside services marked a retreat from the church legal position, he said, as the administrative court had ruled that the church could worship in its building.

"Although the City of Bogor had requested a rehearing, this is no reason to delay the execution of the decision according to law 14/1985," he said.

Sigalinging said that the decision of the administrative court had the force of law, and that the GKI Yasmin congregation should have been allowed to worship in its building. The court had found that the building permit was legally obtained and that the Bogor municipal government could not revoke the permit. The court had ordered Bogor to rescind the revocation order.

The meeting finished at 1:30 a.m., with the church firmly committed to holding Sunday worship on Dec. 26. Bogor officials responded by sending police to the worship site on Abdullah bin Nuh Street in Yasmin Park; from early morning on, the road was barricaded at both ends.

As a show of force, water canon trucks appeared.

"The police excused their action by saying that it was designed to stop troublemakers who might try to use religion as a mask," Sigalingging said. "These kinds of people had been there since morning. However, such excuses were not accepted by the congregation. The congregation could not get close to their church, and they were even asked about their permission to worship."

As a result, the congregation was not able to worship; they did pray in the middle of the street, he said.

In a press conference at the Wahid Institute protesting the discrimination, GKI Yasmin leaders along with representatives of the Indonesian Fellowship of Churches said that they were concerned.

"Discrimination is becoming systemic and spreading, yet it is ignored by the nation in many places," Sigalingging said in a statement he read that was also signed by Pastor Ujang Tanusaputra and Pastor Esakatri Parahita.

An interfaith group that has been assisting the GKI church issued a three-point appeal: cease all slander and obstructions to finishing construction of the GKI church building, which was legally underway, and allow the congregation to worship in it; the state must be firmer in dealing with intolerant groups that terrorize those of a different faith; and strengthen the constitution, Pancasila (the state philosophy that includes belief in one God without specifying any particular religion) and the practice of unity in diversity (Bhineka Tunggal Ika).

The executive secretary for research and communication for the Fellowship of Churches in Indonesia, the Rev. Henry Lokra, said at the press conference that contrary to the claims of protestors, no illegal worship exists in the nation.

"Because of this, when the government apparatus is passive, it is violating the constitution," Lokra said. "In the case of GKI Yasmin, passivity has led to the blocking of those who wish to worship rather than blocking those who demonstrate. This is a basic human rights violation."

Organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the FUI and the Islamic Reform Movement (Garis) "have absolutely no constitutional right to forbid the building of a place of worship, because the forbidding of permission for a place of worship is the right of the government," he said.

Chairul Anam of the Human Rights Working Group commented that the incident was a violation of the constitution and the law by the Bogor municipal government, which sealed the church even though the GKI had won decisions in the case all the way to the Supreme Court.

"When Bogor asked for an appeal, the Supreme Court refused," Anam said.

An appeal in any legal system does not nullify a previous decision, said Anam. "Because of this [principle], the Supreme Court decision regarding GKI Yasmin cannot be revoked," he said.

The central government should sanction or otherwise take strong actions against those in the Bogor city government who disobeyed the law and the constitution by sealing the church building, he said.

Another problem, Anam said, was the extreme measures police took, using mobile barricades and water cannons to control 50 demonstrators.

"What the police did was actually terrorizing the congregation," he said, adding that the measures prevented GKI members from getting to their church site. "The police were supposed to neutralize the 50 demonstrators that were propagandizing, instead of blockading the congregation from worship."

The state has given in to a small gang of Muslim thugs, "and this small gang of Muslims does not represent the Indonesian Islamic community," he said, adding that the Bogor city government should quickly remove the seal. "The police must act decisively and not make those who disobey the law heroes."

The head of the Legal Advocacy and Human Rights Association of Indonesia, Hendrik Sirait, said that politics played a role in the GKI Yamin church's problems. A Bogor police official, Sirait said, indicated that obstacles to the church's worship resulted from a pact between the Bogor government and a political party.

"The police have become intimidators rather than peace officers," he said.

Church Property Seized

In Rancaekek, Bandung, Islamic protestors occupying the front part of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan HKBP church premises on Dec. 19 clamored for police to remove property from the building; eventually authorities removed the pews and other items.

The local government had already sealed the building, but demonstrators from the hard-line Muslim Intellectuals Gathering Forum of Rancaekek arrived at 4 a.m. on Dec. 19 calling for its belongings to be removed, sources said.

The Rev. Badia Hutagalung said he was sleeping in the rented house adjacent to the place of worship when he saw 15 demonstrators locking the property fence and calling for him to wake up and leave the premises.

"Why do you live in a place that has been sealed?" asked one in the crowd when Hutagalung came out. He explained to the protestor that the district head had unsealed his home when he realized it had nothing to do with the church worship.

At 7 a.m., when the mob forced the pastor to leave the house, he climbed over the 1.5-meter fence – the crowd had glued shut the lock – and called one of the elders, Jawadi Hutapea. He arrived, and Hutagalung also called police and the district head to ask them to come immediately. Three policemen arrived but only watched the mob from a distance, he said.

When Compass arrived at 8:30 a.m., nearly 100 protestors were occupying property in front of the fence and shouting for the local government remove all property inside.

The district head of Rancaekek, Mema Nurjana, arrived at 9 a.m. but was unable to calm the protestors. The district head, police chief, representatives from the Police Civil Service (Satpol PP) and the Muslim Intellectuals Gathering Forum held a discussion in the middle of the crowd. Authorities promised to remove the items later, but the crowd demanded it be done immediately.

Local officials ultimately brought three cars to take property out of the place of worship, and at 10:30 a.m. the pews along with other items were seized.

The chairman of the Bandung Muslim Intellectuals Gathering Forum, Abu Sofyan, told reporters that the HKBP Rancaekek church should have been closed since 2006. A lawyer for the HKBP Rancaekek church, Usman Poncho Silitonga, said he did not understand why demonstrations were continuing after the church and others had been sealed.

"There's no rule that allows the removal of property from the the HKBP church," he said.

The sealing by the local government was illegal, a church representative said, because it was not given public notice.
