

# Countering extremism in Indonesia and beyond

Religious Freedom Institute (<https://bit.ly/2KP2a10>) – Between May 8 and May 14, 2018 Indonesia was hit by a wave of ISIS terrorist attacks, including bombings carried out by families—fathers, mothers, and children together. The principal targets were churches and police stations, including the headquarters of the paramilitary Police Mobile Brigade (which is also where Ahok, the former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian, is serving a sentence for blasphemy). In the wave of attacks, thirteen terrorists and fourteen others were killed, and more than 40 were injured.

The Indonesian government's security forces responded strongly. There were some early arrests and then, on May 31, in a series of raids, anti-terrorist squads arrested 41 terror suspects and killed 4 others. These raids came less than a week after the May 25 passage of a new anti-terrorism law that criminalized overseas terror attacks and allowed for longer detention of suspects. The bill had been languishing in parliament for two years amid controversies over how strict it should be and how to define terrorism, but this the wave of deadly suicide attacks persuaded lawmakers the bill should be passed.

But a much more low-key event may signal broader changes in how Indonesia is approaching its effort to combat extremism.

On May 31, Indonesian President Joko Widodo appointed Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (Pak Yahya) as a member of the Presidential Advisory Council. Pak Yahya is from one of Indonesia's most distinguished Muslim families, is the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, and is the head of Gerkan Pemuda Ansor (ANSOR), NU's young-adult wing, which

has some 5 million members. He is also among the Muslim world's most incisive and outspoken reformers.

NU has long been engaged in ideological combat with Islamist extremism. In May 2017, Anzor called together more than 300 international religious scholars to consider the "obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law" that call for "perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam." This gathering issued the Anzor "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," that built on the May 16, 2016, NU-hosted International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL).

The "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," is far more self-critical than declarations that have come from the Middle East. It argues that there are elements within classical Islam that are problematic and need to be changed. At the press conference announcing the Declaration, Anzor Chairman Yaqut Qoumas stated "It is false and counterproductive to claim that the actions of al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam."

Pak Yahya reemphasized these themes and expressed them in an even more radical fashion in a July 18, 2017, address to the Council of the European Union Terrorism Working Party, many of whose members would have accused the speaker of Islamophobia if he had been anyone else. He stressed:

"Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam."

"Within the classical tradition, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is assumed to be one of segregation

and enmity.”

“Why, no matter how many [terrorists] we kill or put in jail, new recruits are always coming to join them? Here is the fact: the problem lies within Islam itself. Jihadist doctrine, goals and strategy can be readily traced to specific elements of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice, including those portions of fiqh-classical Islamic law or shari‘ah-that enjoin Islamic supremacy.”

While NU as a whole has not endorsed the “Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,” Pak Yahya told me they are discussing it and he has suffered little criticism for his statements. The arguments that he and Anzor are making are radical, and crucial in the battle with extremism. And they are gaining increasing attention in Indonesia and around the world.

On May 17, 2018, Pak Yahya met with Vice President Pence for the second time. And the fact that Indonesian President Jokowi has now appointed him to his Advisory Council sends a strong signal about Jokowi’s own attitudes.

---

Paul Marshall is Wilson Professor of Religious Freedom at Baylor University, Senior Fellow of the Religious Freedom Institute and member of the South and Southeast Asia (SSEA) Action Team, and Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom

---

**INDONESIA: Christian’s  
whipping under sharia law in**

# Aceh

World Watch Monitor (02.03.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2Fm73Qw> – Two Indonesian Christians were whipped in public earlier this week in Banda Aceh, the capital of the Sumatran province of Aceh, as a crowd took photos and jeered.

Dahlan Sili Tongga, 61, and Tjia Nyuk Hwa, 45, were being punished for breaking Sharia (Islamic law) by playing a game at a children's entertainment centre, which the authorities judged to be tantamount to gambling. Tongga and Hwa were whipped six and seven times respectively on Tuesday, 27 February.

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia governed by Sharia, and Sharia courts impose hundreds of whippings every year. Previously, the laws only applied to Muslims, but this changed in December 2013, when they became effective for members of all religious groups.

As a local source told World Watch Monitor, life as a non-Muslim is very restricted in the province, which is led by an ex-militia from former separatist group GAM. Aceh's authorities do not allow new churches to be established, whereas in other provinces that is still possible.

"Sometimes it seems that religion is just a tool to gain and retain power, which is very common in many Muslim countries, as there is no separation between religious and political domains," said World Watch Monitor's source. "And in politics, targeting Christians is a classic manoeuvre to garner votes and support from Muslims."

Furthermore, Aceh's regulations stipulate a strict dress code, prohibiting all women from wearing tight clothes and requiring them to adhere to hijab (Islamic dress). Citizens in Central Aceh who fail to comply with the Muslim dress code forfeit their right to assistance from local public or private

institutions, regardless of their religious affiliation.

The cases of Christians being subjected to flogging are rare because the number of Christians in Aceh is small – they make up around 1.2 per cent (about 50,000 people) of the province's population.

But although Christians are rarely whipped, World Watch Monitor's source mentioned multiple cases where Christians were harassed – for example unmarried Christian couples being dragged to a religious office for walking together (Sharia prohibits physical proximity between unmarried people), only for it to be clarified later that they were Christians.

Non-Muslims in Aceh are allowed to choose between being punished under Sharia or civil code. Some prefer whipping over potential imprisonment.

---

## **China bans Muslim children from Quran classes**

Aljazeera (17.01..2017) – <http://bit.ly/2FMGDEI> – Chinese government authorities have banned Muslim children from attending religious events during winter break, in a county in western China that is mostly populated by Muslims.

The notification for the ban has been posted online by the education bureau, as authorities step up their suppression of religious freedoms.

School students in Linxia county in Gansu province, home to many members of the Muslim Hui ethnic minority, are prohibited from entering religious buildings over their break, a district education bureau said, according to the notification.

Students must also not read scriptures in classes or in religious buildings, the bureau said, adding that all students and teachers should heed the notice and work to strengthen political ideology and propaganda. China is an atheist, communist state.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the notice.

The Linxia education bureau has declined to comment on the document's validity.

Xi Wuyi, a Marxist scholar at the state-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an outspoken critic of rising Islamic influence in China, shared the picture and welcomed the apparent move by the authorities.

With the notice, the county was taking concrete action to keep religion and education separate, and sticking strictly to education law, she said on the Weibo social media platform.

New regulations on religious affairs released in October last year, and due to take effect in February, aim to increase oversight of religious education and limit religious activities.

Last summer, a Sunday School ban was introduced in the southeastern city of Wenzhou, sometimes known as "China's Jerusalem" due to its large Christian population, but Christian parents found ways to teach their children about their religion, regardless.

Chinese law formally grants religious freedom for all, but regulations on education and protection of minors also say religion cannot be used to hinder state education, or children taught to believe in a religion, rather than communism.

Authorities in troubled parts of China, such as the far western region of Xinjiang, home to the Turkic-speaking Uighur

Muslim minority, ban children from attending religious events.

But religious communities elsewhere rarely face blanket restrictions.

Fear of Muslim influence has grown in China in recent years, sparked in part by violence in Xinjiang.

The Chinese-speaking Hui, who are culturally more similar to the Han Chinese majority than to Uighurs, have also come under scrutiny from some intellectuals, who fear creeping Islamic influence on society.