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Indonesia's Orang Rimba: Forced to renounce their faith

By Rebecca Henschke

BBC News (17.11.2017) - <http://bbc.in/2iojzIG> - The Sumatran rainforests of Indonesia are home to the Orang Rimba - the people of the jungle. Their faith and nomadic way of life are not recognised by the state and, as their forests are destroyed to make way for palm oil plantations, many are being forced to convert to Islam to survive.

In a wooden hut on stilts, a group of children dressed in white sit on the floor. They sing "I will protect Islam till I die" and shout "There is no god but Allah", in unison.

Three months ago, the 58 families that make up the Celitai tribe of Orang Rimba converted to Islam.

They were picked up and bussed into Jambi, the nearest city, and given clothes and prayer mats.

The Islamic Defenders Front - a vigilante group whose leader is facing charges of inciting religious violence - helped facilitate the conversion.

Ustad Reyhan, from the Islamic missionary group Hidayatullah, has stayed to make sure the new faith is practised.

"For now we are focusing on the children. It's easier to convert them - their mind isn't filled with other things. With the older ones it's harder," he says.

"Before Islam they just believed in spirits, gods and goddesses, not the supreme god Allah.

"When someone died, they didn't even bury the dead, they just would leave the body in the forest. Now their life has meaning and direction.

"[Before] they lived in the forest. They just lived for each day, each moment. When they died, they died. But now they have a religion, they know there is an afterlife."

'No choice'

But village leader Muhammad Yusuf - Yuguk, to use his Orang Rimba name - was thinking about surviving in this life when he converted.

"It was a very heavy and difficult decision, but we feel like we have no choice, if we want to move forward," he says quietly.

"So that our children can have the same opportunities as the outsiders, the people of the light, we had no other choice. We had to all convert to Islam."

Outsiders are the "people of the light", because they live in open areas and are often in the sun, unlike the people of the jungle.

The surrounding majority Muslim population calls the Orang Rimba "Kubu".

"It means that they are very dirty, they are garbage, you can't even look because it is so disgusting," explains anthropologist Butet Manurung, who has lived with the Orang Rimba for many years.

"It also means primitive, stupid, bad smelling - basically pre-human. People say their evolution is not complete."

It's thought there are about 3,000 Orang Rimba living in central Sumatra.

"If you came before, you would have seen our forest. It was pristine, with huge trees," says Yusuf.

Now there are seemly endless ghostly white burnt-out sticks in one direction, and palm oil trees in neat rows in the other.

The absence of any natural sounds is eerie.

"It's all gone. It happened just in the last few years. The palm plantations came in, and then the forest started to burn," adds Yusuf, referring to 2015's devastating fires, which burnt more than 21,000 sq km of forest and peat land.

Every year, landowners start fires to clear land with devastating effects, but those fires were catastrophic because of a longer dry season.

Half a million people were affected by the toxic haze from the fires and dozens died from breathing problems.

"I was terrified. We were so scared of the flames and smoke all around us," Yusuf tells me.

His tribe ran to the nearest village to escape and this was where the conversion process started.

Endangered population

"After a while, we wanted to send our children to school, but the teacher wanted to see their birth certificates, and for that you have to have a state religion that the government recognises.

"So we had a tribal meeting, and discussed what religion we would choose, and decided to choose Islam," says Yusuf.

Indonesia - the world's largest Muslim country - officially recognises six religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Indigenous rights bodies are fighting to get recognition for the hundreds of other faiths practised across Indonesia.

The country's constitutional court recently ruled in their favour, finding that it was against the constitution to force people to state a religion.

Rukka Sombolinggi, head of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, has been a key figure in this fight.

"We have been around before the new religions arrived, but now it's like they rule us, and want to clean us from this country. We have to fight back," she says.

She says the Orang Rimba are one of the most endangered indigenous tribes in Indonesia.

"They reached the point of complete hopelessness and saw that embracing one of the official religions would probably help them come out of this very bad situation. It is a matter of survival."

'No space to live'

I experienced a sense of the discrimination towards Orang Rimba, when I met a remote tribe still practising this nomadic, polytheistic way of life.

We were eating with them in the jungle when a police officer and local government officials arrived and asked what we were doing and if we had permits.

Our Orang Rimba guide Miyak was visibly upset, and asked why such documents would be necessary on his own land.

"We have no space to live. We are always told we are nomadic people with no religion, no culture," he told me.

"Our religion is not respected. The government is always insisting that we convert and live in houses in one place. We can't do that. Our way of life is not like that."

"Why you are making our lives so difficult?" he asked the officials.

The officer, Budi Jayapura, took me aside to check my documents and said: "We need to watch over them.

"They don't understand the concept of stealing. They say the fruit grew by itself on the tree so it can be taken, but it was planted by someone. Maybe in their belief system it is OK, but not in our society."

The pig problem

The fact that they hunt and eat wild pigs also creates social tensions, he added.

"This is a Muslim community. If they see the pig's blood and the leftover bits, they are disturbed," the officer explained.

What is taboo, or haram, for the Orang Rimba directly contrasts with what Muslims eat, explains Mr Manurung.

"Orang Rimba will not eat domesticated animals such as chickens, cows or sheep. They think it's a form of betrayal. You feed the animal, and when it gets fat you eat it. The fair thing to do is to fight. Whoever wins can eat the loser."

This clash of cultures began in the 1980s, when then-President Suharto gave land and incentives to migrants from overcrowded Java to move and open up the jungles of Sumatra.

Since then, vast areas of forests, traditionally home to the Orang Rimba, have been handed out to palm oil, rubber and pulp and paper companies without compensation to the indigenous tribes.

Zulkarnai, a Ministry of Forestry official, who helped facilitate the mass conversion of the Celitai tribe, admits that as a child, he thought the Orang Rimba weren't human.

"One day a 'Kubu' child stole fruit from one of my neighbours, and he shot him. We went over to the body, and I realised it wasn't a kind of animal, it was a human, just like us.

"I realised that we have to help them. I feel sorry for them. They will starve if they don't change."

In the last decades, millions of hectares of rainforest have been cleared in Indonesia, in what some studies call the world's fastest rate of deforestation.

Polluted land

New palm oil plantations have been increasing at a rate of between 300,000 and 500,000 hectares per year for the past 10 years.

In the last 30-odd years, more than half of Sumatra's forests have disappeared, replaced by monoculture palm oil plantations.

Sigungang's family lives on a palm oil plantation. He tries to hunt wild pigs when they come.

"But if we can't find anything, we are forced to eat palm oil fruit. It makes your head spin," he says.

The streams in the plantation are polluted with pesticide and his family is getting stomach problems drinking from it.

"There is no forest for them to hunt in, the water they fished in and drank from is polluted, and so is the air," says social affairs minister Khofifah Parawansa, matter-of-factly. "So we are giving them houses, villages to live in."

The government - working with plantation companies - has built a number of housing estates for the Orang Rimba.

Last year, President Joko Widodo announced more new housing and some land for them, following a meeting with tribal leaders - the first organised by an Indonesian head of state.

Minister Khofifah says faith is part of this process.

"On the identity card, they have to state what religion they have. There are those that have become Muslims, some who have become Christians. So now they are getting to know God."

But many of the housing estates have failed and are effectively ghost towns.

Without work or a way to feed their family, many Orang Rimba who lived in them briefly went back to the traces of jungle that are left.

"What we want is for them to stop taking away our forest. We don't want houses like the outsiders," says Ngantap, one of the elders of an Orang Rimba tribe.

"I am at peace and happy in the forest, I am a person of the jungle."

Ngantap wears the traditional loincloth of the Rimba people, with a bag of cigarettes hanging from the side.

Unmarried women traditionally wear simple sarongs covering the breasts. Once married, the sarong is tied around the waist leaving breasts open for feeding babies. Many now wear clothes from the outside.

But Ngantap insists they are holding on to their faith.

"It's wrong to say we don't have a faith. Religion is a personal right of every person. It's very wrong to discredit someone's faith.

"If our belief system is lost, and the gods and goddess have no forest home, disaster will reign."

Ngantap's wife Ngerung tell me they are connected to the trees from birth.

"After a baby is born, three trees must be planted, one for the placenta, one for the baby, one for the name. They can never be cut down or hurt. When we walk through our forest we remind people of this."

Mr Manurung explains: "Orang Rimba worship many gods, the tiger [being] one of the most powerful.

"They have a god of bees, a god of hornbill birds, gods and goddesses of many trees. They also worship a god of water springs. They will never go to the toilet or put soap in the river, so you can drink it directly."

Sacrifice

Miyak, my guide, converted to Islam so he can travel and fight to try and protect his family's forest.

They are trying to register the forest as their ancestral land, following a landmark 2013 court ruling which said indigenous people have rights over forests they have lived in for centuries.

He can take part in meetings but not in religious ceremonies or rituals. As he now uses soap to wash himself and eats chicken and cows, he can't enter his family home.

"When I got educated in the outsiders' ways, there were many things that I had to sacrifice.

"But I accept that, because I am a messenger and bridge for many people here with the outside world and the government, about our forest and rights."

He still fears the gods and goddesses of the old religion.

"It's the sacred people - our women shamans - [that] I fear. They can communicate and see the gods and goddesses.

"The shaman can become a tiger, can become an elephant if the gods are very angry, and attack people. I am scared of that. I worry about breaking the rules."

But Miyak's greatest fear is that his people's way of life will disappear forever.

Top Indonesia court overturns discriminatory religious law

New York Times (07.11.2017) - <http://nyti.ms/2Ar18nM> - Indonesia's top court has overturned a law that denied recognition and legal rights to followers of indigenous faiths in a surprise advance for religious freedom in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The Constitutional Court, in a unanimous ruling Tuesday from its nine-judge panel, said articles in the Civil Administration Law were discriminatory and violated the principle of equality before the law.

"These articles are not legally binding as they contradict the 1945 constitution," presiding Judge Arief Hidayat told the court.

The ruling is an unexpected victory for moderates at a time when religious conservatives have demonstrated growing political influence and undermined the country's reputation for tolerance.

The discriminatory articles, in place since 2006, effectively required followers of faiths not among the six recognized by the government to list one of the official religions on their national identity card or be denied basic rights such as marriage registration and land titles.

They also had the option of leaving the religion category blank but that would risk being accused of being an atheist, an offense under Indonesia's blasphemy law, said Andreas Harsono, Indonesia researcher for Human Rights Watch.

The ruling, published on the court's website, said the law caused injustice to followers of native faiths. Difficulties in obtaining national identity cards meant some were deprived of education, access to the justice system and other rights, it said.

Indonesia has for decades recognized only Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism as religions, but millions practice animism and other local faiths.

Harsono said the ruling will protect adherents of indigenous religions from prosecution under Indonesia's blasphemy law but it won't help Shia and Ahmadiyah Muslims who face difficulties in getting national ID cards.

The Constitutional Court agreed to hear a challenge to the 2013 Civil Administration Law — the most recent amendment to the law that perpetuated the discriminatory articles — after being petitioned by four people who said they'd been disadvantaged by it.

The Ministry of Home Affairs said in a statement that the court's ruling is final and binding. It said it will propose revisions to the act.

Beware the war against ASEAN's atheists

A look at the ongoing persecution of a minority group that continues to be under assault in some parts of the region

By David Hutt

The Diplomat (19.08.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2wFEFnW> - There is one "minority" that knows no borders, isn't divided by race or gender, and yet still faces persecution across the world: atheists. And in recent weeks, they have been under attack in Malaysia. The government has announced that it will "hunt down" atheists who, it says, could face prosecution — exactly what for remains in question. This all began earlier this month, when the Kuala Lumpur branch of the Atheist Republic, a Canada-based organization, posted a photo of their annual meeting on social media.

The Hunt for Atheists Continues

In response, the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department, Malaysia's religious watchdog, said it is now "constantly monitoring" atheists groups, presumably those also online, and its director said that they would provide "treatment" to those caught. Shahidan Kassim, a minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said later that: "I suggest we go all-out to hunt down these groups and we ask the media to help us identify them because this is a religious country."

Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar upped the ante when he commented that the "the police would scrutinize the existing laws to enable appropriate action to be taken should the atheist group cause anxiety among Muslims," as FreeMalaysiaToday, an online newspaper, put it.

One can make many things of this comment. Primarily, though, if a few dozen, mostly young people who gather once a year in private can make Malaysia's Muslims anxious (note Khalid cared little about the nerves of Malaysian Christians or Buddhists) then isn't his comment an affront to their commitment to the faith itself?

But the Malaysian authorities took the issue back to a perennial one: apostasy.

According to Malaysia's federal laws, apostasy is not a crime. But in practice, the country's state-run courts, which hold the sway over religious matters, rarely allow Muslims to formally leave the faith. Instead they are punished with "counseling," fines, or jail time. Similarly, atheism is not strictly illegal in Malaysia, but blasphemy is. This makes atheism a grey area, since the most fundamental point of it is the belief that there is no god.

A similar problem exists in Indonesia. In 2012, [Alexander Aan](#) was almost beaten to death by a mob and then sentenced to two and a half years in prison — while his attackers were set free — after he posted a message on Facebook that read: "God doesn't exist." The commentary surrounding the case frequently asked whether atheism was illegal in Indonesia or not. Most pundits took the opinion that it wasn't illegal:

Alexander Aan, they said, wasn't convicted for his atheism but for blasphemy. To some, that was no more than intellectual contortionism at work.

But none of this should have come as a surprise. A 2016 [report](#) by the International Humanist and Ethical Union found Malaysia to be one of the least tolerant countries in the world of atheists. The report singled out Prime Minister Najib Razak for criticism. In May of that year, he described atheism and secularism, along with liberalism and humanism, as "deviant" and a "threat to Islam and the state." He stated clearly: "We will not tolerate any demands or right to apostasy by Muslims."

Over the years I have met a number of Malaysian atheists. Many have to hide their lack of faith from their families, lest they be ostracized. Social media, here, has been a massive help. And many are forced to hide behind less-controversial monikers, like "freethinker," in order to avoid the thought police. By way of a comparison, I have met Vietnamese pro-democracy activists more willing to criticize the Communist Party in public places than Malaysian atheists willing to talk about religion at coffee shops. "I am worried. I have already accepted that something might happen to me... that I might be killed," one Malaysian atheist recently told Channel News Asia.

No Freedom From Religion

We are often told that Malaysia and Indonesia are secular nations. That is not quite true. At best, they are secular-lite. Secularism has three main components, and that is often forgotten conveniently by some. The first is a genuine separation of the church — or mosque, or pagoda — and the state. The second is freedom of religion, which brings with it pluralism and religious tolerance. Put simply, all faiths have equal status within the eyes of the state.

Malaysia and Indonesia do to some extent practice these but certainly not the third, which is freedom *from* religion. It means that I, a non-believer, am not interfered with by the forces of religion, and am protected against this by the state. It also means that a believer is allowed, by law, to remove himself from a religion. As has been indicated above, that is not quite the case by any means.

More Than Politics

Some pundits will simply claim that politics is at hand. Malaysian elections are approaching, and Malaysia's ruling party is playing the religious card, fearful that Malay-Muslims will vote for one of the opposition parties. In Indonesia, the arrest and imprisonment of [Basuki "Ahok" Purnama](#) for blasphemy, coming as it did during the Jakarta's mayoral election, was also politicians "using" religion, some say. President Joko Widodo weighed in here with the opinion that the anti-Ahok protests, some of the largest Indonesia has ever witnessed, were "steered by political actors who were exploiting the situation."

There is some merit in this view, but it is far from the whole picture. For starters, if they are "exploiting" conservative religious sentiments, then surely those sentiments themselves must have been there in the first place — and must be thought by a sizeable number of people for opportunistic politicians to take notice. That itself is something that ought not to be ignored, since it is the root cause of the issue we are addressing here.

Second, if it is only politicians exploiting the situation, why haven't the "moderate" Muslim organizations come out and defend the atheists, for instance, or, to take a more specific example, why didn't they campaign for Ahok? As some experts have already noted, Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Indonesian Muslim organization, with more than 50 million followers, made a lot of noise against the radical protestors at the time, but was conspicuously quiet on defending Ahok's right to say what he did.

A More Radical Mainstream?

Some have argued that the extremists in Malaysia and Indonesia are becoming more open. But there is also some evidence that points to the mainstream, or even the public at large, being more conservative. For instance, in 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted a [worldwide survey](#) on the attitudes of Muslims towards different elements of faith. When Indonesian respondents were asked if they favored making Shari'a the national law of the country, 72 percent said they would – it is currently only the law in the semi-autonomous state of Aceh. Of Malaysian respondents, 86 percent said they would, higher than the percentages recorded in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt, countries which are not typically described as “moderate.”

Some might argue that Muslims were merely responding in such a way because they perceived that doing so was in line with what their religion called for and what it meant to be a good, practicing Muslim. But what was striking was that, of those respondents who favored introducing Shari'a, 41 percent from Malaysia and 50 percent from Indonesia thought it should apply to all citizens, not just Muslims. And 60 percent from Malaysia and 48 percent from Indonesia thought stoning to death was an appropriate penalty for adultery.

One can quibble with any single poll or statistic or development. But the point here is that there are enough of each of these out there for a level of concern to be raised. Or, at the very least, for more attention to be paid to a relatively neglected issue.

A journalist visited the prison where the leader of the Gafatars is incarcerated

HRWF (08.08.2017) – In March last, Jon Emont, a journalist covering a number of issues in and from South-East Asia and the Middle East, visited the leader of a new religious movement in Islam who is currently in prison in Indonesia. See here below excerpts from his long article entitled “Why are there no new major religions?” published in The Atlantic on 6 August. The full text is available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/new-religions/533745/>

The Atlantic

Cipinang prison stands like a huge fortress in East Jakarta, its massive walls and guard towers separating the city's bustling traffic from the criminals held within its gates. I visited in March, sitting at a noisy mess hall filled with hardened, tattooed Indonesian prisoners who greeted their wives and children with hugs and pats on the head. The prison is known for housing many of the country's most notorious drug criminals and convicted terrorists. But across from me sat a trio of prisoners in bright orange fatigues charged with a different crime entirely: daring to start a new religious movement.

The leader of the group, Ahmad Mushaddeq, a broad-shouldered man with bright gray eyes and a winning smile, is a former national badminton coach turned preacher. In the late 1990s, he said, it was revealed to him that he was the son of God. His followers proclaimed him to be the prophet to succeed Muhammad, sparking a new religious movement based on his teachings, which was eventually called Millah Abraham. The new faith was adopted mainly by disenchanting Muslims. It spread quickly across Indonesia and Malaysia to more than 50,000 followers, according to the group. Mushaddeq's followers also established a parallel back-to-the-land social movement, called Gafatar, which promoted organic farming and agricultural self-sufficiency, considered by Millah Abraham to be two of the real-life applications of their vaguely New-Age faith.

As strange as Millah Abraham's beliefs may seem, scholars of religion say the group is simply in the early stages of a process nearly as old as humanity: starting a new religion.

“Often cults are seen as aberrations, or a psychological phenomenon. Psychologists would see cult leaders as having delusions of grandeur. But I see them as something different—as baby religions,” said Susan Palmer, a sociologist and scholar of new religions at Concordia University in Montreal. “I think people are unaware how many of them there are, how constant they are.”

Al Makin, an Indonesian scholar of new religions, estimates that Indonesia alone has seen over 600 new religious movements in its modern history. In this regard the archipelago is hardly unique: New religions spring up regularly in the United States, Canada, Russia—everywhere government authorities are flexible enough to allow them.

And like many other new religious movements, Millah Abraham is dreaming big, with hopes to supersede Christianity and Islam as the dominant Abrahamic faith. Millah Abraham’s followers believe that every Abrahamic faith, from Judaism onward, is fated to lose its way, becoming corrupt and power-hungry, until eventually it is succeeded by a new prophet who will restore the original Abrahamic relationship to God. Followers of Millah Abraham believe that the near-constant wars in the Middle East are just one indication that Islam has fallen and it is Mushaddeq’s turn to continue the eternal cycle and establish the next iteration of Abrahamic faith. In the same way that Judaism was succeeded by Christianity, and Christianity by Islam, Islam is to be succeeded by Millah Abraham.

Though its prophet is in prison, it’s still possible Millah Abraham will succeed in becoming a globally influential faith. There have, after all, been unexpected successes before. “If we had been observers of the religious scene in the year 50 AD, I wonder if we would have bet on that small religious group in the corner of the Roman empire,” said Jean-François Mayer, a Swiss scholar of new religious movements, referring to ancient Christianity. Still, he acknowledges that the odds appear to be very much against Millah Abraham, even without persecution from the Indonesian government. (...)

* * *

Dwi Adiyanto, an Indonesian marketing professional in his mid-30s living in central Java, told me that when he first encountered Millah Abraham’s teachings in a local study group, it gave him a sense of purpose and clarity about his life’s mission that Islam had never provided. The group’s religious teachings, which posited a continuous pattern of faiths rising and falling as they strayed from Abrahamic teachings, resonated with Dwi, as did the sense of social purpose he gained from joining a farming community. “It offered a source of faith that could really be trusted,” he told me, “a path that was clearly correct.” Dwi sold all his belongings in late 2015, and moved to rural Borneo, along with around 7,000 members of Millah Abraham.

Though Indonesia’s constitution promises citizens religious freedom, starting a new religion here is illegal, and a crackdown quickly followed. Indonesia has just six legal religions—Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—and sects that split off from Muslim orthodoxy are punished with blasphemy charges. After Gafatar branches throughout the Indonesian archipelago began running into trouble with local authorities, the organization’s authorities encouraged adherents like Dwi to sell all their possessions and use the money to buy land in remote Indonesian Borneo, where they hoped state authority would be lax enough to allow them to farm in peace. The goal was to establish a Zion, similar in concept to the one Mormons founded one and a half centuries ago in Utah—a faraway community where followers could live according to their faith without being challenged by outsiders. The young faith was rapidly evolving, and as followers moved out to Borneo it took on an increasingly ecological bent, with Millah Abraham leaders arguing that cities were corrupting and alienating, and the best way to worship the Lord was to till land in harmony with nature.

But the utopian effort would not last long. Just a week after the national government formally banned Gafatar in January 2016, local mobs stormed the group's compound in West Borneo and burned their farms to the ground. "There were around a thousand men who brought clubs and daggers. They burned our homes in front of our eyes," Dwi recounted to me. "There was no respect for human rights, although police were right there." Indonesian police officers then forcibly returned around 7,000 Gafatar members to their home provinces—on waiting planes and boats. After being returned home, Gafatar members were given classes on Indonesian nationalist doctrine by soldiers; evaluated by psychologists, and encouraged to return to their old faith, which was generally Islam.

"They have their own system, they have their own country—in my opinion it is dangerous for Indonesia," Koentjoro Soeparno, a professor of social psychology who evaluated Gafatar members after they were returned home from Borneo, told me in an interview. He said that de-radicalization was necessary. "Gafatar has a lot of similarities with what happened in the United States with Jim Jones," he added, referring to the American cult leader who persuaded hundreds of followers to follow him to the remote jungles of Guyana to participate in a giant agricultural project, before conducting a mass suicide that killed around 900.

But followers I spoke with said there had been no coercion, and Gafatar members had moved to West Borneo to live communally and worship freely, not to challenge the Indonesian state or conduct mass suicide. They "never had that desire, to create a new country," Yudhistris Arif Rahman, a lawyer who represented Mushaddeq, told me. In total, more than 25 members of Gafatar were convicted of blasphemy around the archipelago, with around a dozen spending time in prison. Human Rights Watch called the Indonesian government's treatment of Gafatar one of the worst examples of religious persecution since Indonesia began transitioning to democracy in 1998.

Members of the faith insist they will soldier on; their persecution, after all, is in keeping with prophecy. "We were prepared for this mentally," Farah Meifira, a Millah Abraham adherent, told me. But it's far from clear whether the faith will be able to carry on effectively, given the Indonesian state's apparent determination to stamp it out.

State persecution, aided by religious authorities, is in fact a major reason why new faiths fail in parts of the world where government polices religious doctrine. "New religions have always existed; they are an organic phenomenon like weeds in a garden. In some societies they are considered weeds and will be uprooted; in other societies they will be allowed to grow and take root and become plants," said Palmer, the scholar of new religion. To the Indonesian government, Millah Abraham is a weed. (...)

See HRWF Database of religious prisoners in Indonesia at <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Indonesia-FBL-2017.pdf>

Ahmadis report local administration over alleged discrimination, again

Margareth S. Aritonang



Ahmadiyah followers from Manislor village in Kuningan regency, West Java, report the discrimination they face to the Indonesian Ombudsman in Jakarta on July 24. (Kompas.com/Kristian Erdianto)

The Jakarta Post (25.07.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2uXqCj8> - Members of the Ahmadiyah sect in Manislor village in Kuningan, West Java, on Monday reported the local administration to the Indonesian Ombudsman and the Home Ministry's Population and Civil Registration Agency (Dukcapil) for allegedly forcing Ahmadis in the village to abandon their faith.

It was the second time for Ahmadiyah followers in the village to file such a report.

Submitting their report with the Ombudsman in Jakarta on Monday, 15 members of Manislor's Ahmadiyah community said the Kuningan regency administration had insisted all Ahmadiyah followers in the village renounce their faith and convert to the "true teaching of Islam" if they wanted the government to issue IDs for them.

Syamsul Alam Agus, an activist from the Satu Keadilan Foundation (YSK), one of the human rights groups assisting Manislor's Ahmadis in their quest for justice, said the lack of administrative documents had hampered their rights to exercise civil rights and access social services.

"Without IDs, they, for example, cannot access BPJS [Healthcare and Social Security Agency] services and their marriages are unregistered. They cannot even go anywhere around the country by plane or train because we need ID to arrange travel by those modes of transportation," Syamsul told *The Jakarta Post* in Jakarta on Monday.

Ahmadiyah followers from Manislor would also be excluded from participating in the upcoming regional elections, as well as the 2019 legislative and presidential elections, he went on.

In June, the Ombudsman and Dukcapil urged the local administration to issue IDs to the Manislor Ahmadis but around 1,600 Ahmadis in the village have not yet obtained IDs. (ebf)

Indonesian Islamic sect members say they're denied state IDs over their beliefs

Members of an Indonesian Islamic sect have issued a complaint that their human rights were breached by a local government refusing to issue them state ID cards unless they renounce their belief, a rights group said.

Reuters (20.06.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2tcoCg0> - The Ahmadiyah identify themselves as Muslims but believe another prophet followed the Prophet Muhammad, who founded Islam. Many mainstream Muslims and hard-line groups accuse the sect and other Muslim minorities of apostasy.

A mob of 1,000 people beat to death three Ahmadis in an unprovoked attack in a village in Banten province, west of Jakarta, in 2011 and activists say the group continues to face discrimination.

Indonesia's reputation for tolerance has come under renewed scrutiny since Jakarta Gov. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian, was sentenced last month to two years in prison for blasphemy in a trial that came after mass Islamist-led rallies and raised religious tensions to the highest in years.

Sixteen people from the village of Manislor in West Java, representing 1,400 members of the sect, told the ombudsman on Tuesday (June 20) that their lives had been damaged by not having IDs for five years, said Syamsul Alam Agus, executive secretary of One Justice Foundation, a nonprofit organization.

Some were unable to register their marriages, Agus said, adding in one case an Ahmadi was refused treatment at a hospital because of a lack of ID.

According to Agus, in order to obtain ID documents, Ahmadis had to sign a form stating they were Muslims while reading the Shahada, an Islamic creed declaring belief in the oneness of God and Muhammad as God's prophet.

"Not giving an electronic ID card to Manislor's Ahmadiyah followers is not only a violation of human rights, but also breaking the law," Agus said.

Indonesia requires a person to state their religion on official ID cards.

The ombudsman felt there had been maladministration at the local Kuningan government where Manislor is located but had not formally issued any recommendation, said Ahmad Su'adi, an ombudsman official, adding that "the state cannot force people" to denounce or join a religion.

The Kuningan government could not be reached for comment on Wednesday, but in a June 2016 post on its website, the head of the Kuningan regency, Acep Purnama, defended its refusal to hand out identity documents to followers of Ahmadiyah and an animist belief, Sunda Wiwitan.

"We are not discriminating or being intolerant ... but this is an issue of principle that has to be resolved together and must be accepted by all Kuningan people. This isn't about majority or minority," he was quoted as saying.

Earlier this month, the government of Depok city near Jakarta sealed off a mosque frequently used by Ahmadis during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, according to media reports.

Muslims make up nearly 90 percent of Indonesia's 250 million people but there are sizable communities of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and people who adhere to traditional beliefs.

The Islamic Defenders Front

By Nisan Kassam for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (15.06.2017) - During the authoritarian regimes of Soekarno (1959-66) and Soeharto (1966-98), stringent checks kept on violent radical Islamists prevented the spread of their ideology in Indonesia. Nevertheless, following Soeharto's resignation in 1998, the lifting of restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of association/assembly resulted in the proliferation of these Islamist groups and their presence in the media (Islamic extremists' newspapers, magazines, books and websites were permitted to circulate).

The Islamic Defenders Front, a moralist radical group

The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) is the best known of the radical groups that exist in Indonesia. The FPI was founded on August 17, 1998 (Indonesia's Independence Day) by Habib Muhammad Rizieq Shihab and KH Misbahul Anam. Both expressed their concern with the so-called rise of immorality and anti-Islamic behaviors¹ in their communities (Fealy 2004). In contrast to other radical groups (which have been associated with Wahhabism and Salafism), the FPI is an indigenous group. It follows the traditional Indonesian Islam and has been linked to Sufi mystical brotherhoods. The members of the FPI are known to have limited religious education, and many come from criminal backgrounds (Woodwark et. al. 2009).

The FPI vigilant group is known for its violent actions against so-called places of vice. Most of the attacks of the FPI have been targeted towards bars, nightclubs, brothels, and other "immoral" places. Dozens of FPI members have assaulted such venues with long sticks, destroying properties and, oftentimes, harassing their staff and owners.

Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that the FPI accepts bribes from bar owners and others in order to abstain from attacking their facilities. The FPI also conducts attacks against minorities. In a video recorded on 2008, Sorbi Lubis, General Secretary of FPI, called on FPI followers to kill Ahmadiyah Muslims² (Woodwark et. al. 2009). The FPI also targets Christian minorities claiming that they are carrying out missionary activities, threatening Islam. In 2010, the FPI carried out five attacks on the followers of the HKBP Philadelphia Church in Bekasi and injured twenty people. Police forces did not respond to the incident. Furthermore, in 2012, FPI militants in Singkil protested the presence of churches, which they claimed to be illegal, and demanded that they should be closed down. Their demands were met; the churches and a place of worship belonging to a local faith were shut down (Incet and Ugur, 2015).

¹ The FPI was particular preoccupied activities such as gambling, prostitution, and alcohol consumption, which they considered to be "anti-Islamic."

² The Ahmadi movement has its origins in British-controlled northern India in the late 19th century. It identifies itself as a Muslim movement and follows the teachings of the Quran. However, orthodox Muslims argue that Ahmadiyah Muslims are heretical because they do not believe that Mohammed was the final prophet sent to guide mankind.

The FPI has described itself as *ahlus sunnah wal jamaah* (adherents of the Prophetic tradition and the community). The group embraces the implementation of *shari'a*, as well as constitutional recognition of the Jakarta Charter but it does not support the creation of an Islamic State, unlike the Islamist radical organizations Darul Islam (DI), the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI). It recognizes the Pancasila-based Unitary Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) as the final form of the state. The FPI believes that the role of the government should be to make individuals better Muslims, instead of changing the basis of the State. Furthermore, since 2002, the FPI has suffered major setbacks. In that year, Habib Rizieq was arrested and found guilty of inciting hatred, and was subsequently jailed for seven months. From that point until February 2003, the organization stopped its operations, claiming that it had been infiltrated by the police and other spies (Fealy 2004).

The FPI and other extremist groups rely on two rulings from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI)³ to justify hate speech and sectarian violence. In 1980, the MUI issued a fatwa declaring Ahmadiyah to be a deviant sect. The government did not take any action against this ruling. Similarly, other Islamist groups, which at the time were persecuted by the state, remained silent. In 2002, Saudi Arabia sponsored conferences and religious gatherings that lead to anti-Ahmadiyah violence. Furthermore, the second MUI ruling on which radical groups rely was issued in 2005. The MUI confirmed and strengthened the 1980 fatwa and called for the Indonesian government to disband Ahmadiyah organizations. Since 1998, the Indonesian government has shown more inclination to consider MUI advice, as it depends on Islamist groups for parliamentary support (Woodward et. al., 2013).

Links with state apparatus

There exist links between the FPI and senior figures in the Indonesian military, police, and government. In fact, in 2011, WikiLeaks released documents suggesting that the Indonesian police have provided funds to the FPI. In 2013, calls for the dismantling of the FPI, resulted in repeated episodes of violence⁴. Islamic clerics in Central Java spoke out against the organization. Nonetheless, government figures have shown sympathy towards the FPI. Gamawan Fauzi, the Home Affairs Minister, has called to form a constructive relationship with the FPI, claiming they can be a "national asset" ("Christian Solidarity Worldwide" 2004). The FPI has been particularly present in Jakarta slums that have been targeted by eviction programs. For instance, in 2016 when the government threatened to evict approximately 1,000 people of the Luar Batang neighborhood, the FPI went in to provide food, clothing, and volunteers to aid the community.

Despite pressure from the police, the FPI has continued to engage in violent attacks. In January of 2017, the mass organization Gerakan Masyarakat Bawah Indonesia (Indonesian General Society Movement or GMBI) called on the government to disband the Islam Defenders Front. The petition cites the last incidents in the cities of Bogor, Ciamis and Tasikmalaya where alleged FPI members attacked and burned down GMBI secretariats. Twelve other organizations signed the petition. Fauzam Rahman, Chairman of GMBI, has claimed that the petition was aimed at FPI leader Habib Rizieq ("The Jakarta Post").

³ The MUI is an official body and the voice of the Indonesian Muslim community. There are representatives of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) on the MUI fatwa council. The fatwas of the MUI are purely advisory to the government. Nevertheless, Islamist organizations adhere to the rulings of the MUI.

⁴ There were a series of clashes between members of the FPI Temanggung branch and locals of Sukorejo in Kendal.

In January 2017, the police named Habib Rizieq as a suspect over allegations that he insulted the secular state ideology in the world's biggest Muslim-majority country. Police in the province of West Java has been investigating the leader of FPI over allegations that he made defamatory statements about Sukarno, one of Indonesia's founding fathers, and that he questioned the legitimacy of Pancasila, the state ideology. Rizieq has denied wrongdoing. Slamet Maarif, spokesman of FPI, said the allegations were intended to "silence Muslims demanding justice" (Da Costa, 2017).

Campaign against Christian governor Ahok

Rizieq had been a key organizer of rallies that took place at the end of 2016 against Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, Jakarta's governor, an ethnic Chinese Christian, who was accused of insulting the Quran. In May 2017, Ahok was sentenced to two years in prison on charges of blasphemy, based on a video in which he spoke out of context about a verse in the Quran. FPI militants managed to get the court's endorsement of their narrative of blasphemy, which includes the assertion that non-Muslims should not be allowed to comment on the Quran's interpretation. In the verdict against Ahok, a judge quoted a verse from the Quran (Al-Maidah 51) which purports to suggest that Muslims should not elect non-Muslim leaders. The objective of the campaign against Ahok was to prevent his re-election because he was a Christian⁵.

FPI leader prosecuted on charges of pornography

Also in May 2017, the FPI leader Rizieq was linked to a scandal involving pornography and an extra-marital affair. The Indonesian police stated that Rizieq would be charged with violating Indonesia's pornography laws. However, some rights advocates said they were troubled that Mr. Rizieq would be charged on pornography counts — specifically, committing extramarital sexual acts captured on media — instead of more substantial crimes, such as intolerance, hate speech, hate crimes.

Rizieq has denied the accusations and has fled to Saudi Arabia. A number of analysts believe that the charges against him could consolidate support for the FPI. Ian Wilson, a researcher in politics and security at Murdoch University in Australia, claimed, "if the political goal is to nullify the FPI, then it's a serious miscalculation." He went further to add, "each time he's spent time in jail, the organization has grown, the martyrdom complex has grown."

The aim of Islamist groups is to influence the elections in 2019. Indonesian political parties and lawmakers have long debated whether radical groups should be banned in the country, but they fear taking such action would lead to terrorism.

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Suggested reading

Hate speech and the Indonesian Islamic Defenders Front
https://www.academia.edu/4439583/Hate_Speech_and_the_Indonesian_Islamic_Defenders_Front

The Islamic Defenders Front: Demonization and the State in Indonesia
https://www.academia.edu/25708413/The_Islamic_Defenders_Front_Demonization_Violence_and_the_State_in_Indonesia

Stakes are global in decline of pluralism in Indonesia

WEA-RLC (14.06.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2ss9EID> - The sentencing of Jakarta's former governor, Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian and ethnic Chinese, to two years in prison for alleged blasphemy is a cause for serious concern not only for religious minorities and tolerant Muslims in the archipelago, but also in the global fight against terrorism and Islamist radicalism. For, there is perhaps no better narrative to counter the growing Islamist extremism in the world than that of the moderate and tolerant practise of Islam in Indonesia.

The southeast Asian country is home to the world's largest Muslim population and has not allowed Saudi Arabia's intolerant Wahhabism to take root. It's not only tolerant and plural, but also a large functioning, stable democracy unlike any other country in the Muslim world. It's a country whose religious expressions are not a top-down phenomenon.

Under the authoritarian President Suharto's New Order regime from 1966 to 1998, Indonesia was equally moderate and tolerant but without religious freedom. Islamist groups were not allowed to function. While the process of Reformasi (reformation) that began after the fall of Suharto opened the gates for radicals to preach their versions of Islam and Islamist ideologies, the roughly 250 million people in the archipelago have largely shunned Wahhabism for about two decades.

However, Ahok's conviction and sentencing based on a video that showed him speaking out of context about a verse in the Quran, could be a turning point for the country. It represents the biggest breakthrough in the ongoing efforts of the Indonesian cleric Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, who mobilised massive protests against Ahok, to turn the country towards conservatism.

It's not surprising that Shihab, who leads the radical organization Islamic Defenders Front, locally known as FPI, is currently in Saudi Arabia. He fled Indonesia to avoid his arrest after a pornography-related case was filed against him. Ironically, his group has been opposing prostitution, gambling and bars to cleanse Indonesia of "sin."

The FPI, which targets liberal Muslims, Ahmadiyah and Shia mosques, churches and embassies of countries that it perceives to be hostile towards Islam, was founded in 1998. It has managed to gain about 200,000 members. The number is miniscule compared to the membership of moderate and pluralistic Muslim groups Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which oppose attempts to spread Wahhabism in Indonesia and claim to have 50 million and 29 million followers respectively. However, the head count estimates or claims are neither a major concern nor any consolation.

Despite being seen as a negligible minority, Islamist groups have been able to flout local laws by physically attacking minorities and collecting protection money from the entertainment industry. More importantly, they have now been able to cause the defeat of a popular official, Ahok, by making his religious and ethnic identity an issue in the recent gubernatorial election. Furthermore, they managed to get the court's endorsement of their narrative of blasphemy, which includes the assertion that non-Muslims should not be allowed to comment on the Quran's interpretation. In the verdict against Ahok, a judge quoted a verse from the Quran (Al-Maidah 51) which purports to suggest that Muslims should not elect non-Muslim leaders.

After their success in discounting the leadership of an otherwise efficient official by using the religion card, radical Islamists are now expected to target West Kalimantan governor Cornelis M.H., who is also a Christian. But they are not likely stop there. The radicals are also likely to try to influence the 2019 presidential election. They vehemently oppose President Joko Widodo, who is popularly known as Jokowi and is moderate and pluralistic. FPI leader Shihab has claimed that Jokowi is avenging the sentencing of Ahok through the pornography case.

The 2019 election is the main concern currently. For, the radicals are apparently eyeing nothing less than political power, though through parties that have been supporting them. And this could also have a bearing on how democratic Indonesia remains. For it's the authoritarian politicians and parties that need the support of groups like the FPI to compensate their lack of popularity and track record with the use of religion.

Hard-line groups like the FPI have put consecutive governments since 1998 in a conundrum. Governing parties and lawmakers have long debated whether such groups should be banned, but they have erred on the side of caution by allowing them to function due to fears that such an action could force radicals to become terrorists. Now,

there is an added possibility of unrest and instability if these groups are proposed to be outlawed.

However, with the strength and networks of the NU and Muhammadiyah, it is not impossible to build consensus among the people for banning hard-line groups. As an alternative, the Jokowi government can also adopt a policy of zero tolerance towards radical group vis-a-vis law and order and also deal strictly with officials in the police and the military who help such groups.

The sooner it is done, the better it is for the future of Indonesia, and the world.

Indonesia's social and political fabric stretched as bombs hit Jakarta

World Watch Monitor (25.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2rNByYB> - Churches in Jakarta are on high alert after Indonesia's capital was the target yesterday (24 May) for two suicide bombers. The attacks killed three policemen based at a bus terminal ahead of policing for a pre-Ramadan parade.

Yohanes Bao Keraf, head of security at St Joseph's church, which is a few kilometres from the blast, said: "There is a feeling of fear... we are co-ordinating with police on heightened security measures."

The church has good reason to be alarmed. Jamaah Islamiyah militants bombed St. Joseph's, and other churches in Jakarta and other cities, on Christmas Eve in 2000, killing 18. In 2016 members of the church escaped unhurt after an attacker, apparently inspired by the murder in France of Father Jacques Hamel, was overpowered by parishioners as he assaulted a priest. A suicide belt the attacker was wearing failed to detonate.

Meanwhile in West Java, the province adjacent to the capital, Christians are being failed by the authorities as pressure from local Muslims is forcing many churches to close. The Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace says the province recorded the country's highest number (41) of incidents of religious intolerance last year.

Meanwhile, the congregation of West Java's Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church, which was closed in 2010 and is now almost covered by undergrowth, have been holding their services outside the presidential palace in Jakarta as a protest against government inaction over their case.

According to Bonar Tigor Naipospos, deputy chairman of Setara, radical Islamic groups in the province now thrive because politicians use them to get re-elected. "They believe these groups are machines to reap Muslim voters," he said.

The trial and sentencing of Jakarta's Christian ex-governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as "Ahok") as well as his withdrawal of his appeal puts the spotlight on the influence of radical Islam in Indonesia and its political and judicial institutions, as well as the freedom of religion.

A day before Ahok said he would not challenge the two year prison sentence he received for blasphemy, the UN called on the Indonesian government to repeal blasphemy laws which they say undermine religious freedom in the Muslim-majority nation. UN officials added that Ahok's sentence was "disappointing" as "instead of speaking out against hate

speech by the leaders of the protests, the Indonesian authorities appear to have appeased incitement to religious intolerance and discrimination.”

The UN’s human rights experts refer to the rallies and protests in the run-up to, and after Ahok’s bid for re-election as Jakarta’s governor earlier this year. In September he was charged with blasphemy, following a comment he made during his campaign saying that – despite what their leaders said the Koran prescribed – Muslims could vote for non-Muslims if they wanted to. This was recorded on video and a manipulated version went viral on the internet.

Paul Marshall, Professor of Religious Freedom at Baylor University and senior fellow at the Leimena Institute in Jakarta, amongst others, describes how the semi-official Indonesian Ulema Council issued a *fatwa* (a religious ruling) saying that Ahok had blasphemed: “Shortly after that the radical, sometimes violent, Islamic Defenders’ Front (FPI) teamed up with the newly formed “National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulema Council’s Fatwa” to demand that Ahok be arrested. There were massive demonstrations in Jakarta in November and December. On November 16, the police announced that he was being officially investigated for blasphemy.”

Religion or politics?

“While religion was the dominant feature of the campaign, it was warped by massive political manipulation and other salient factors”, writes Marshall. He says it was clear “that major political players were funding the radicals. The FPI can make a lot of noise, but does not have the capability to organize massive demonstrations. Someone else was paying for those thousands of busses to bring in demonstrators from afar, as well as the neatly printed signs and shirts.”

According to him many of those who support the militant Islamic groups are not particularly Islamic themselves. Among them are some generals who would like “to erode democracy and return Indonesia to an authoritarian system with a large role for the military.”

Both the election campaign and Ahok’s trial reveal the growing radicalization in Indonesia’s Muslim population, Marshall says.

“This is often led by a well-funded Saudi network of radical literature, schools, scholarships, imams, and mosques determined to wrest Indonesians away from their interpretations of Islam, which encourage democracy and peaceful relations between religions.”

Hardline Islam

Paul Marshall writes that “Indonesian Muslims are eager to affirm *moderasi*, or the Qur’anic term *wasatiyah*, meaning ‘balanced and just’ Islam—an Islam called to be a supportive gift to the world”. This variant of Islam (“Islam of the Archipelago”) is shaped by Indonesia’s geography and history as the world’s largest archipelago with 15,000 islands, and is characterized by beliefs and cultures that are more comfortable living alongside people with other backgrounds. This is summarized in the ‘Pancasila’, the Indonesian state philosophy of unity, justice and democracy.

This is in contrast with the more orthodox and restrictive variants of Islam like Wahhabism, which is the dominant belief in countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The vast majority of Indonesian Muslims “repudiate [these] intolerant interpretations of Islam and resist more repressive versions being exported from the Middle East into their land”, according to Marshall.

Just a day before the North Jakarta Court sent Ahok to jail for blasphemy, the government announced it would impose a permanent ban on Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) for promoting a philosophy that contradicts Pancasila.

HTI was not a prominent member of the anti-Purnama coalition but National Police Chief Gen. Tito Karnavian and Political Coordinating Minister Wiranto say the organization's support for an Islamic caliphate disrupted social order.

Thomas Muller, persecution analyst at World Watch Research, calls it "surprising that an organization like Hizbut Tahrir is banned, while a much more violent organization such as FPI is not targeted by the authorities. Given that Christians increasingly face difficulties one would expect the administration to act more decisively against 'trouble-makers' in order to preserve the country's 'Pancasila'. However, it seems that Indonesia is now heading in a different direction. As one long-term observer put it, in Indonesia one can observe a 'Wahhabization by stealth'."

Struggling

A visit by the Saudi King Salman to Indonesia in March this year raised concerns about the influence of the Saudi Kingdom and how Indonesian Islam is beginning to shed its historic reputation for tolerance and moderation.

Anti-Wahhabi moderate Sunni Islamic Indonesian groups have long complained about Saudi-financed efforts in Indonesia to spread Salafi-Wahhabi, thought as a source of the country's increasingly perceptible rise in hardline Islam.

It would not be the first time that economic and geo-political concerns get mixed up with religion. Indonesia is the world's largest country with a Muslim majority. However, there are parallels with the situation in the Horn of Africa where a toxic relationship between faith and money has been playing itself out in the last couple of years.

Indonesia is a long way from becoming another Saudi Arabia, says author and journalist John McBeth "but religious and political leaders have done little over the past 17 years of democratic rule to stem a creeping tide of Islamization that runs counter to the country's secular constitution".

He points out that it gained so much ground that the current administration of President Joko Widodo is struggling to control it – which is clearly illustrated by Ahok trial. What is more, on his watch acts of intolerance against religious and ethnic minorities have increased.

Under Widodo, who, according to sources close to the Presidential palace, was "upset" and "disappointed" over the court's decision to send Ahok to prison, the blasphemy laws are still being used and the destruction and closure of churches and temples a reality.

West Java

West Java for example is a province that is known for its failure to maintain religious freedom and where also religious violence has been increasing.

According to Bonar Tigor Naipospos, the deputy chairman of rights group Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, the province has a long history of Islamic fundamentalism.

Although "former leaders Soekarno and Suharto largely suppressed radical groups [...] this began to change after the fall of Suharto in 1998 – with the rise of groups such as the Islamic Defenders' Front, Indonesian Mujahidin Council and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia", he says.

He notes that some regional politicians appear to be working “handinglove” with hard-line groups: “They use radical Islamic groups to be re-elected [and] believe these groups are machines to reap in Muslim voters.” The result is more pro-Islamic rules and regulations, observers say.

West Java had the highest incidence of religious intolerance in Indonesia, with 41 cases reported last year of which most incidents were carried out by hardliners, according to a report by the Setara Institute.

It is this province that will hold a gubernatorial election in April 2018 and John McBeth notes that president Widodo will already be “looking ahead to what will be a major pre-election test” of his popularity.

Sealed and padlocked

Last year the brand new Santa Clara church in Bekasi was sealed off by an Islamist group, demanding that its permit be annulled. The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) started an appeal on the church’s behalf, calling for the government to “revise the law on the establishment of worship places without any discrimination among the various religions and beliefs that exist in Indonesia”.

Many situations involve local government authorities interfering, as for example with the GKI Yasmin Church in Bogor, West Java.

The church was sealed and padlocked by order of the mayor of Bogor and the city government seven years ago. The mayor claimed that the previous sub-village head had falsified community signatures and that the church brought trouble with local Muslim neighbors. Later he said that the church should not be built on a street with an Islamic name. Over the years the GKI Yasmin Church held meetings in different places but since 2012 has been holding open-air services outside the Presidential palace in Jakarta, in protest against government inaction over their plight.

In February the church was told by the mayor that it could reopen if it also allowed a mosque on its premises. However church spokesman, Bona Sigalingging, said that no progress has been made since then. After years of abandonment, the church building is now filled with weeds and the exterior is almost covered by undergrowth.

Bogor district head, Nurhayati, recently said a local ban order on places of worship for Christians was imposed to maintain peace and harmony among religious believers. The reason often used is that they do not have the proper permit or license to worship.

There are also the two Catholic and one Protestant church in Bogor which were banned from holding religious activities because local authorities said they could not guarantee the safety of the communities, and that the three churches did not have official permission to use the houses where they were gathering as houses of worship.

According to the churches, the closure however followed pressure by local Muslims which has been building over many years while they’ve continued meeting.

To obtain a permit to set up a place of worship Christians need to have at least 90 signatures from church members and the consent of at least 60 members of local Muslim communities. In reality this turns out to be a very difficult thing to achieve.

Tolerance and brotherhood

It is in this context, where Indonesia’s social and political fabric is being stretched, that Father Robertus Rubiyatmoko (53) was ordained as the new archbishop of Semarang,

the capital of Central Java, on 19 May. The sixth archbishop and the youngest of Indonesia's 10 serving archbishops, realizes he has his work cut out for him: "The archdiocese wants to create a culture of love in society. Catholics can promote a harmonious life which shows tolerance and brotherhood". He said rising sectarianism had led to intolerance and national unity was at risk. He vowed to encourage Catholics to build good relations based on love of people from different religious backgrounds.

Government should drop the blasphemy law

A statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

Asian Human Rights Committee (11.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2qW0HA9> - The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has learned about the implementation of The Blasphemy Law Number 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of "Religious Abuse and/or Defamation. In many cases, the police investigators and prosecutors still apply article 156 and 156a of the Indonesian Penal Code to indict accused persons. Recently, the North Jakarta district court sentenced Jakarta governor, Mr. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, alias Ahok, to two years imprisonment. In the last 40 years, a similar pattern emerges in the implementation of the Blasphemy Law. Let us take the case of Aswendo Atmowiloto. In 1990, he was imprisoned after he wrote a survey in the Monitor tabloid. Another consideration is that of HB. Jassin. He was tried before the Courts in 1968 after writing a story Langit Makin Mendung (Darkness of the Sky).

The above mentioned articles are well known as rubber or elastic articles. To some extent they can be politicized and subjectively applied by law enforcement agencies. Blasphemy cases are often conducted to accommodate pressure groups and anti-tolerant mobs. Historically, in almost 100% of the blasphemy cases prosecuted before the Courts, Judges handed down guilty verdicts and prison sentences. We also found some similarities in their judgments, where Judges ignored evidence, witnesses, and defended petitions submitted by the defendants. This was evident in the blasphemy cases of Ustads Tajul Muluk, a leader of the Shia community in Sampang, Madura and in the case of Lia Eden.

The Blasphemy Law is frequently applied against minority religions and other belief groups. There are cases of persecution against minority religions and belief groups, and religious hatred behavior by hardliner groups. None have been seriously prosecuted by law enforcement agencies.

The AHRC notes that this situation remains due to weaknesses of the Government's policy stand and an unwillingness to seriously review the implementation of the Blasphemy Law. In the last ten years, the situation has worsened. The police are inept when they act or react in preventing persecution against minority religions and other beliefs. An example would be the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Congregation in Cikeusik in 2011. Up until now, the Court has failed to apply a high standard of law in this case. As a result, the Ahmadiyya are re-victimized, attacked and named as suspects. A similar situation took place against the Shia Community. They were attacked by anti-tolerant groups and evicted from their hometown. In the end, the Shia leader was prosecuted and punished by the Court.

There is no standard on the implementation of the Blasphemy Law and its interpretation can be very wide and elastic. In the accusations against Mr. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, we note that his case cannot be separated from the political background. Mr. Basuki is the current governor and was a candidate for the new governor's election held between February 2017 and April 2017. Mr. Basuki is saddled with a double minority problem--he is of Chinese descent and a Christian. This case began when he visited Pramuka Island

on 27 September 2016. This official visit aimed at a discussion with local residents regarding the cultivation and monitoring of the Grouper Fishes Cultivation Program. Ahok convinced the local residents that although he will not be elected as the next governor in the February 2017 election, the Grouper Fishes Program will still be continued. In his speech Mr. Basuki stated:

“Ladies and gentlemen, you can’t vote for me because you’re being lied to by Al Maidah verse 51 and so on. “So don’t believe people – deep down ladies and gentlemen, you can’t vote for me because [these people] are lying to you using Al Maidah verse 51 and so on.”

Since the video of this circulated, it has triggered anger in the Muslim community. Despite Mr. Basuki’s public media apology, pressure by mobs and hardliner groups continues. ‘Trial by mob’ in this case is very clear. It sets a very bad precedent for Indonesian law enforcement. Since the video circulated, hardliner groups pressured the Government and the police to speed up the investigation process and to detain Mr. Basuki. A few days before the Judges passed down their judgment, the masses pressured the Court and the Supreme Court to detain Mr. Basuki and give him the maximum sentence allowed.

On 9 May, 2017, the Judges sentenced Mr. Basuki to two years in prison. Currently he is in police custody, despite the fact that his lawyer submitted an appeal to the High Court.

Indonesia is a state party to key international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). As such, it should seriously review the implementation of the Blasphemy Law and abolish it. The government has to develop a standard to eradicate religious hatred as regulated by article 20 of the ICCPR

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Under Article 20 of the ICCPR, it is clear that there should be a clear mens rea when a person or a group is guilty of religious hatred behavior. The government should reflect on this Article and consistently develop standards for it. So, we can see that there is a clear boundary between religious hatred and racial discrimination and the right to freedom of expression and opinion as regulated in the Covenant and in Article 28 of the Indonesian Constitution.

Jakarta governor Ahok found guilty of blasphemy

The outgoing governor of Jakarta has been jailed for two years for blasphemy after judges handed down a sentence that was harsher than expected.

BBC (09.05.2017) - <http://bbc.in/2qXbjff> - Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, was accused of insulting Islam by referring to a verse in the Koran in a campaign speech last year.

Mr Purnama, a Christian in Muslim-majority Indonesia, has denied blasphemy and plans to appeal.

His case was seen as a test of the country's religious tolerance.

Mr Purnama was taken into custody immediately after the verdict was read out. His deputy Djarot Saiful Hidayat will govern Jakarta until the term ends in October.

The sentence was harsher than that requested by prosecutors, which was a one-year suspended sentence.

The governor was "found to have legitimately and convincingly conducted a criminal act of blasphemy, and because of that we have imposed two years of imprisonment", the judge told the court.

The verdict was met with strong protest. Hard-line Islamic groups who called for the maximum penalty of five years said it was too lenient, but Mr Purnama's supporters said it was too harsh and that he should be acquitted.

Protesters from both camps had gathered outside the court, which was guarded by around 15,000 security personnel from the police and military.

Outside the court supporters of Governor Ahok broke down in tears when they heard the verdict. Some hugged each other.

Andi, a devoted Muslim, said she felt heartbroken. "He was such a good man and great leader... He didn't care what religion people were. Now he has been framed," she said.

Many here believe the case against him is politically motivated. But a short distance away, the atmosphere among the governor's critics - a coalition of Islamic groups - was one of anger.

"The sentence is too light, he should have got the maximum of five years, or better still be hung," said Solihin.

Men around him then threw their fists in the air and cried out that God would hand out justice. Riot police closed ranks to make sure both sides did not meet.

The battle is far from over. Governor Ahok will appeal the decision. Islamic groups who oppose him say they will push for a harsher sentence.

Mr Purnama was accused of blasphemy for comments he made during a pre-election speech in September 2016.

He implied that Islamic leaders were trying to trick voters by using a verse in the Koran to argue that Muslims should not vote for a non-Muslim leader.

His remarks, which were widely shared in an edited video, sparked outrage among religious hard-liners. They staged regular large rallies calling for him to face trial.

Throughout the trial, Mr Purnama denied wrongdoing, but did apologise for his comments.

Mr Purnama became governor after his predecessor, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, was elected president in 2014.

As an ethnic Chinese Indonesian and Christian he is a double minority, and was Jakarta's first non-Muslim governor for 50 years.

His political success was also seen as a significant development given the violent anti-Chinese riots that occurred in the city in 1998.

Before the blasphemy allegations, he had been widely hailed as a straight-talking politician with a strong anti-corruption stance.

But the controversy overshadowed scheduled elections last month.

Despite his enduring popularity with many in Jakarta for his efforts to improve living standards, he lost to conservative Muslim candidate Anies Rasyid Baswedan.

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country. About 85% of its population are Muslim, but the country officially respects six religions.

2017 Jakarta election alternative view: beyond religion

By Chaula Rininta Anindya

RSIS.edu.sg (27.04.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2pIFqXC> - **Synopsis:** While religion was a major factor in the recent Jakarta election for governor, fear of oppression and social welfare were significant issues framed by Anies-Sandi and successfully used to mobilise voters. Strategic issue-framing could be replicated in the 2019 presidential election to shape political contestation.

Commentary

THE JAKARTA gubernatorial election for 2017 was a tight race between Basuki "Ahok" Tjahja Purnama-Djarot Saiful Hidayat (Ahok-Djarot) and Anies Baswedan-Sandiaga Uno (Anies-Sandi). Yet, Anies-Sandi surprisingly won with a huge margin of 16 percent against Ahok-Djarot. Despite having led in the first round against the other candidates, many had predicted that it would be unlikely for Ahok-Djarot to win against Anies-Sandi, particularly with the voters of defeated first round candidates Agus Yudhoyono and Sylviana Murni (Agus-Silvi) being inclined to support Anies-Sandi.

The underlying factor is that Anies-Sandi and Agus-Silvi's voters shared a similar objective to vote for a Muslim Governor to lead Jakarta. The Jakarta election was beyond choosing the next governor of the capital city. The path of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, who began his journey to the presidency by first running in the Jakarta election, illustrates the centrality of the capital in Indonesian politics. This year's Jakarta election could set the pattern for the upcoming presidential election.

Strategic issue-framing

The Islamist groups promoted the necessity of voting for a Muslim candidate to lead Jakarta. It is based on their interpretation of Surah Al-Maidah Verse 51 by which they believed Muslims should only be led by a Muslim. Their interpretative approach represents the method of modern salafi groups in implementing the core tenets of their ideology through the concept of al-wala wal-bara (loyalty and disavowal).

The concept of al-wala directs the loyalty of the Muslim community to the ummah, whereas the concept of wal-bara refers to the disavowal to anything that is seen as unIslamic and has the potential to threaten the sanctity of the religion.

In this light, religion could be seen as the fundamental issue in the Jakarta election. Nevertheless, religion is primarily an enabler to mobilise support. The main issues that mobilised support for Anies-Sandi were not necessarily religion, but the fear of being oppressed plus social welfare concerns. Anies-Sandi and their supporters smartly framed these issues to garner support.

The first issue was the fear of being oppressed; it represented the concept of existential identity - the fear that the group which they belong to is under threat. In essence, the

concept of al-wala wal-bara also addresses the fear of being under threat whereby a believer cannot practise an Islamic way of life if they are led by a non-Muslim leader. It clearly threatens the belief that binds the group together.

Ahok-Djarot's latest video campaign also heightened this fear. It was circulated a few weeks before the second round. The beginning of the video had stirred controversy; there was a scene when an Islamist group held a rally while holding a big banner with the words "Crush Chinese" written. The Islamist groups perceived this scene as a form of oppression because it labelled them as a reactionary movement.

It creates a sense of urgency for the Muslims not to vote for a non-Muslim leader for fear that he would continue to oppress the Muslim community at large. Even though the main purpose of the video was promoting unity in diversity, the opening point backfired on Ahok-Djarot.

Nothing intrinsically religious

The second issue was social welfare, with Anies-Sandi touching upon the Jakartans' housing grievances. They promised low-income earners would get a home-loan with zero down payment. Although it seemed impossible to implement this project, this issue was strategic in addressing the despair of the poor in Jakarta.

Furthermore, the poor people who became the victims of Ahok's forced eviction also viewed that voting for Ahok was not an option. For instance, the victims of forced evictions at a neighbourhood of fishermen in North Jakarta strongly opposed Ahok's relocation solutions arguing that the relocated housing was way too far from the place they work.

The religious factor notwithstanding, Anies-Sandi and their supporters used strategic-issue framing to mobilise the support. The religious rhetoric is one of the most effective issues in a Muslim majority country like Indonesia. But what actually had been done by Anies-Sandi were firstly to address the grievances of Jakartans and later finding a particular means of framing or context that resonated the most within the society, in this case the Muslim-majority Jakarta.

A similar approach could also be employed in secular society, but in this context the rhetoric is not religion but nationalism. President Donald Trump had successfully garnered support in the United States through his campaign promoting the nationalist spirit of "America First". He once stated that he would no longer surrender the US or its people to the false promise of globalism. This resonated with a large group of Americans who believed that the US was in a state of decline.

In other words, there is nothing unique with the methods employed by Anies-Sandi and their supporters. Strategic issue-framing is a useful tactic to mobilise support.

Now for the Presidential election

The pattern of strategic issue-framing might be replicated in the 2019 presidential election. With Jokowi predicted to run for a second term, his political rivals presumably will employ a similar method to undermine him. However, the question will be what issues and rhetoric are going to be addressed, especially as Jokowi is a Muslim and Javanese.

It will no longer be valid to use the rhetoric of "voting for a Muslim leader", unless the rumours perpetrated in the past - that Jokowi was a secret Christian, of Chinese ethnicity, and having communist sympathies - were revived. If the rumours circulate

again when the presidential election draws closer, Jokowi should change his strategy because relying on mere performance would be insufficient to secure his position.

Indonesia jails leaders of "deviant sect" for blasphemy

An Indonesian court has jailed three leaders of a group that Islamic clerics had called a deviant religious organization for up to five years for blasphemy, sparking condemnation from human rights groups over the targeting of minorities.

Reuters (08.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2n97ktT> - The now disbanded Gafatar hit the headlines after dozens of people, who had been reported missing by relatives, were believed to have joined. Last year, hundreds of members had to be evacuated from their West Kalimantan base after being attacked by residents who opposed their beliefs.

Gafatar was labeled by Indonesia's Ulema Council a deviant sect and authorities had described its teachings as "dangerous". People associated with the group say it is a social organization, not religious.

A panel of judges at the East Jakarta court on Tuesday jailed Mahful Muis Tumanurung and Ahmad Mussadeq for five years and Andry Cahya for three years for blasphemy. The men were cleared of treason charges.

A lawyer for the men, Yudhistira, described it as a "malicious prosecution" that had tainted Indonesia's justice system and said would consider whether to appeal.

Indonesia's blasphemy laws have come under greater scrutiny since Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, Jakarta's Christian governor, was put on trial for allegedly insulting the Koran. He has denied wrongdoing but his trial has inflamed religious tensions. Almost all blasphemy cases in recent years have ended in conviction.

Indonesia has the world's largest population of Muslims, the majority of whom adhere to moderate Sunni beliefs, and it recognizes six religions including Hinduism, Catholicism and Buddhism, but minorities, even within Islam, have faced rising intolerance in recent years.

Human rights organizations criticized the verdicts.

"The sentences show how Indonesia's vague, coercive and discriminatory blasphemy laws are being used to punish people for peacefully exercising minority beliefs," said Josef Benedict, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Discrimination and prohibition of Ahmadiyya Congregations to pray in their Mosque

AHRC (01.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2ms3xuM> - The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information regarding the following: forcible closure, intimidation, discrimination and State negligence against the Ahmadiyya congregation (JAI) of the Al-Hidayah Mosque, Depok City, West Java province. Without any reason, the Depok city government forcibly closed and sealed off the Mosque belonging to local Ahmadiyya groups. The local government and the police failed to ensure protection for the

Ahmadiyya. On the contrary, without due process of law, the government issued a controversial policy to permanently prohibit local Ahmadiyya congregations and their activities in the Al-Hidayah Mosque.

Case Narrative

On Wednesday 22 February 2017, the Ahmadiyya Indonesia Congregations of Depok city, West Java province received an invitation letter from the local Depok City government. It requested the JAI leader to attend a meeting related to activities of the Depok City Ahmadiyya congregations.

However, at 06.00 pm the same day, there was a phoned message that the meeting was cancelled by the government. No reason was given. On Thursday, February 23 at 08.30 am, Mr. Dadang, chair of the National and Political Unity Office (Kesbangpol) of Depok city phoned Mr. Farid Ahmad, a local Islamic religious leader. He invited him to attend a meeting in the government offices.

During the meeting, Mr. Dadang said that in the last three days the Depok City situation had become unstable, with religious discord increasing. He added that a huge demonstration would be held in front of the Al-Hidayah Mosque (Ahmadiyya Mosque). At 10.00 am Thursday, February 23, a government representative came to Al Hidayah Mosque. He asked about their building permit. After checking the document, it was shown that the Al-Hidayah Mosque had an official building permit from 2007.

Nevertheless, at 02.00 pm, the commander of the local civil service police unit (Satpol PP), Mr. Dudi Mi'raz Imaduddin forcibly closed down and sealed off the Al-Hidayah Mosque. This happened despite the Mosque having an official building permit. An announcement was posted in front of the Mosque prohibiting anyone from entering or using the Mosque. All doors and windows were permanently closed with wooden shutters.

The entire process was witnessed by the commander of the Depok police office (Polsek Depok), the village head of Sawangan Depok, the head of sub-district Sawangan Depok and the commander of the local military office (Koramil Depok). Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) of Depok city, KH. Abdullah Syafei and K.H. Fachrudin, also attended the forcible closure. The Ahmadiyya congregations protested against the closure because it was executed without judicial process. Therefore, the sealing off and forced closure is illegal and against the rule of law.

The Ahmadiyya congregations submitted a written letter to the police for guaranteed protection. They stated that there is social media propaganda about an invitation to the people. They were asked to become involved in the forcible closure of Al-Hidayah which will be conducted on February 24. Later, the chief of police came to the Al-Hidayah Mosque. He announced to the Ahmadiyya congregations that there will be a huge public protest of some 5000 people in front of the Al-Hidayah Mosque.

Suggested Action

Please write to the authorities listed below, asking them to investigate and audit the policy of the Depok City government regarding the forcible closure of the Al-Hidayah Mosque. The central government, ombudsman, parliament and the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) must be involved in Depok City's policy on Ahmadiyya.

Protection and equal treatment should be ensured for the Ahmadiyya congregations. Anyone who breaches the law, attacks or intimidates minority religions and belief groups in Indonesia should be prosecuted.

To support this case, [please click here](#).

Sample letter:

Dear

INDONESIA : Discrimination and prohibition of Ahmadiyya Congregations to pray in their Mosque

Name of victims: Congregations of Amadiya Depok City of Al-Hidayah Mosque

Names of alleged perpetrators : Government of Depok City, Police, Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP)

Date of incident: 22, 23 and 24 February 2017

Place of incident: Al-Hidayah Mosque, Depok City, West Java province

I am writing to voice my deep concern regarding the following: forcible closure, intimidation, discrimination and State negligence against the Ahmadiyya congregation (JAI) of the Al-Hidayah Mosque, Depok City, West Java province. Without any reason, the Depok city government forcibly closed and sealed off the Mosque belonging to local Ahmadiyya groups. The local government and the police failed to ensure protection for the Ahmadiyya. On the contrary, without due process of law, the government issued a controversial policy to permanently prohibit local Ahmadiyya congregations and their activities in the Al-Hidayah Mosque.

On Wednesday 22 February 2017, the Ahmadiyya Indonesia Congregations of Depok city, West Java province received an invitation letter from the local Depok City government. It requested the JAI leader to attend a meeting related to activities of the Depok City Ahmadiyya congregations.

However, at 06.00 pm the same day, there was a phoned message that the meeting was cancelled by the government. No reason was given. On Thursday, February 23 at 08.30 am, Mr. Dadang, chair of the National and Political Unity Office (Kesbangpol) of Depok city phoned Mr. Farid Ahmad, a local Islamic religious leader. He invited him to attend a meeting in the government offices.

During the meeting, Mr. Dadang said that in the last three days the Depok City situation had become unstable, with religious discord increasing. He added that a huge demonstration would be held in front of the Al-Hidayah Mosque (Ahmadiyya Mosque). At 10.00 am Thursday, February 23, a government representative came to Al Hidayah Mosque. He asked about their building permit. After checking the document, it was shown that the Al-Hidayah Mosque had an official building permit from 2007.

Nevertheless, at 02.00 pm, the commander of the local civil service police unit (Satpol PP), Mr. Dudi Mi'raz Imaduddin forcibly closed down and sealed off the Al-Hidayah Mosque. This happened despite the Mosque having an official building permit. An announcement was posted in front of the Mosque prohibiting anyone from entering or using the Mosque. All doors and windows were permanently closed with wooden shutters.

The entire process was witnessed by the commander of the Depok police office (Polsek Depok), the village head of Sawangan Depok, the head of sub-district Sawangan Depok and the commander of the local military office (Koramil Depok). Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) of Depok city, KH. Abdullah Syafei and K.H. Fachrudin, also attended the forcible closure. The Ahmadiyya congregations protested against the closure because it was executed without judicial process. Therefore, the sealing off and forced closure is illegal and against the rule of law.

The Ahmadiyya congregations submitted a written letter to the police for guaranteed protection. They stated that there is social media propaganda about an invitation to the

people. They were asked to become involved in the forcible closure of Al-Hidayah which will be conducted on February 24. Later, the chief of police came to the Al-Hidayah Mosque. He announced to the Ahmadiyya congregations that there will be a huge public protest of some 5000 people in front of the Al-Hidayah Mosque.

Therefore, I respectfully request that you investigate and audit the policy of the Depok City government on the forcible closure of the Al-Hidayah Mosque. The central government, ombudsman, parliament and the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) must be involved to monitor the investigation on government policy on the Ahmadiyya.

Protection and equal treatment should be ensured for the Ahmadiyya congregations. Anyone who breaches the law, attacks or intimidates minority religions and belief groups in Indonesia should be prosecuted.

I look forward to your prompt action in this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

.....

PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1. Mr. Joko Widodo
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2. Mr. Yasonna Laoly
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7. Dr. HM. Azis Syamsuddin, SH
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Indonesian church closed for years told: you can reopen if mosque allowed on your land

World Watch Monitor (10.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2mL1NbR> - An Indonesian church closed for years by order of the local mayor has been told it can reopen if a mosque is also allowed on its premises.

The GKI Yasmin Church in Bogor, 60km south of Jakarta, had resorted to holding open-air services outside the Presidential palace in Jakarta in protest.

The church was sealed and padlocked by order of the mayor of Bogor and the city government. The mayor claimed that the previous sub-village head had falsified

community signatures and that the church brought trouble with local Muslim neighbours. Later he said that the church should not be built on a street with an Islamic name.

In December 2010, the Indonesian Supreme Court affirmed the church's constitutional right to freedom of worship; however the mayor refused to reopen the church. The Indonesian Ombudsman's Office also urged the Bogor city administration to withdraw its later 2011 decree annulling the church's construction permit.

The congregation had resorted to conducting services on the pavement in front of their former church. Then in 2012 they moved to a monthly service in front of the Presidential Palace, where they held more than 100 services.

"We are glad and support the initiative," church spokesperson Bona Sigalingging told UCAN.

"We hope the problem for our church and also of other churches with similar problems will end soon," added Rev. Sony Dandel.

Original article (24 Sep, 2015):

Indonesian church holds 100th service outside Presidential palace

At the heart of the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, in the megacity of Jakarta, Indonesia, a church this Sunday will hold its 100th open-air Sunday morning service next to a main road – because a city mayor is afraid to insist that a Supreme Court order is carried out.

Bogor City, 60 kilometres south of the Indonesian capital Jakarta, is said to be one of the world's most densely populated areas. In April 2010, Bogor's Taman Yasmin Indonesia Christian Church (GKI Yasmin) was sealed and padlocked by order of the mayor of Bogor and the city government. According to a national paper, he claimed that the previous sub-village head had falsified community signatures and that the church brought trouble with local Muslim neighbours. Later he said that the church should not be built on a street with an Islamic name.

In December 2010, the Indonesian Supreme Court affirmed the church's constitutional right to freedom of worship; however the mayor refused to reopen the church. The Indonesian Ombudsman's Office also urged the Bogor city administration to withdraw its later 2011 decree annulling the church's construction permit.

GKI Yasmin's congregation resorted to conducting services on the pavement in front of their former church for more than two years. During services outside the church, they constantly faced harassment from groups of protesters – including from Islamist extremist groups such as FORKAMI (Indonesian Muslim Communication Forum), GARIS (Reformed Islamic Movement) and the FPI (Islamic Defenders' Front).

Fearing further aggravation from hard-liners, members of the Protestant church then held clandestine services at the houses of congregation members. In 2012, they started to conduct Sunday services in front of the State Palace, to further their case with the government.

The Bogor City Government reportedly allocated land for the replacement church some seven kilometers from its previous location, and a budget of up to 4.5 billion rupiahs (\$305,000) for a new church. The West Java regional government said it could provide up to 10 billion. But it is by no means certain that, even should the church agree to relocation, which so far they utterly refuse to do, they would be allowed to build a new church. Among other things, they would have to obtain a new building permit, which

would require them to obtain approval signatures from 60 local residents and 90 of the church congregation itself (all proved by local ID cards).

Indonesian President Jokowi, who completes one year in office in October, has introduced some improvements for the country's minority faiths, but a case like this one still shows how much room there is for progress. A recent report says he has the power to enforce the highest court's order on Bogor, but so far he has taken no action. The report continues, "As Human Rights Watch noted, Jokowi has also sought to "outsource a solution to Indonesia's religious intolerance problem to NU and Muhammadiyah, [Indonesia's two largest Muslim organizations]." While they both promote tolerant versions of Islam, the report says "some of the growth of extremism, which has many facets, can be dealt with only with the power of the state".

For World Watch Monitor, Vishal Arora went to visit the Sunday morning service outside the Presidential Palace. His video report is here: https://youtu.be/H0GbpXb7_I

Text of video:

"I'm worshipping here in front of our presidential palace because the GKI Yasmin church in Bogor cannot worship [in its own building] on Sundays," said Adhi Nugroho Chandra, a member of the church, which was sealed off in 2008.

The GKI Yasmin church has been meeting outside the president's office in Jakarta since 2012. This month, it will hold its 100th worship service on the street. It holds them every two weeks at 1pm, come searing heat or torrential downpour: the two or three other Sundays it meets in a variety of places. Its building in Bogor city, in Jakarta's suburbs, remains sealed in defiance of a Supreme Court order. The mayor of Bogor is under pressure from Islamist groups to restrict the congregation from using their place of worship.

"It's very hard to be a minority in Indonesia, and we have to fight for our rights," said Dwiati Novita Rini, a lay leader of the church. "It's not easy but it will not affect my faith."

While they are holding on to their faith in God, church members are now beginning to lose their confidence in the influence of President Jokowi, who will complete one year in office in October.

"I think the problem remains because the president did not dare to take action," Chandra Juliar, the pastor of the church, said. "The leader should have the courage to take action and enforce the law. We can't afford, as a nation, to let this problem remain if we want peace in Indonesia."

President Jokowi was expected not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor, Susilo Bambang Yodhoyono, who was criticised for being indecisive and weak before Islamist extremists. Jokowi appears to have the will to enforce the court order, but that involves taking a political risk. To function as president, he needs cooperation from parliament, which is dominated by opposition parties, including Islamist groups. Going against the Bogor mayor could have political repercussions.

"The mayor, who, I think, is the key person who can decide what happens in Bogor, still has people around him who are intolerant," explained Rini.

Christians acknowledge that President Jokowi has brought at least some change in the religious atmosphere of the country. For example, extremist groups like FPI and GARIS now appear to be less active.

"In Bogor, the leader of the group GARIS, which protested against our church, is in jail, and the protests against us are now getting lower and lower," Rini said.

The GKI Yasmin church says it will continue to hold as many worship services on the street as it takes to regain their right to use their church building.

"We are often asked how long we will struggle," said Pastor Juliar. "We have to carry on until we get justice. Yes, we are very tired and our hope at times starts to fade, but as believers, we won't give up. Our struggle is not only for our needs, but also for others who deserve peace. So we will achieve our goal to build our beloved Indonesia to be a peaceful country."

VIDEO text ends.

Meanwhile, Aceh – the only Indonesian province enforcing sharia law – is among the most hostile places for Christians to live. On 18 August, for the third time in 30 years, the Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church (GKPPD), in Singkil regency, was burned down in a fire that reduced the building to ashes in only 20 minutes.

A police investigation discovered a traditional machete and the wheel traces of two vehicles at the site. Despite this evidence, they announced a few days later that the fire was presumably caused by a short circuit, stopping further enquiry.

Fear of upsetting the majority community is believed to be another factor: after an arson attempt at the church in 1999, a mob threatened to set fire to the police station if arrested suspects were not set free. The demand was immediately granted.

Three hundred and fifty church members now hold services in the church yard. They gathered funds, bought a tent, and set it up for Sunday services.

"We know we are being watched by the extremists. Some even threatened to destroy the tent," the leader of GKPPD in Singkil, Rev. Erde Brutu, says. "But I remind the congregation: 'Don't give in to the temptation of fighting back. If we retaliate, how are we different from those who trespass against us?'"

Rev. Erde says he is almost desperate over the repeated incidents: "Pray that God will touch the perpetrators' hearts and turn them to Him, as well as for the law to be enforced in other similar cases in my hometown."

Indonesia ranks #47 on the 2015 World Watch List, the annual list compiled by Open Doors International, which works among Christians under pressure for their faith.

European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2017 on Indonesia, notably the case of Hosea Yeimo and Ismael Alua and the Governor of Jakarta

European Parliament (19.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2m8CGTv> -

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Indonesia, in particular that of 26 February 2014 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation between the European

Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Indonesia, of the other part, with the exception of matters related to readmission⁽¹⁾,

- having regard to the EU-Indonesia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force on 1 May 2014,
- having regard to the statement of 23 May 2015 by Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) Federica Mogherini on the prospect of further executions in Indonesia,
- having regard to the statement of 27 July 2016 by the European External Action Service (EEAS) spokesperson on the planned executions in Indonesia,
- having regard to the 6th European Union-Indonesia Human Rights Dialogue of 28 June 2016,
- having regard to the Bangkok Declaration on Promoting an ASEAN-EU Global Partnership for Shared Strategic Goals of 14 October 2016,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Indonesia ratified in 2006,
- having regard to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1987,
- having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous nation, the third largest democracy, the largest Muslim majority country, with millions of followers of other beliefs, and a diverse society comprising of 255 million citizens of various ethnicities, languages and cultures;

B. whereas Indonesia is an important partner of the EU; whereas relations between the EU and Indonesia, a G20 member, are strong; whereas the EU and Indonesia share the same values as regards human rights, governance and democracy;

C. whereas, in the first Ministerial Strategic Dialogue (8 April 2016), the Foreign Minister of Indonesia and the VP/HR jointly declared their decision to 'move the relationship to a new level of partnership' between the EU and Indonesia;

D. whereas on 19 December 2016 Hosea Yeimo and Ismael Alua, two Papuan political activists, were detained and charged with 'rebellion' under the Indonesian Criminal Code, following peaceful political activities; whereas Hosea Yeimo and Ismael Alua were released on bail on 11 January 2017; whereas legal proceedings of the case continue; whereas, if convicted, they can face up to life imprisonment;

E. whereas President Joko Widodo has promised Papuans a change, beginning with 'an open dialogue for a better Papua', and has undertaken to stop disproportionate use of force and human rights abuses; whereas the President has visited Papua four times since his election in 2014; whereas he recently ordered the release of a large number of Papuan detainees as a gesture of appeasement;

F. whereas the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, better known as Ahok, is standing trial, accused by some religious groups of insulting Islam; whereas three rallies calling for Ahok to be jailed, organised by a coalition of Islamist groups called the

National Movement to Guard the MUI Fatwa (GNPF-MUI), including Front Pembala Islam (FPI) members, have been staged since October 2016;

G. whereas freedom of thought, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of religion, the right not to be arbitrarily arrested or detained, and the right not to be tortured are fundamental and inalienable freedoms and rights;

H. whereas Indonesia resumed capital punishment in 2013 and has executed a number of convicts;

1. Appreciates the strong relationship between the EU and Indonesia, and repeats the importance of the strong and long-standing political, economic and cultural ties between the two parties;

2. Is concerned about the growing intolerance in Indonesia towards ethnic, religious and sexual minorities; strongly condemns all acts of violence, harassment and intimidation against minorities, as well as impunity for such acts, and condemns the increased abuse of existing regulations in order to discriminate, prosecute and imprison members of religious minorities, traditional religions, and ethnic and sexual minorities;

3. Welcomes Indonesia's insights on countering violent extremism and its experience in this regard, based on the promotion of a tolerant society and interfaith dialogues; notes the efforts of Indonesia to sustain its democracy, respect human rights and recall its 'unity in diversity'; stresses the need to ensure the protection of all human rights, particularly those of minority and vulnerable groups, ensuring non-discrimination in their exercise of the freedoms of religion or belief, opinion, expression, association and peaceful assembly;

4. Welcomes the continued European Union – Indonesia Human Rights Dialogue, established in 2010; welcomes the close cooperation between the EU and Indonesia on a wide range of issues; stresses that the EU and Indonesia have agreed to pursue concrete cooperation projects in a wide range of areas, including access to justice and penal policy, the countering of violent extremism, the rights of migrants, business and human rights, and the rights of persons with disabilities and of persons belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups;

5. Recalls that improving the human rights situation in Indonesia is a priority of the EU-Indonesia PCA;

6. Welcomes the good state of relations between Indonesia and its neighbours and its active engagement in favour of the UN;

7. Encourages the Government of Indonesia to take all necessary measures to ensure that the rights of peaceful activists are protected, and to ensure that an enabling environment is created for the realisation of freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful demonstration;

8. Welcomes the release on bail of Hosea Yeimo and Ismael Alua on 11 January 2017; notes that the legal proceedings of the case will continue; calls on the Delegation of the EU to Indonesia to follow these legal proceedings;

9. Asks the Indonesian authorities to consider dropping the charges against Hosea Yeimo, Ismael Alua and other prisoners of conscience against whom charges have been brought for peacefully exercising their right of freedom of expression;

10. Urges the Indonesian and local authorities in Papua to implement immediate and effective measures to ensure the safety and security of peaceful political activists

exercising their rights; calls on the authorities to ensure that people in Papua are able freely to express their ideas and opinions without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation;

11. Strongly condemns any act of violence or terror, and conveys its condolences to the families of the victims;

12. Notes with concern the blasphemy case against Ahok; stresses that freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion are protected under international human rights law;

13. Calls on the authorities of Indonesia to repeal Articles 156 and 156(a) of the country's Criminal Code, to remove the blasphemy provisions in the current draft Bill of Revision of the Criminal Code (RUU Revisi KUHP), the Electronic Information and Transactions Law and the rebellion laws (in particular Articles 106 and 110 of the Code), and to bring all laws into conformity with Indonesia's obligations under international human rights law, specifically on freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, and the right to expression and public assembly; notes that people may be imprisoned for 'defamation' for as long as five years;

14. Stresses the need for the Indonesian Government to protect Indonesia's tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism by investigating, arresting and prosecuting individuals or groups who discriminate or commit acts of violence against religious communities;

15. Is concerned about the intensification of anti-LGBTI rhetoric, which has resulted in numerous threats against, and violent attacks on, LGBTI NGOs, activists and individuals; calls on the government and lawmakers to refrain from further restricting the rights of LGBTI people, and to ensure that their right to freedom of expression and assembly is guaranteed;

16. Regrets the resumption of the death penalty; calls on the authorities to establish a moratorium on all executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty; expresses its concerns about the case of EU citizen Serge Atlaoui;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Indonesia, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council.

(1) Texts adopted, [P7_TA\(2014\)0141](#).
