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Death toll 'unimaginable' if bomb had exploded inside church

World Watch Monitor (18.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2GFHI0b> - The leader of the Indonesian church most badly damaged by the [suicide bombing attacks](#) last Sunday, 13 May, has said he "can't imagine" how much greater the damage could have been had the attacker detonated the bomb *inside* the church.

Rev. Yonathan Budiantoro of Surabaya Pentecostal Church, told the Christian charity Open Doors International that the morning service is the "worshippers' favourite time" to be at the church. Asked what might have happened had the bomber made it inside, he said: "I can't imagine. There would be so many victims. I can't imagine the death toll if the bombs had exploded inside the church."

Police say that Dita Oepriarto, whom they accused of being the local leader of the JAD militant group behind the attacks, drove a car laden with explosives at the church at around 7.30am local time, but it exploded outside the building. A 52-year-old security guard died, as did four church members, including a 17-year-old who tried to prevent the bombers' car from passing through the church gate.

The church has since posted a list of missing church members:

Nama = Korban Jemaat GPPS yg dirawat di

- RKZ :

① Fenny Suryawati (34 th)

② Agus (Tempel 1/11) (38 th)

③ Tae Suk Tjien (Tempel 1/11) (64 th)

④ Clarissa Angelin (7 th)
(Manukan Lor I/5)

5. Joseph Fernando (Bajawa RT 4 Rw3 NTT) 24th.

6. Rahmat Harjono (Mam Bonjol IS) 55 th.

7. Claudia Febryanti (WR. Supratman, NTT) 22 th.

- RSAL :

1. Ibu Tutik.

- RS. Adi Husada :

1. Kayla Jesslyn Imanuel

(Cucu Ibu Siti Jainap - PD)

RS. Dr. Soetomo

1. Sri. Martha Djumani

Cik Bing Bing

2. Bp. Giri Catur Sungkowi

Sebelum kejadian msh ada di dlm gereja
keluarga gereja yg belum diketahui keberadaannya.

1. Ibu Tjun Tung - jetis kulon g.

2. Anak Daniel (anak Bp. Budi Parkir)

3. Bp. Yudi Wijaya - Driyorejo I & A

4. Ibu. Debrin.

yg meninggal

① Pak Mini (Parkir Arjuno)

Meanwhile, reconstruction work at the church has been held up, as police are still gathering evidence as to what type of bomb was used, according to Catholic news agency [UCAN](#).

Soehendro, a church worker who was inside the church at the time of the blast, said the church needs major repairs as its interior was seriously damaged.

“The blast was huge and caused the ceiling to collapse. People just ran in panic,” he told UCAN.



Police investigating outside the Pentecostal church the day after the explosion (Photo credit: Open Doors International)

Access to the area around the church (circled in red, below) has been limited as police continue to investigate:



The bomb that exploded outside Surabaya Pentecostal Church killed a security guard and four church members (Photo credit: Open Doors International)

Indonesia bombings 'did not come as a surprise'

World Watch Monitor (14.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2rQljIn> - As details emerge of the shocking tactics used in the two sets of bomb attacks in Indonesia over the last 48 hours, a regional analyst has said he was not surprised by the apparent Islamist motive.

"Just a few weeks before the attacks, the government published a study, according to which close to 25 per cent of university students agree with the idea of a caliphate. Another study showed that eight per cent are ready for violent jihad, if given the opportunity. So in a way did not come as a surprise," Thomas Muller, analyst at Christian charity Open Doors International's World Watch Research unit, said in an interview with German Catholic broadcaster [Domradio](#) yesterday, answering a question about how a country once known for its inter-religious tolerance could give way to extremism.

A 2016 report looking at terrorism in Indonesia found that recruitment to the Islamic State group from the country was "one of the lowest" in the region as a proportion of its 200 million population, which it put down to "a strong culture of moderate Islam, a non-repressive government and relative political stability". The report, by a group of regional analysts, said the threat from IS-inspired militants "should not be under-estimated", however, given Indonesia's long history of Islamic terrorism and lack of legal measures to prosecute individuals under suspicion of terrorism.

Yesterday's (13 May) suicide attacks on three churches in Surabaya, the capital city of East Java province, by members of a single family were followed by this morning's (14 May) suicide attack on a police headquarters by a family of five. Indonesian police have revealed that the family that attacked the three churches on Sunday included two girls, aged nine and 12, two teenage boys, and both of their parents, identified in the [New York Times](#) as Dita Oepriarto, 47 and his wife, Puji Kuswati, 43.

An eight-year-old girl, wedged between her parents on a motorbike during this morning's attack on the police headquarters, survived the blast.

Meanwhile police [said](#) that an explosion yesterday at a block of flats in Sidoarjo, 41km from Surabaya, killed three members of a family who may have been planning an attack. A couple, both 47, and their 17-year-old son died in the explosion. Three other children survived. A number of active bombs were found in the flat.

Latest figures from the [BBC](#) put the overall death toll from the attacks at 18, including the bombers, with more than 40 injured.

Yesterday's attacks were the most deadly. The two teenaged sons rode motorcycles into Santa Maria Catholic Church and detonated explosives at 07:30 local time, just five minutes before their father drove a bomb-laden car at Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church, and followed shortly after by their mother and two sisters carrying out a bomb attack on Diponegoro Indonesian Christian Church.

The pastor of Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church told World Watch Monitor that a 52-year-old security guard died, along with four church members, including a 17-year-old who tried to prevent the bombers' car from passing through the church gate.

Response to the attacks

Indonesian President Joko Widodo described the attacks as “cowardly, undignified and inhumane” and said he will push through a long-awaited anti-terrorism bill if parliament does not pass it.

President Widodo was one of 70 prominent Muslim scholars meeting at the presidential palace in West Java to discuss peace in Afghanistan just three days ago, on 11 May. The group, from Pakistan, Indonesia and Afghanistan, issued a fatwa saying that “violent extremism and terrorism, including suicide attacks, are against Islamic principles” in an effort aimed at convincing the Taliban to end its violence, reported [AP](#).

Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, condemned the attacks. “Every act of hostility that manipulates religion is not supported by Islam,” it said in a statement.

In a statement from the Christian Conference of Asia, its General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara expressed his condolences to the victims’ families and stated that attacks carried out against worshiping communities during Sunday services are a “heinous crime, which is not justifiable by any religion”. He said the attacks “aim at destroying the country’s long-nurtured and cherished values of religious harmony”.

Pope Francis said he prayed that those affected would find no place in their hearts for “hatred and violence”, but instead “reconciliation and fraternity”, reported Catholic news site [CruX](#).

The attacks are the worst in Indonesia since Al-Qaeda killed 22 people on the island of Sulawesi in May 2005, and 20 in Bali later that year.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the Surabaya attacks, which are believed to have been orchestrated by Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an Indonesian militant group formed in 2015 and affiliated to IS. JAD is led by the jailed cleric Aman Abdurrahman, who has been accused of spreading IS propaganda from behind bars. Abdurrahman is currently facing new charges of masterminding attacks including the November 2016 [bombing of a church playground that left one child dead](#). Police said they believed church bomber Dita Oepriarto was the head of JAD in Surabaya.

The Surabaya attacks show more sophistication than previous “amateurish” plots by JAD, Zachary Abuza of the National War College in Washington DC told the [BBC](#). The use of children in the attacks was “absolutely unprecedented” in the region, he said, and speaks to the “ideological indoctrination” of the group.

World Watch Monitor reported in March that an [attack on a church](#) on the island of Sumatra was a “political warning” ahead of June’s regional elections. A local source said at the time that “in [Indonesian] politics, targeting Christians is a classic manoeuvre to garner votes and support from Muslims”.

The Surabaya attacks came only days after Islamist militant prisoners ended a five-day siege at a high-security jail on the outskirts of the capital Jakarta, reported [Reuters](#). During the stand-off the militants killed five members of Indonesia’s counter-terrorism force, Densus 88. The elite force was set up in 2003 following the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing that left 202 people dead. Densus 88 was described in 2016 as having [“become better than pretty well any other counter-terrorism group in the world”](#) at foiling attacks.

Suicide bombers kill at least 13, wound dozens at churches in Indonesia



Indonesian anti-terror policeman stands guard at the blast site following a suicide bomb outside a church in Surabaya, Indonesia on Sunday. (Photo credit: Robert Rizky/Barcroft Media via Getty Images)

By James Doubek

NPR (13.05.2018) - <https://n.pr/2Iydt0r> - Suicide bombers killed at least 13 people and wounded dozens in attacks on three different churches holding services in Indonesia's second-largest city of Surabaya Sunday morning.

Police said at least five suicide bombers were involved, including at least one on a motorcycle and a woman who had two children with her, according to The Associated Press.

Police spokesman Frans Barung Mangera said at least four people were killed at the first attack on the Santa Maria Roman Catholic Church. He said 41 people were wounded at that location, including two police officers, while one or more of the bombers were killed.

Mangera told the AP that minutes later, a second explosion went off at the Christian Church of Diponegoro and a third explosion went off at the Pantekosta Church.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack via its Aamag news agency, but earlier Reuters quoted the communications director of Indonesia's intelligence service, Wawan Purwanto, as saying the agency believes it was the work of the ISIS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD).

The U.S. State Department designated JAD as a terrorist group in January 2017. The U.S. government says the group originated in 2015 from other extremist groups and its members pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The U.S. blames JAD for a suicide bombing and gun attack in Jakarta in January 2016 that left four people dead and 25 injured.

Purwanto said the attacks are likely linked to a riot and a 36-hour standoff at a prison near Jakarta last week, when Islamic State loyalists killed at least five security officers, according to Al-Jazeera and Reuters.

"The main target is still security authorities, but we can say that there are alternative [targets] if the main targets are blocked," he told Reuters.

With more than 260 million people, Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. About 87 percent of the population is Muslim, while Christians make up about 10 percent, according to a 2010 estimate from the CIA.

Christians have been targeted before by militants in Indonesia, according to the AP. Attacks on churches in 2000 killed 15 people and wounded almost 100.

One of the most deadly attacks in Indonesia involved multiple bombs that went off inside and outside nightclubs in 2002 in Bali. The attack by the al-Qaida-linked group Jemaah Islamiyah left 202 people dead.

'Indonesia's most important extremist ideologue' faces death over church bombing

World Watch Monitor (02.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2ImpBkS> - A Muslim cleric alleged to have inspired an attack on a church playground in Indonesia, in which [one child was killed and three injured](#), has denied inciting hatred.

Aman Abdurrahman, 46, is facing a possible life sentence or even the death penalty for allegedly masterminding a series of bombings, including the one at Oikumene Church in Samarinda, the provincial capital of East Kalimantan province, in November 2016.

He is alleged to have told his followers to kill "heathens" from prison, where he [is already serving a nine-year sentence](#) for funding a militant training camp in Aceh and plotting other attacks.

But Abdurrahman [told the South Jakarta District Court](#): "My view of heathenism does not authorise bloodshed. Like in Samarinda, that violates what I believe about how to behave towards Christians."

Meanwhile, he said he only learned about a 2016 suicide attack in Jakarta, in which eight people died, from other inmates who had seen the news on TV. "I didn't instruct them to do it," he said.

'Started to move on'



Four-year-old Trinity, one year after the attack, still needs treatment for burns she sustained. (Photo: World Watch Monitor)

In September, [five militants received prison sentences](#) for their part in the Samarinda church attack.

The children who were injured [are still undergoing treatment](#) for the burns they sustained, and are also being given trauma care. Their families attended the court hearing last week and told World Watch Monitor it was a difficult experience because they had “started to move on”.

“All of us, at first, refused to attend the hearing as it will bring back the sad memories, but the Special Forces said it is important for us to testify,” said Marsyana Tiur, mother of five-year-old Alvaro, who was forced to undergo [17 operations in the first four months after the explosion](#).

“I am not concerned about the perpetrators or who is behind the attack anymore. What is important to me now is my child,” she added. “I told the judges about the amount of money we needed for Alvaro’s treatment. They advised me to keep all the receipts as they will try to propose to the government to sponsor the cost. I hope they will do it.”

The father of two-year-old Intan Banjarnahor, who died in the attack, also expressed concern that their testimonies would ignite further hatred among the families and supporters of the bombers.

'He influenced thousands'

Abdurrahman told the court he had “never killed anyone”, but Sidney Jones, director of Jakarta-based think-tank Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, told [Bernar News](#) there is “no question that Aman Abdurrahman is Indonesia’s most important extremist

ideologue, whose writings and sermons, disseminated online and over social media, influenced thousands”.

“The defendant is considered to be the most knowledgeable of Islamic State ideology [in Indonesia]” and was a helpful source for IS affiliated groups, another expert witness told the court, as reported by the [Jakarta Post](#).

While in prison, Abdurrahman “pledged his allegiance to ISIS online and began translating the group’s propaganda into Indonesian in 2014”, according to the Singapore-based [Straits Times](#). “He also amassed a following and some inmates went on to engage in terror activities after their release. In 2015, more than 20 Indonesian terrorist factions united behind Abdurrahman to support ISIS, giving birth to JAD [Jamaah Anshar Daulah, a local IS-affiliated group], which he directed from his prison cell.”

As the alleged founder of JAD, the US government has put him on a list of “global terrorists”.

Indonesia Christians’ whipping a rare example of non-Muslims punished under Sharia



**Non-Muslims in Aceh are allowed to choose between whipping and prison.
Photo credit: Chaideer Mahyuddin/AFP/Getty Images**

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, Aceh's regulations stipulate a strict dress code, prohibiting all women from wearing tight clothes and requiring them to adhere to *hijab* (Islamic dress). Citizens in Central Aceh who fail to comply with the Muslim dress code forfeit their right to assistance from local public or private institutions, regardless of their religious affiliation. The cases of Christians being subjected to flogging are rare because the number of Christians in Aceh is small – they make up around 1.2 per cent (about 50,000 people) of the province's population.

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

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

Ahok's appeal 'last chance' to clear name

World Watch Monitor (26.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2FazZe6> - A first appeal hearing in the blasphemy case of the Christian former governor of Jakarta was held today (26 February) in what could prove his only chance to challenge the verdict.

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, better known as "Ahok", has asked the Supreme Court for a review of the two-year prison sentence he received in May 2017. He was convicted on the basis of a video in which he argued against use of the Quran for political purposes – comments for which he was later adjudged to have committed blasphemy.

Since the former governor went directly to the Supreme Court, it "could be Ahok's last chance to overturn his conviction", explained Moses Ompusunggu for the Jakarta Post, as the number of reviews by the court is limited.

After today's hearing at the North Jakarta District Court, which lasted only ten minutes, Ahok's lawyer and sister, Fifi Lety Indra, told reporters the basis of the appeal was the conviction in November last year of Buni Yani, a communications professor from Jakarta.

Yani was found guilty of tampering with the video on which Ahok appeared. The video caused widespread unrest in the Muslim-majority nation and a turning of public opinion against Ahok who, at that time, was running for re-election.

"The legal argument for our petition is that the judges [at the district level] made a mistake in their verdict [on Ahok], particularly in relation to Buni Yani's verdict," Ahok's sister explained.

The prosecutors, who will have a chance to respond in two to three days, maintained that the two cases were not connected and that Yani's conviction did not constitute "new evidence".

Once both parties have been heard, the case will be forwarded to the Supreme Court, which will then decide whether or not to review the case.

"Ahok was guilty of blasphemy, while Buni Yani was guilty of tampering with a video that was not his," one of the prosecutors, Sapta Subrata, said. "The evidence in Buni Yani's case is part of a speech cited by Buni Yani, it was not used as evidence in Ahok's trial."

Abdul Fickar Hadjar, a criminal law expert from Trisakti University in Jakarta, told the Jakarta Post also that "the decision [on Yani] had yet to be declared final and binding", as Yani is also considering an appeal.

A hard-line Muslim group, Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which was involved in leading major protests in Jakarta during Ahok's trial, has called on the court to reject the appeal.

Since his sentencing in May last year, Ahok has been held at the Police's Mobile Brigade Command Headquarters in West Java. He is due to be released in May 2019, but could be released earlier if remissions are taken into account.

Indonesia church attacker acted alone, police say

World Watch Monitor (15.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2ofZIYE> - The man accused of injuring four people in an attack on an Indonesian church on Sunday morning (11 February) acted alone and obtained the weapon – a one-metre-long sword – in exchange for his mobile phone, police say.

The suspect, a 23-year-old student identified as Sulyono from Bayuwangi in East Java, had attempted to travel to Syria and had shown signs of being radicalised, The Straits Times reported.

But so far, no evidence has been found that he was linked with a wider extremist network, a police spokesman said, according to the newspaper. It appears he acted as a lone-wolf when he entered the St. Lidwina Catholic Church in the city of Yogyakarta on Sunday morning and allegedly injured the 81-year-old priest, Father Karl-Edmund Prier, as well as two other church members and a police officer, before he was taken down by a gunshot to his thigh. Church statuary were also damaged in the attack. In a video that went viral he can be seen waving a sword at the front of the church.

Sulyono was charged on Tuesday, 13 February, under three different laws related to persecution, sharp-weapon ownership and terrorism. A conviction under the 2003 terrorism law carries the possibility of the death penalty.

Local sources told World Watch Monitor that Sulyono was an alumnus of an Islamic boarding school in East Java and known by the villagers as a good Quran reader.

According to police, he was radicalised as a student in Sulawesi when he joined several religious organisations.

Religious freedom

A day after the attack, Indonesia President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo said there was no room for intolerance. "Our Constitution guarantees religious freedom," he said. "We will not give even the slightest amount of room to those who promote and spread intolerance in our country. Especially those who act with violence."

Moderate Muslim leaders condemned the attack. "The act of assault and violence is not part of any religious teachings and beliefs," Helmy Faishal Zaini, general secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama, the country's largest moderate Muslim organisation, told the Catholic news agency UCAN. "Islam condemns acts of violence, especially if it is done in houses of worship."

The radicalisation of Indonesian youth was highlighted during the 2017 blasphemy trial of Jakarta's former Governor, Ahok, a Christian and ethnic Chinese.

In November, World Watch Monitor reported that a survey of 4,000 high-school and university students showed nearly 20 per cent "support the establishment of a [Muslim] caliphate over the current secular government" and that one in four was willing to fight to achieve this.

'Guarantee protection'

Earlier this month, Catholics from another church in Yogyakarta were confronted by a group of local Muslims, who claimed that through their social work, Christians were attempting to convert people to their faith.

Father Endra Wijayanto, head of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Yogyakarta, called on the police to "guarantee protection and security to churches" and to assume "a proactive attitude to prevent further episodes of violence, protecting the fundamental rights of all Indonesian citizens, without exception". In a statement sent to Agenzia Fides, he said the Church "actively supports the values of Pancasila [the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state] and the Constitution of 1945, which guarantees freedom of religion and worship [and] the protection of human rights for Indonesian citizens".

Decree 'abused'

Meanwhile, however, about 450 religious leaders have said that a decree regulating places of worship has been abused by some local government authorities to block the construction of churches. According to UCAN the 2006 decree "states that religious officials should provide the signatures of 90 worshippers, as well as signed support from at least 60 residents. Village heads also need to approve the building of a new church or other place of worship".

This has made it difficult for churches to obtain a building permit and over the years hundreds of churches have been closed for failing to show the necessary documentation when questioned. This has resulted in many Protestants finding alternative places, gathering in shopping malls or outside, as is the case for example with the GKI Yasmin Church in Bogor, West Java. For the past seven years the church has been holding open-

air services outside the Presidential palace after it was closed down and pastors were later told they could reopen only if they also allowed a mosque on the premises.

On the most recent Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian, Indonesia rose from 46th position last year to 38th in 2018.

"The situation for Christians has deteriorated in the course of recent years," Open Doors said.

Judges: ICE can't deport 100 Christians to Indonesia

Immigrants in New Hampshire and New Jersey 'fear persecution and torture' back home

By Griffin Paul Jackson

Christianity Today (06.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2nYEAoY> - On February 1, a federal judge put a halt to the deportation of about 50 Indonesian Christians living in New Hampshire. The next day, a different judge took the same measure to protect another 50 Indonesian Christians in New Jersey.

Despite an ongoing crackdown by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on immigrants living in the United States illegally, these 100 Christians from Southeast Asia can breathe a little easier—for now.

In the New Hampshire case, US District Judge Patti Saris gave the immigrants living mostly in the state's coastal towns 90 days to reopen their cases once they receive the necessary paperwork.

Most of the endangered immigrants are counted among a group of about 2,000 ethnic Chinese Indonesian Christians who fled violence in their home country two decades ago. Each of them entered the United States legally, typically via tourist visas now long overstayed. While some have been granted legal status, others—including the dozens now threatened with deportation—have seen their applications denied or stalled.

The immigrants have held jobs, raised families, and lived peacefully in the US over the last 20 years. But their reprieve granted under previous administrations has ended as President Donald Trump emphasized a policy of removing illegal aliens.

'The Last Fight'

"This is a hard case," said Saris at a hearing, according to Reuters. "These are good and decent people who have stayed here with our blessing and were given work authority and haven't violated the opinions we imposed on them."

In her opinion, Saris concluded that the 90-day pause was warranted in light of the potentially deadly circumstances that may await Christians forcibly returned to Indonesia.

"A brief delay in unlawful deportation of residents who have lived here with government permission for over a decade outweighs the public interest in prompt execution of removal orders, where petitioners have been law-abiding and pose no threat to public safety," Saris wrote.

The immigrants have lived in the US for years, protected since 2010 by a now-defunct humanitarian program called "Operation Indonesian Surrender." However, beginning in August of last year, as these individuals attended their regular ICE check-ins, they were informed of their impending deportation.

The plight of the dozens of Indonesian Christians in the New Jersey case is similar. In that case, US District Judge Esther Salas granted a temporary stay to deportations in response to a lawsuit put forth by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

<http://cvnteyes.co/2FizBWi>

New Hampshire governor, Chris Sununu, lauded the decision in his state and affirmed the court's call for further re-examination in the case. "I will continue to advocate for a resolution that protects these individuals from religious persecution and allows them to remain in the United States," he stated.

Lee Gelernt, an attorney with the ACLU, critiqued ICE tactics in the case and expressed relief at the stay. "The ruling ensures that the fundamental principles of habeas corpus and due process will not be discarded in the rush to deport these longtime residents," he told Law360.

Sandra Pontoh, pastor of the Madbury Maranatha Indonesian Fellowship in Madbury, New Hampshire, also rejoiced at the ruling.

"I was hoping the judge would decide to let my friends work on their case for 90 days. That is what we hoped," Pontoh told the Associated Press. "This is wonderful. That means my friends can have time, their lawyers will have more time to work on their cases. This is the last fight for them."

Battles for Religious Freedom in Indonesia

Indonesia ranks No. 38 on Open Doors's World Watch List, which tracks the most dangerous countries for Christians. After moves toward increased openness and democratic freedoms over the last two decades, Indonesia has sent mixed messages on persecution in recent years.

Last year, the Christian governor of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, was convicted of blasphemy against Islam. The governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, received a two-year jail sentence for challenging political rivals on their use of the Qur'an to dissuade the country's Muslims from voting for a non-Muslim.

Social, political, and religious forces have converged against Christians in the country that is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. Especially following Ahok's conviction, fringe Islamist groups have leveraged increased political influence. A 2006 law allegedly promoting "religious harmony" prompted the closure or destruction of more than 1,000 Indonesian churches. In 2015, threats against churches ultimately scared thousands of Christians from their homes in the nation's Aceh province.

However, the last year has been somewhat more measured. Ahok's replacement in Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, has attempted to reach out to the archipelago's embittered Christians, inviting them to host their public Christmas celebration at the city's National Monument. (The Christians expressed appreciation, but rejected the offer.) In a far more significant move that came last November, Indonesia's top court discarded the national requirement that compelled citizens to identify with one of six religions on their national identification cards.

According to Open Doors, Indonesia is on an overall negative trajectory in terms of freedom and protections for Christians. The continuing persecution of Christians in

Indonesia provided the US judges grounds for staying deportation orders, as it is considered unconstitutional to deport immigrants to countries where they are likely to face persecution or torture.

A Temporary Respite

In New Jersey, four Indonesian Christian men sought refuge in the Reformed Church of Highland Park last month to avoid deportation. One of the men, Harry Pangemanan, who watched as two companions were arrested while he fled to the church, has a wife and two children and is an elder at the church. He helped rebuild hundreds of homes in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. The court ruling means these men can now leave the church without fear of arrest for deportation.

"Praise God," Pangemanan told USA Today. "I feel so much relief and for my daughters. There's still so much to do, but I just praise God for what we have now."

Reformed Church of Highland Park's pastor, Seth Kaper-Dale, is familiar with the predicament facing some of his congregants. In 2006, more than three dozen men connected to the church community were deported. Last year, eight Indonesian refugees moved into the church to find sanctuary in light of increased ICE threats of removal.

At the time, Kaper-Dale received a call from Arino Massie, an Indonesian Christian and one of his flock, saying, "Pastor, I'm already on the plane. I'm headed for Japan. Thanks for all the efforts of the community. Tell the community I love them. Tell my son I love him."

The 100 Indonesian Christians in New Hampshire and New Jersey are now fighting a legal battle that, if lost, could lead them to the same fate that befell Massie.

For the moment, however, some of the pressure is off.

Judges Saris and Salas have rejected ICE's deportation initiatives for the time being. But the long-term threat is no less potent.

"Under this Kafkaesque procedure," wrote Saris in her opinion, "[the Indonesian Christians] will be removed back to the very country where they fear persecution and torture while awaiting a decision on whether they should be subject to removal because of their fears of persecution and torture."#

West Java had highest number of religious freedom violations in 2017, Jakarta close behind: Setara Institute

Setara (16.01.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2G9DfmB> - Many people have been concerned about a general rise in religious intolerance throughout Indonesia over the last few years, and the Setara Institute has been carefully documenting specific incidents in which religious freedoms have been violated to highlight which areas of the archipelago have become the most problematic.

According to the Indonesia-based NGO, which conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom and human rights issues, last year there were 201 incidences of religious freedom being violated across Indonesia's 26 provinces. And West

Java has the unenviable distinction of being the region with the highest number of violations.

"In West Java there were 29 incidents, in Jakarta 26 incidents, in Central Java 14, East Java 12 and Banten 10," Setara Institute researcher Halili said at the NGO's office yesterday as quoted by Kompas.

According to Halili, out of the 201 violations, 75 were acts involving government officials, including local administrations, police, schools and courts. The other 126 incidences involved individuals or non-governmental organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

The report shows that most of the violations were directed at minority religious groups including Christians, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus and Shiites, with incidents including intimidation, discrimination, assault, hate speech, bans on worship and the sealing of houses of worship.

Setara and others argue that the weakening of religious freedoms is due to both the strengthening and spread of intolerant organizations as well as weak governmental agencies and policies that do little to combat these organizations (when they're not actively enabling them).

Last year, Setara ranked Jakarta as the least tolerant city in Indonesia (worse even than Banda Aceh), in part due to its high number of reported religious freedom violations as well as the "politicization of religious identity" during the 2017 gubernatorial election.
