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INDONESIA: Christian YouTuber sentenced to 10 years in prison for 'criticizing' Islam

Christian YouTuber sentenced to 10 years in prison for posting videos critical of Islam

By Anugrah Kumar

The Christian Post (09.04.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3vfYrmq> – An Indonesian Christian YouTuber has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for posting a video that purportedly offended people across the Muslim-majority country.

Muhammad Kace, a former Muslim cleric who converted to Christianity in 2014 and had been uploading videos to YouTube criticizing his former faith, was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Ciamis District Court in West Java this week.

On the day of his sentencing, Muslims surrounded the court demanding a harsher prosecution of the convert, according to the U.S.-based persecution watchdog International Christian Concern.

Kace was arrested in Bali last August after he uploaded a sermon video in which he allegedly insulted the Islamic prophet Muhammad. According to UCA News, Muslim groups filed several complaints about that video in which he said: “Muhammad is unknown by God and is only known by his followers because he is surrounded by devils.”

When prosecutors demanded a 10-year jail term for him, Bonar Tigor Naipospos, deputy chairman of the Jakarta-based rights group Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, noted that Muhammad Yahya Waloni, a Muslim convert from Christianity, was recently convicted of a similar offense against Christians but he received only five months.

Police allege that Kace uploaded at least 400 videos insulting Islam. And he did it intentionally to stir public unrest, chief prosecutor Syahnan Tanjung was quoted as telling the

court. "This is outrageous, so it warrants a stiff sentence," he said.

In jail, Kace was beaten and tortured by a police official named Napoleon Bonaparte, who was detained in the same prison due to a corruption case, ICC said, adding that Bonaparte forced Kace to eat his excrement.

Kace's lawyer, Martin Lucas Simanjuntak, has said his client will appeal the sentence.

Andreas Harsono, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch Indonesia, told ICC. "Both Christian preacher Mohammad Kace and Muslim cleric Yahya Waloni need not to stay a single night in prison because of the toxic law."

Timothy Carothers, ICC's advocacy manager for Southeast Asia, said: "The right to speak one's mind is essential and must be protected. This sort of treatment and punishment under Indonesian law is a shameful reality. As long as Indonesia continues to enforce religious harmony through regulation and prosecution, it will continue to achieve the opposite."

The Southeast Asian country is home to the world's largest Muslim population. Its Constitution is based on the doctrine of Pancasila – five principles upholding the nation's belief in the one and only God and social justice, humanity, unity and democracy for all.

However, there are many extremist groups in Indonesia that oppose Pancasila.

Churches often face opposition from groups that attempt to obstruct the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship.

Photo : Christians gather at a church for Easter mass on April 4, 2021, in Surabaya amid tight police security following the March 28 a bombing at the Makassar cathedral on Palm Sunday. | JUNI KRISWANTO/AFP via Getty Images

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Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1268

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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1269