

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

INDONESIA: Indonesia to relax building rules for worship places

INDONESIA: Indonesia to relax building rules for worship places

Obtaining permission to build a church is difficult in the most populous Muslim-majority country

UCA News (08.06.2023) – The Indonesian government has decided to ease rules for building houses of worship, including churches, by initiating changes to a 17-year-old decree, considered a major barrier to such plans.

Religion Affairs Minister Yaqut Cholil Qoumas told lawmakers on June 5 that the Joint Ministerial Decree of 2006 will be revised, doing away with the need for a recommendation from the Forums for Religious Harmony (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, or FKUB), the main arbiter on issues regarding interfaith ties.

According to current rules, a government license for building a place of worship can be obtained only by getting a set of recommendations, including one from the Muslim-dominated FKUB.

The change would mean the recommendation from representatives of the ministry in the local government would be sufficient to construct a house of worship.

"Often, the more recommendations the more difficult it is," said the minister, who is a cleric and member of Indonesia's largest moderate Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama.

"We can't deny that," the minister said of many proposals new houses of worship are rejected in the country.

"We can solve all problems if we start with honesty, especially being honest with our religion," said the Muslim politician.

Andreas Harsono, a researcher from Human Rights Watch, said that "by removing permits for houses of worship from FKUB, the government is actually returning the principle of freedom of religion, according to the 1945 Constitution, to Indonesia."

He said the FKUB founded in 2006 has been problematic.

"In the name of harmony, the minority submits to the majority. This is different from the concept of freedom of religion where all citizens have the same right to practice their faith, regardless of religion or belief," Harsono said.

Also, being representative of the population, the forum always

had more Muslim members.

“In Jakarta, 83 percent of the 21 FKUB members are Muslim. As a result, the decisions taken by the forum reflect a majority veto,” he said.

Harsono said that since 2006, thousands of houses of worship for minority groups have been closed.

Most of them are churches because Christians are the largest minority in Indonesia, and not surprisingly, the number of mosques has increased dramatically.

“Based on data from several different institutions, I estimate that at least 1,000 churches were closed or plans for their renovations were canceled.

However, the number of mosques increased from 243,000 in 2010 to 550,000 in 2020 according to data from the Ministry of Religion, he said.

Minority groups welcomed the move to revise the system.

Protestant Pastor Reverend Palti Pandjaitan of the Solidarity Group for Victims of Violations on Freedom of Religion and Belief told UCA News on June 8 that the need for obtaining 60 signatures from neighboring households of different religions also needed to be revised.

Some of these neighbors may be intolerant and opposed to church construction and hence “cannot be handed over responsibility for guaranteeing the right to worship” of their fellow citizens, he said.

“In fact, what must be guaranteed is the right of every citizen to be able to worship in the state,” the pastor said.

Catholic priest and social activist Father Antonius Benny Susetyo said the permits should be mandatory only for permanent places of public worship.

Susetyo is also a member of a group appointed by President Joko Widodo for promoting communal tolerance and understanding.

“Places of worship for limited use do not need permits, such as chapels in convents or prayer rooms in family houses,” he told UCA News.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos of the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace said FKUB need not be involved in issuing permits for building houses of worship.

“The function of FKUB should be to become a joint forum, a forum for communication, and play a role in campaigning and promoting tolerance and respect for those who are different,” he said.

Naipospos said building permits should be the domain of the federal government, even though the application may be made through the regional office of the Ministry of Religion Affairs.

Meanwhile, Anwar Abbas, deputy chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council, opposed the plan and warned it could trigger uproar and may cause violence.

“I’m just asking a question, if there is commotion and acts of violence in the community as a result of a policy made by a minister, then who is to blame, the people or the minister?” he said in a statement.

Photo: Indonesia’s Minister of Religion Affairs Yaqut Cholil Qoumas. (Photo: The Ministry of Religion Affairs)

[Further reading about FORB in Indonesia on HRWF website](#)

Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in **/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php** on line 1267

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line 1267

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

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line 1268

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