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Indonesia's only Christian governor insists 'no insult intended' as 'blasphemy' trial begins

By Imogen Faux

World Watch Monitor (13.12.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2iiYSVZ> -

UPDATE (13 Dec.)

Indonesian Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (better known as "Ahok"), fought back tears during the first day of his blasphemy trial today (13 Dec.).

Ahok - only the second Christian and the second governor of Chinese descent to lead the Indonesian capital city, Jakarta - is alleged to have "misused" a Qur'anic verse (which, some say, suggests Muslims should not be ruled by non-Muslims) during a speech in early October.

Some Muslim leaders accused him of insulting Islam by quoting from the Qur'an. He apologised, but said his comments were directed at politicians "incorrectly" using the verse against him and not a criticism of the verse itself.

The trial is widely seen as a test of the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation's stance on religious freedom, since the country has a large Christian minority.

It was broadcast live on TV and Ahok continued to protest his innocence, telling the court: "I had no intention of insulting Muslims or insulting the clergy. On that basis, I plead with the judges to consider my exception plea."

Original article (29 Nov.)

A Christian governor in Indonesia is being investigated by police as a suspect in a blasphemy case, amid on-going calls from Muslim groups for his imprisonment.

Investigators questioned the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as "Ahok", for eight hours at the National Police headquarters in South Jakarta last week.

The outcry against Ahok began after he quoted a verse in the Qur'an that forbids using the Islamic scripture for political gains in a speech he made in early October. Some Muslim leaders accused him of insulting Islam by quoting from the Qur'an, and he apologised.

An edited version of his speech was posted online and went viral, sparking outrage. At a mass rally in the Indonesian capital on 4 Nov., demonstrators called for Ahok's removal from power. On 16 Nov., police declared that he was being investigated.

The incident coincides with a rise in terror attacks targeting Christians, and Christians, rights activists and moderate politicians fear Indonesia's increasingly fragile secular constitution is under strain.

Muslim leaders have called for the public to respect the legal process while the investigation continues. But the outrage caused by the speech, spearheaded by radical Muslim groups, has increased concerns that the majority-Muslim republic is swaying towards extremism.

Last week, Indonesian police gave permission for a large-scale rally against Ahok to take place on Friday (2 Dec). Earlier this month, the National Movement to Save Indonesia Ulema Council's Fatwa (GNPF-MUI) mobilised tens of thousands of demonstrators to take to the streets of the capital in protest on 4 Nov. Estimates of the number of participants varied between 50,000 and 150,000.

In response, rallies were held on 19 Nov. in support of the ethnic-Chinese Christian leader, UCAN reported. Christians, activist groups and moderate Muslim politicians have expressed solidarity with minority religious and ethnic groups against the tide of growing intolerance. Ahok said he has no intention to give up his place as the republic's first Christian governor for decades, and has remained positive about his re-election bid.

The Ahok case is one of a series of incidents that have seen radicals challenge secular political and civil affairs. In August, a teenage man attacked a priest with an axe during a Mass in Medan, North Sumatra, and failed to detonate a bomb in his backpack. Earlier this month, a two-year-old child died and three other young children were injured when a man threw petrol bombs at a Protestant church in East Kalimantan Province. Some Indonesian Christians said they fear the attack was connected to Ahok's case.

Two terrorism experts said last week that a five-year national de-radicalisation programme had not succeeded in reducing extremism. Analysts have been especially concerned by moderate Muslims' hostility towards Ahok. Earlier this month, tens of thousands of moderate Muslims rallied alongside hardliners. The Muslim Times ran an opinion piece arguing that Ahok losing his blasphemy case could be the tipping point for a republic once upheld as a model of pluralism and stable democracy in a shift towards a more conservative form of Islam.

From 2004 to 2014, blasphemy cases in Indonesia had a 100 per cent conviction rate. Human rights campaigner Andreas Harsono voiced concerns that the accusation may be being used as a "political tool" to derail Ahok's re-election campaign.

For Christians, much hangs in the balance. Some see their on-going security and freedom tied to the fate of the accused governor of Jakarta. With a lengthy legal process ahead for Ahok, the coming months could hold much uncertainty for them as well.

Indonesia's only Christian governor questioned by police amid 'blasphemy' furore

By Imogen Faux

World Watch Monitor (29.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2hWro0z> - A Christian governor in Indonesia is being investigated by police as a suspect in a blasphemy case, amid on-going calls from Muslim groups for his imprisonment.

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Bomb attack on Protestant church in Indonesia kills infant

The attack is another blow to religious harmony in the Muslim-majority nation

By Katharina R. Lestari

UCA News (14.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2eWcaW5> - A convicted terrorist hurled petrol bombs at a Protestant church in Indonesia on Nov. 13 killing one infant and leaving three others hospitalized with severe burns.

The attacker, a 32-year-old man identified as Johanda, threw several petrol bombs into the parking lot of the Batak Society Christian Church of Oikumene in Samarinda, East Kalimantan province.

Four children playing in the lot were injured and rushed to nearby hospitals. One of them, a two and a half year-old toddler named Intan Olivia Banjarnahor later died on Nov.14.

The attack came after tens of thousands of Islamic hard-liners rallied in Jakarta on Nov.5 calling for the city's Protestant governor to be jailed for blasphemy, or even put to death. Many now worry the Muslim-majority nation might be turning towards extremism.

According to National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian, the bomber was sentenced in 2012 to three years and six months in prison for his involvement in a plot to blow up the Center for Science and Technology Research. He was released on parole two in 2014.

"The perpetrator has been arrested. Please trust law enforcement officers to uncover his [terrorist] network," Indonesian language news site, Tempo, quoted him as saying.

Meanwhile, Samarinda Police Chief Setyobudi Dwiputro claimed the attack was the first terrorist act to have taken place in the province, claiming that East Kalimantan was usually a place of religious tolerance.

The blast resonated right to the top of the Indonesian administration. President Joko Widodo tweeted that the attack must be "investigated thoroughly" on Nov.13.

Religious leaders' response

Reverend Sabar Maringan Manullang from the Batak Society Christian Church in East Kalimantan said he visited the bomb site after the incident. He said that around 100 members of the church attended the Sunday prayer service.

"Some parents brought their children in. But some children refused to come into the church," he said. "So they were hurt in the bomb attack.... If the pastor had not asked parents to bring their children in, the number of victims would have been higher."

Holy Family Archbishop Yustinus Harjosusanto of Samarinda said the tense political situation in the country has been hijacked by terrorists. The bomb attack was a "signal" that must be taken seriously, he said.

"Following the bomb attack, all parishes in Samarinda were guarded by security forces during their Sunday afternoon Mass celebrations. Still, local Catholics didn't feel panicked," he said.

Reverend Gomar Gultom, general secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, said that all of Indonesia's religious leaders needed to spread the message of peace, humanity and nationhood.

"This is why religions came to this earth," he said.

He also entreated the government to prevent similar incidents from happening.

In another anti-Christian incident in August, Capuchin Father Albertus S. Pandiangan was attacked and injured by Ivan Armadi Hasugian while delivering a sermon during Sunday Mass held at St. Joseph's Church in Medan, North Sumatra province.

'Worship in the woods' a year after Islamic extremists destroy Aceh churches

World Watch Monitor (10.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2fmxIyE> - Churches destroyed a year ago by Islamic extremists and police in Aceh Singkil – a rural 'regency' in Indonesia's only Sharia-ruled province – have still not been rebuilt because of discrimination against Christians by local authorities, say church leaders. However, despite the troubles, church membership is climbing.

Hardliners started destroying Aceh Singkil churches in October 2015 following clashes between Muslims and Christians in another part of the country. Some churches were razed by extremists and others demolished by police following demands from residents that all unlicensed churches be pulled down.

Of 11 churches demolished last year, the members of six continue to meet in tents. The rest have joined other churches, but many live in fear of further violence. "The perpetrators live in the neighbourhood and they always watch my church members' activities," said Noldi,* whose church meets in two sites 25km apart - to cater for its growing numbers.

Boru Manik, a local church member, added: "I'm sad that we have to worship in tents in the middle of a palm-oil plantation. But we're keeping our spirits high."

The heavy rain in largely tropical Indonesia can be a problem in temporary structures. “[Rain] has happened many times, but we still continue the service. Even if the tents are leaking and rainwater or mud is splashing in from the outside, no-one ever leaves the service!” said a member of the Indonesian Christian Church.

The authorities allow Christians to meet in these temporary structures, but church leaders say they are nevertheless playing politics with plans for new buildings. Churches fear that these authorities are reluctant to grant them planning permission because it would not be popular with Aceh’s largely Muslim voters in the run-up to local elections in February 2017.

Alongside this, all local churches that were not destroyed must become licensed, but the registration process is slow and churches fear it will not be prioritised during election campaigning.

Lamhot*, a Christian activist, told World Watch Monitor that it is already too late to expect building permits to be issued by the authorities now that candidates have started registering for the election. Lamhot’s church was burned down last year and services are now held in tents in the nearby woods. Even this also requires a permit, denied by the government to many hundreds more on security grounds.

Another setback is the formula planners insist is used to estimate the size of a new church. They stipulate that estimates must be based on the number of church members with local identity cards, multiplied by 0.8 metres. Outsiders without local ID cards may not be counted, so new churches are in danger of being granted too small a plot if most of their members are not local.

Berutu, a member of Pakpak Dairi Christian Church in the village of Pertabas, is disappointed by the lack of progress. “The government is afraid of pressures from Muslim clerics and extremists,” she said. “When they gave instructions to knock down our church, they were no longer our protectors.”

Local politicians are putting added pressure on the Church in the lead-up to elections. The regency chief who instigated last year’s demolition of unlicensed churches – a move agreed by Christians following last year’s religious clashes – wants each church to appoint five people to his election campaign team. Christians believe it is a bribe to win him their backing, but understand that other candidates are less tolerant of Christianity. “Vote wisely for your leaders – our fate for the next five years depends on it,” Berutu told her congregation.

Conviction for a Muslim’s murder 'without reliable evidence'

Progress has been slow on another front too. Natanael ‘Wahed’ Tumangger was convicted of killing a Muslim in last year’s clashes. But the legal process that saw him sentenced to six years in jail was flawed, according to Christians who say he was not accompanied by a lawyer during police interrogation and that no proper evidence was shown during his trial. Later, the Council of Churches in Indonesia sent a team of lawyers to represent him. They said that the prosecutor mentioned a projectile and a gun, but failed to present any reliable evidence at the next hearing. The prosecutor’s statement on the colour of Tumangger’s clothes during the clash was the only ‘proof’ used against him.

Local Christians say Tumangger’s sentence was passed to satisfy the Muslim community. In jail, news had spread among inmates that a Christian had killed a Muslim, so Tumangger was beaten regularly during his first weeks behind bars. His first few months were spent in a room only 6x4 metres, with 26 other inmates.

"The prison guard didn't let us out even for a few minutes. Those were miserable times," he said of his experience. His wife remembered him being as pale as a corpse when he finally got out of that cell.

Tumangger has been transferred to a better room – the same size, but with no more than six people. Prisoners normally 'rent' the room for an equivalent of US\$300 for the duration of their time behind bars. However, Tumangger is an electrician and the head of the prison 'employs' him as payment for the better room.

"There's nothing to worry about me here. But what about my wife and our four children?" he said. "How are they going to survive in my absence?"

The Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but by-laws in provinces such as Aceh can prevent these rights from being upheld.

The Open Doors World Watch List 2016 cites Islamic extremism as the main source of persecution in Indonesia, which has the world's largest population of Muslims. It's ranked 43 among the 50 countries in which it's most difficult to live as a Christian. In strictly Islamic regions like Aceh, Muslims converting to Christianity face pressure from family and friends to deny their new faith.

*Names changed for security reasons

Islamic hardliners protest in Jakarta, accuse Christian governor of blasphemy

Today Online (14.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2gFDqOC> - Thousands of Muslim hardliners protested in Jakarta on Friday (Oct 14) demanding the Indonesian capital's Christian governor be executed for allegedly insulting Islam, as he faces an increasingly tight election race.

About 10,000 demonstrators wearing white Islamic robes and skullcaps rallied outside city hall in the capital of the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, waving banners that read: "The blasphemer must be prosecuted."

The protest was triggered by accusations that Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known by his nickname Ahok, insulted Islam by criticising opponents who used Koranic references to attack him ahead of the February polls.

"Ahok must be executed. According to Islamic teaching, he must be killed," Mr Emed Muhammad, a hardline opponent of the governor, told the cheering protesters.

"Jakarta is now being governed by an infidel, but Indonesia has the biggest Muslim population."

Hundreds of police and soldiers were deployed around city hall to ensure the rally did not get out of hand.

In his controversial remarks last month, Mr Purnama told a crowd they had been "deceived" by his opponents who used a Koranic verse to try to put them off voting for a Christian.

"You are being fooled," he said.

Mr Purnama, Jakarta's second Christian governor and the first from Indonesia's ethnic Chinese community, has won huge popularity with his no-nonsense style and determination to clean up Jakarta, an overcrowded, disorganised and polluted metropolis.

But his tough-talking style, unusual for a politician in Indonesia, has alienated some and he has also faced constant opposition from hardline Islamic groups, who protested for weeks when he became governor two years ago.

Mr Purnama still remains the favourite to win the election, but the race has heated up in recent weeks with two other candidates, the son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and a popular ex-education minister, declaring they will run.

He became Jakarta governor in November 2014, but was not elected to the post. He was deputy governor and automatically became governor after incumbent Joko Widodo was elected Indonesian president.

Catholic priest injured by ISIS axeman, failed bomb attempt during mass

Terror in Indonesia: Axe-wielding ISIS jihadi, 18, stabs Catholic priest, 60, before trying to blow up hundreds of worshippers during Sunday Mass

By James Dunn

Daily Mail (28.08.2016) - <http://dailym.ai/2c0oGni> - An ISIS suicide bomber today attacked a Catholic priest with an axe as he tried to blow up hundreds of worshippers at a church during Sunday Mass.

Priest Albert Pandiangan, 60, was holding the holy ceremony at the altar when the 18-year-old fanatic rushed towards him with a backpack bomb and tried to blow himself up.

But the bomb burned without setting off the explosives, so the jihadi pulled an axe from his bag and slashed the priest's arm at St Yoseph Church in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra in Indonesia.

The congregation then stepped in and managed to wrestle the axe from his grasp, detaining him until the police arrived.

As officers marched the suspect to the car, pictures show his white trousers soaked in blood. Police found his ID card and a hand-drawn picture of the ISIS flag.

The young fanatic also told police that he was not working alone.

He was later pictured at the police station with an officer holding his bloody head off the ground, where he was lying handcuffed.

'Somebody tried to kill the priest by pretending to attend the church service and at that time tried to explode something, like a firecracker, but the firecracker didn't explode, it only fumed,' chief detective Nur Fallah said.

The priest suffered slight injuries and has been taken to hospital near where it happened. A picture of the attacker's ID card circulating online said he was Muslim.

In recent years there have been a number of attacks on religious minorities and others in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country.

A suicide attack in the Indonesian capital in January killed four attackers and four civilians, including a Westerner, and injured 19. In July a suicide bomber linked to the Islamic State group blew himself up outside a police station in Central Java.

Churchgoers on Sunday quickly caught the attacker and called the police.

An eyewitness, Markus Harianto Manullan, said the assailant wore a jacket and carried a bag.

'He sat in the same row as I did... I saw him fiddling with something in his jacket, and then I heard a small explosion and he immediately ran to the podium,' Manullan said. Police are still investigating the man's motive.

Ahmadis arrested in Lombok following village protest

The Jakarta Post (21.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2fXZ6S0> - The East Lombok Police criminal investigation division released eight Ahmadiyah followers from Bagik Manis village, East Lombok regency, West Nusa Tenggara, on Saturday after detaining them for four days for allegedly praying with non-Ahmadis.

"They told us that there was a report from local people saying that we prayed with non-Ahmadis in my home. Then, local officials from the village administration ordered us to go to the sub-district office with them," Monginsidi, one of the Ahmadis, told The Jakarta Post in a telephone interview on Sunday.

He added that when they arrived, the head of Sambelia religious affairs office (KUA) told them that Ahmadiyah followed a different syahadat (Islamic creed), which the three Ahmadis denied.

Sambelia sub-district head Buhari said that to avoid any problems, he decided to take the Ahmadis to the Sambelia Police office.

"A crowd formed outside while they were in my office, so I decided to take him to the police to protect as they would not come to any harm there," Buhari told the Post over the phone.

Indonesian Ahmadiyah Congregation (JAI) spokesperson Yendra Budiana said there were eight Ahmadiyah families in Sambelia village and the heads of five of them were also taken to the Sambelia police office from their homes while the other three were being questioned.

National Police spokesman Insp. Gen. Boy Rafli Amar said on Monday that the local police decided to detain the eight Ahmadis for their own protection.

"It was for their own safety. We didn't want any violence. We also ordered local communities to engage in dialogue to address any problems," Boy told journalists.

However, Monginsidi said that several people joined them in the sub-district office such as local figures from Bagik Manis village but none of them spoke out against the Ahmadiyah or tried to harm them.

Yendra said the JAI contacted East Lombok Police on Friday asking them to release the eight Ahmadis. The request was granted after a meeting was held in the village with

Sambelia Police officers, local figures and local officials, which decided that they should be released but must move from the village.

He added that the next day, East Lombok Police officers delivered them to a mosque at their village where Sambelia Police personnel and village officials asked them to sign statements promising not to disseminate Ahmadiyah teachings and if they wished to live in the sub-district they must give up being Ahmadis.

"However, they all refused to sign the statements, asking to remove the words 'should not follow Ahmadiyah' in the text before they would be willing to sign them," Yendra said, adding that currently all of them were still living in the village.

There have been widespread instances of discrimination against Ahmadiyah followers across the country. In February, Ahmadis in Bangka regency, Bangka Belitung, were forced to leave their village because local people protested against their presence. Meanwhile, in May, a mob ransacked an Ahmadiyah mosque in Kendal, Central Java even though the followers had acquired a permit to build it in 2003.

National Commission on Human Rights commissioner Muhammad Nurkhoiron said that the government was failing to guarantee the freedom of religion in the country.

"Discrimination against Ahmadiyah followers is an old story. It proves that the government has never regarded it as a serious matter. That is an example of a human rights violation and the government has not been there to protect the minority," Nurkhoiron said.

Ex-Gafatar leaders charged with blasphemy and treason in Indonesia

By Jewel Topsfield

The Sydney Morning Herald (08.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Uupqms> - Three former leaders of the disbanded Gafatar movement face life imprisonment after being arrested for blasphemy and treason in a case raising serious concerns about Indonesia's treatment of religious minorities.

In January an ex-Gafatar community in West Kalimantan was torched by a rampaging mob and members forcibly returned to their home villages to be "re-educated" by religious leaders.

The three ex-Gafatar leaders are followers of Millah Abraham, a belief system banned in Indonesia in February by a joint ministerial decree.

Indonesian authorities say that Millah Abraham combines the religious teachings of Islam, Judaism and Christianity and is therefore heretical. The Indonesian state ideology, Pancasila, only recognises six official faiths - Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism -although Indonesia's 1945 constitution explicitly guarantees freedom of religion.

Police also accuse the ex-Gafatar of trying to establish an independent state known as Negeri Karunia Tuhan Semesta Alam (State gifted from the Lord of the Universe), which they say is treasonous.

The accused - spiritual leader Ahmad Mushaddeq, his son Andry Cahya and ex-Gafatar leader Mahful Tumanurung - were arrested on May 25. They are the first people to be

charged with treason and blasphemy by the government of Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Amnesty International is urging the international community to appeal to Indonesia to release the men, drop the charges, ensure they are not tortured and rescind the ministerial decree banning Millah Abraham.

"They have been arrested solely for peacefully exercising their human right to freedom of religion," it said.

Human Rights Watch also called on the government to stop using the blasphemy law against religious minorities in Indonesia.

Gafatar was founded in 2012 but was disbanded by its members in August 2015, after the government refused to register it as an organisation. Its members say it was a community organisation, not a religious group, but many were Millah Abraham followers.

Several thousand ex-Gafatar members moved to West Kalimantan to establish a farming community aimed, they say, at creating food security to help Indonesia survive a global food crisis.

"Indonesia is [an] importer of rice, which is ironic because we all eat rice," says one of Gafatar's founders, Farah Meifira. "We have a strong belief the country will run out of food."

Ms Meifira said the former Gafatar community expected to be rewarded for assisting the government to carry out its goal of food self-sufficiency. Instead it was accused of blasphemy and treason.

"According to documents, they divided Indonesia into 12 regions, each region has a governor, their country has a president and a vice-president," Agus Andrianto from the National Police told Fairfax Media.

"There were phases of building the state – first was recruitment, second was spreading their teachings, the third was 'hijrah' or migration when they went to Mempawah (in Kalimantan), the fourth was physical struggle. Look, we have documents that support our case, we don't make it up."

But the ex-Gafatar insist they had no intention of establishing their own country. "We are not trying to grab authority. Nothing like that," Ms Meifira tells Fairfax Media. "We are just a small community, like the Amish, for example."

The ex-Gafatar say many have faced stigma and discrimination, including from their own families, after returning to their home villages. This hardship is exacerbated by the fact many sold all their assets to buy the land in Kalimantan and must start again. They also claim some had holes punched into their ID cards and can't access free medical treatment. Muslim clerics have been sent to the villages to re-educate the ex-Gafatar about Islam.

"It's like we have a stamp on our forehead because we have been so exposed in the media," says Agus Setiawan, a former Gafatar member. "They treat us like the communists back in the day. It's unbelievable."

Islamists close Indonesian church weeks after it opened

World Watch Monitor (12.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1VV7HVx> - An Islamist group in Indonesia has, in front of a local police commander, sealed off a brand new church, torn down its sign and demanded that the local mayor cancel its permit. The Santa Clara Church in Bekasi, a heavily-populated commuter city to the east of the capital, Jakarta, only opened on 7 March.

The Islamic Forum Community (FUI) and other Islamist organisations have been protesting since the church obtained its permit in July 2015, claiming its leaders had used false identity cards to get it.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has started an appeal on the church's behalf, and asked for supporters to send letters to ten top Indonesian leaders, including the President. The AHRC added that it will write a separate letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The AHRC noted that local law enforcement agencies failed to intervene on the church's behalf, leaving the congregants in "fear and uncertainty".

The FUI complained that the church had been built in a community where the majority are Muslims and where Islamic boarding schools also exist. However, the Bekasi mayor refused to annul the church's permit, saying it had fulfilled all the legal requirements necessary for construction. Indonesia's Minister of Religion supported the mayor's decision.

"Despite this, law enforcement agencies have failed to protect the Santa Clara Church congregants; in fact, it seems the agencies have no will or policy to enforce the law against vigilantes. As a result, the church congregation lives under pressure and intimidation," wrote the AHRC in its letter of appeal.

The AHRC called upon the local police to "take a strong stance" against the FUI and "ensure that the government guarantees protection to the Santa Clara congregation to practise their religion".

"Furthermore, the government should revise the law on the establishment of worship places without any discrimination among the various religions and beliefs that exist in Indonesia," the letter concluded.

"In the last decade, the existence of intolerant vigilante groups has become a serious problem in Indonesia," wrote the AHRC in its letter to supporters. "More importantly, the country's law enforcement does not seem to be willing or committed to enforcing the law against such groups, despite their actions being in violation of the right to freedom of religion and belief guaranteed in the 1945 Indonesian Constitution. Article 29, Paragraph 2 requires the State to 'ensure the freedom of every citizen to choose their own religion and to worship according to their religion and belief itself'."

Indonesia is No. 43 on the 2016 Open Doors World Watch List, which ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

The current events in Bekasi are all too familiar for Christians in the Jakarta area.

In March 2013, the Batak Protestant Church, also in Bekasi, was torn down almost immediately after it had been built. Again, protesting Muslims claimed the church's leaders had falsified signatures to obtain a permit.

Meanwhile, about 70 kilometres away in Bogor - also a commuter city outside Jakarta - another church continues to hold open-air Sunday morning services next to a main road, because its city mayor is afraid to insist that a Supreme Court order is carried out.

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 has resorted to conducting services on the pavement in front of their former church for more than two years. Then they moved to a monthly service in front of the Presidential Palace, alternating with services in other premises. In September last year, the church held its hundredth service outside the palace. A church leader told World Watch Monitor that number has now increased to 115 services.

New Catholic report tells stories of murder, kidnapping and torture in West Papua

The Catholic Leader (09.03.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1RUQyIq> - ALLEGATIONS of recent military and police intimidation, beatings and torture, kidnapping and murder in West Papua, have been documented in a new Church report.

The report documents Muslims being radicalised in the once predominantly Christian Papuan provinces, and "very active" Muslim militias that burn down Papuan houses.

The report was compiled by the Brisbane Catholic Justice and Peace Commission's Shadow Human Rights Fact Finding Mission to West Papua, following a visit to West Papua last month.

It has not yet been publicly released, nor comment sought from Indonesian authorities.

The report documents religious, social and economic discrimination including how the carve up of land for major development has benefited multinationals and excluded Papuans from ownership and jobs.

It refers to a slow motion genocide happening 250km north of Australia and states that "the Indonesians want to replace the Christian religion with Islam".

The report author Josephite Sister Susan Connelly was accompanied to West Papua by Brisbane archdiocese's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission executive officer Peter Arndt.

During their fact-finding mission they interviewed more than 250 community leaders in Japapura, Merauke, Timika and Sorong.

Sr Connelly, a respected human rights advocate, likened her visit to West Papua to "stepping back twenty years when I first went to East Timor".

"The same oppressive security presence everywhere, the same suspicion, bewilderment, frustration and sadness," she said.

"The same fear. The same seemingly groundless hope.

"A man took my hands in his and said, 'We are in danger'. That simple statement sums up for me the experience of the whole visit.

"The Papuan people have lost so much, and are facing erasure as a people, merely preserved as oddities of the past or artifacts to be photographed for tourist brochures.

"They realise that their land is considered more valuable than they are."

The fact-finding team heard many accounts of alleged military and police brutality and murder.

"There is clear evidence of ongoing violence, intimidation and harassment by the Indonesian security forces," Mr Arndt said on his return to Brisbane.

"That is especially the case for Papuans expressing their support for particular political points of view.

"Authorities want to close down any Papuan efforts to promote discussion about self-determination, and they have applied a military response to deal with the irrepressible desire of a large number of Papuans to promote their cause for freedom."

Based on his interviews across West Papua, Mr Arndt (pictured) identified the instigators of alleged human rights violations as members of the Indonesian army including Kopassus, police including a special counter insurgency unit, Detachment 88, and Indonesia's intelligence agency, BIN.

"Even demonstrations about social issues such as access to education get broken up by authorities," he said.

The fact-finding team heard many examples of how the Indonesian Government pushed economic development, but ignored human rights.

"The Government has carved up the land and given it for exploitation to some 50 multinational companies," the report said.

"The procedure is that the local government invites companies to come and gives permits.

"People are usually shocked when the companies come to sign a MoU (memorandum of understanding) with them, showing them the permit and the map.

"If the villagers don't agree to the proposal, the company goes back to the local government and returns with the police."

In the 1970s, ethnic Papuans accounted for 96 per cent of the population.

Today they are a minority 48 per cent, because of the rapid migration of Indonesians from other more populated islands such as Java.

The report found that Papuans were now marginalised economically at the expense of immigrants, the majority of whom are Muslims.

The report said there was "a movement for Muslims from Indonesia to replace Papuans in every sector".

"The Indonesians want to replace the Christian religion with Islam. Many mosques are being built everywhere. They want Papua to be a Javanese Malay nation," the report said.

"Radicalisation is happening in Papua, with some militias very active near the border with PNG.

"They burn down the Papuan houses. They are recruited as illegal loggers. Their camps and logging are well protected by the military.

"The military are certainly killing the people, and closed access to opportunity to Papuans in all areas of life constitutes a slow motion genocide.

"The general opinion encountered was that Indonesia is a total failure regarding Papua and is just another coloniser.

"The Indonesian Government does not give opportunities to Papuan people or protect them.

"It was said that most Church leaders try to deal with the problems one by one, but the whole picture should be looked at as a series of policies designed to overcome the Papuan people.

"In every sector of government the system is composed of Indonesian tactics to destroy the Papuans.

"Beatings and torture are used, but also the economic aspects of lack of opportunity, the sidelining of the indigenous peoples, the taking over of land by companies ... are part of the plan."

Accusations in the report

- A young, wealthy businessman poisoned in 2015. He had financially supported building an office for the National Committee for West Papua, an independence-oriented group. He also funded Papuans being sent to international conferences.
- A Papuan woman activist arrested in 2015 by police for holding a prayer service in support of an international conference in London. She and her group were interrogated for five hours.
- In January this year, 27 Papuan palm oil workers were allegedly tortured by the Indonesian army's special force Kopassus. The men had previously complained to their company bosses after they had not been paid for two months.
- A man aged 35 who used to work for Papua's Freeport gold mine was kidnapped in 2015, killed, and his body thrown on the street. There was no sign of torture and the police told his family that it was an accident.
- Police and military broke up community activities such as prayer meetings.
- In September 2015, 18-year-old Daniel Bowgow was killed. His father was a local prayer meeting leader.

- People reported they couldn't move freely at night to search for food for fear of being kidnapped. The military and police use Papuan informers to let them know of people's movements.

Ahmadiyah community persecuted

Subang authorities ban religious minority's activities

Human Rights Watch (11.02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Vgctuy> - Local Indonesian authorities have banned the activities of the Ahmadiyah religious community in the town of Subang in West Java province, Human Rights Watch said today. The Indonesian government should urgently intervene to stop the harassment and intimidation of the minority group.

On January 29, 2016, Subang district officials and Muslim clerics issued a letter that bans all Ahmadiyah activities in central Subang. The next day, they placed a banner outside the Ahmadiyah mosque stating that it was closed. Neither President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo nor other national officials have spoken out or intervened to lift the ban.

"The Subang officials who are trying to prevent the Ahmadiyah community from practicing their faith seem oblivious to religious freedom," said Phelim Kine, deputy Asia director. "Indonesian officials should be at the forefront of defending rights protected under the constitution and international law, not issuing unlawful prohibitions that undermine them."

The three-page letter was signed by Tatang Supriyatna, the head of Subang district, five other local officials, and four Muslim clerics who support the ban. The Subang signatories include its police chief, the district Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) commander, the local Religious Affairs Ministry, and the chief of Sukamelang village, where many Ahmadiyah live.

The Ahmadiyah have long suffered persecution in Indonesia. They identify themselves as Muslims, but differ with other Muslims as to whether Muhammad was the "final" monotheist prophet. Consequently, some Muslims perceive the Ahmadiyah as heretics.

The 400-member Ahmadiyah community in Subang, about 130 kilometers east of Jakarta, has been a target of official harassment and intimidation since October 2015. At that time, Ika Koswara, the Sukamelang village head, sought to stop the construction of an Ahmadiyah mosque, alleging that the Ahmadiyah community had no construction permit. The Subang Ahmadiyah community then presented officials with a valid construction permit issued in 2004.

The harassment and intimidation intensified on January 16, when a neighborhood leader, Amir Syaripudin, accused the Ahmadiyah in a letter to the Sukamelang village chief of "blasphemy against Islam" and implied that there could be violence against the Ahmadiyah unless the local government curbed their activities. "We reject a blasphemous activity taking place in our neighborhood," Syaripudin wrote. "We don't want our members to lose patience and to use violence if that activity is not banned."

The Subang district chief, Tatang Supriyatna, responded by convening a meeting on January 29 with the leaders of the Ahmadiyah community and local government and security force officials. Ahmadiyah community leaders told Human Rights Watch that the officials at the meeting pressured the community "to disband" and to convert to Sunni Islam. Later that day, Supriyatna issued the banning order. The following day, Supriyatna had a banner placed outside the Ahmadiyah mosque that says the property is officially "Closed/Banned" and lists the names of the 10 officials and clerics who support the ban.

The harassment and intimidation of the Ahmadiyah in Subang coincides with similar persecution on Bangka Island, off Sumatra's east coast. The local government's threat of expulsion prompted the police on February 5 to evacuate the community's women and children due to fears of violence.

Indonesia's Ahmadiyah have been under threat since June 2008, when the government of then-President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed a national decree ordering the Ahmadiyah community to "stop spreading interpretations and activities that deviate from the principal teachings of Islam." Violators are subject to up to five years in prison. Following the decree, militant Islamists carried out several violent attacks against Ahmadiyah including in Cikeusik in February 2011, killing three Ahmadiyah men.

During the 2004-2014 administration of Yudhoyono, militant Islamists with the complicity of local police and government officials forced the closure of more than 30 Ahmadiyah mosques, while other religious minorities including the Shia and some Christian groups were also targets of harassment, intimidation, and violence. The frequency and severity of violent attacks on religious minorities have decreased since Jokowi became president in October 2014, and he has pledged to protect religious minorities and fight religious intolerance.

Indonesia's constitution in articles 28 and 29 guarantees freedom of religion. Prohibitions on the Ahmadiyah from practicing their religion violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Indonesia in 2006. Article 18 of the covenant protects the right to freedom of religion and to engage in religious practice "either individually or in community with others and in public or private." Article 27 also protects the rights of minorities "to profess and practice their own religion."

"Jokowi needs to demonstrate the political will to protect the rights of religious minorities by both taking action against officials who seek to deny those rights and repealing discriminatory legislation," Kine said. "Jokowi's silence is giving free rein to people abusing the Ahmadiyah."

Indonesia cracks down on 'deviant sect' Gafatar after village burned down by mob

The Sydney Morning Herald (26.01.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1PS3jAc> - A so-called "deviant sect" living in a remote farming community are besieged by a mob who burn their settlement to the ground. Hundreds of suspected members are taken to transit centres. The government deploys warships to transport them back to their home villages, where they will be "re-educated" by religious leaders.

It may sound like a B-movie script but these extraordinary scenes have played out over the past week in Indonesia, in a country still jumpy after the Jakarta terror attacks.



A little-known religious minority group called the Fajar Nusantara Movement, or Gafatar, recently came to public attention when a doctor and her six-month-old son disappeared from Yogyakarta in December. She was found two weeks later, living in a Gafatar community in West Kalimantan that had been established four months ago.

Gafatar was disbanded in August 2015. The Indonesian government suspected it of being affiliated with "deviant teachings", which are understood to be a combination of Islamic, Christian and Jewish beliefs. The Indonesian state ideology, Pancasila, only recognises six official faiths - Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

On January 19, more than 1000 Gafatar members were evacuated in police trucks after a rampaging mob attacked their settlement in Monton Panjang in the coastal West Kalimantan regency of Mempawah.



Video footage (video in link above) shows a baying crowd hacking at wooden houses before torching the settlement. Clothes and other household items are strewn in the dirt.

"The mass[es] told us to leave, so we did, with just the clothes on my body," Supriyadi, a 56-year-old father of four told Fairfax Media. "Why are they so vicious to us, what exactly did we do wrong? We used to be members of Gafatar, sure, but that was disbanded months ago. Even so, Gafatar was not a religious organisation."

Mr Supriyadi said he came to Monton Panjang from his home in Surabaya two months ago in order to farm. "We grow string beans and water spinach. We never stopped communicating with our family, they knew where we were. We practice the Koran just like other Muslims, we pray five times a day. We just finished building our mushola [Islamic prayer room]."



The evacuees will be returned to their home towns in Indonesian Navy warships.

"We will convince them that they can lead normal lives. Of course this won't be easy, because they already have misguided thinking and principles. But we have to fix this," the co-ordinating human development and culture ministry's acting secretary-general, Agus Sartono, was reported as saying in the Jakarta Post.

Indonesia's top Islamic clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), is expected to issue a fatwa in February on whether Gafatar is a heretical movement. They suspect it is a new form of al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah [Islamic Leadership], which the MUI has already declared heretical. Qiyadah's founder, Ahmad Moshaddeq, was jailed for four years for blasphemy in 2008 after he declared himself a prophet.



The head of MUI in Yogyakarta, Toha Abdurrahman, told Fairfax Media it could take "months, years even" to re-educate the former Gafatar members.

"The ex-Gafatar members may claim that they are practising Islam just like everybody else, five times a day praying, reading from the Koran," he said. "But we know for sure they believe in a fake prophet. That's a deviation. The last prophet was Muhammad. That's what we will guide them back to."

While there is no proof to link Gafatar with acts of terrorism, many Indonesians are suspicious.



"Although it is too early to address Gafatar's links to terrorism, the group's recent recruitment influx is worrying, particularly amid the growing involvement of local radical groups with the Islamic State movement in Syria," a Jakarta-based security consultancy warned its expat clients last week.

But Human Rights Watch Indonesia researcher Andreas Harsono said the government and media should not mislead the public by calling Gafatar a radical Muslim group.

"They are exclusive, but they are not advocating violence," he told Fairfax Media. "They want to live by themselves, they want to have their own community like the Amish."



Mr Harsono said the last week's events represent one of the biggest religious minority crackdowns in Indonesia in recent years. "This is religious persecution. It is disturbing. Why should they be re-educated in Islam?"

Rasidi, a community head in Monton Panjang, told Fairfax Media it was not the local villagers who had asked the Gafatar people to leave or burned their camp down.

"But we all support that they go back to wherever they are from," he said. "They are not part of our community."

Villagers selling supplies were not allowed past the gates of the camp, Mr Rasidi said. "What were they hiding? The recent stories were quite disturbing. Because they do not believe the same thing as us . . . It's best they return home. We felt for the children. But we can't have them here."
