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Indonesia bans militant group Islamic Defenders Front

By Edna Tarigan

Associated Press (30.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2XjK0qf> - Indonesia on Wednesday banned a militant Muslim group with a long record of vandalizing nightspots, hurling stones at Western embassies and attacking religious rivals.

The security affairs minister, Mohammad Mahfud, told reporters that the Islamic Defenders Front, known by its Indonesian acronym FPI, had continued to carry out activities that violate order and security even though it was disbanded last year as a mass organization.

The government also banned the use of the FPI symbols and attributes.

The group, which wants Islamic Shariah law to apply to Indonesia's 230 million Muslims, has gained significant influence in recent years through humanitarian and charity work. It was a key organizer of massive street protests in 2016 and 2017 against the Christian governor of Jakarta, who was subsequently imprisoned for blasphemy.

Its leader, Rizieq Shihab, turned himself in to authorities earlier this month after he was accused of inciting people to breach pandemic restrictions by holding events with large crowds.

Supporters of hardliner Rizieq Shihab clash with Indonesia police

Aljazeera (19.12.2020) - <https://cutt.ly/thMRThu> - Supporters of firebrand Indonesian Muslim leader Rizieq Shihab have clashed with police during a demonstration in Jakarta, after demanding their spiritual figurehead be released from police detention.

Several hundred protesters had gathered in the capital of the world's largest Muslim-majority nation on Friday, with scuffles breaking out after police told the group that large gatherings were prohibited amid the pandemic.

"For the safety of our souls ... the police and the military will disperse [protesters] and act decisively," a police officer told protesters, blasting the message through a sound system.

The police have been investigating the controversial scholar for violations of health protocols during the pandemic after large gatherings to mark his return to Indonesia in November after fleeing to Saudi Arabia in 2017.

Indonesia is grappling with the worst coronavirus outbreak in Southeast Asia, averaging more than 6,000 new cases a day this week.

Police deployed thousands on the streets of Jakarta on Friday to guard the protest, with a new requirement for people to present a negative rapid COVID-19 test to enter the capital likely thwarting some supporters from joining the rally.

Rizieq is the leader of the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI). His return to Indonesia was marked with events attended by thousands of his followers.

Rizieq had left for Saudi Arabia amid allegations that he had violated the country's anti-pornography laws by exchanging graphic messages and nude pictures over the messaging app WhatsApp with a woman.

The calls for his release also come after [six of the scholar's bodyguards were shot dead](#) following a clash with police on a highway earlier this month.

The FPI, once notorious for raiding bars and brothels, has become more politically influential in recent years, particularly after helping orchestrate mass rallies against Jakarta's former Christian governor in 2016 that were the largest in decades.

Islamist terrorists kill four Salvation Army members in C. Sulawesi, manhunt launched

Jakarta Globe (29.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3aHzzv8> - The National Police and Indonesia Military has launched an operation to hunt down an Islamist terror group East Indonesia Mujahidin, or MIT, hiding in a forest in Sigi, Central Sulawesi, after the terrorist allegedly killed a Christian family in The Salvation Army church's outpost on Friday.

This was the third violent attack by the terror group in the last three months. Ali Ahmad, also known as Ali Kalora, lead an estimated ten followers and has been evading the government's military operation in the Central Sulawesi jungle for the past two years.

"Today, we are deploying 100 troops from the Tinombala Task Force, Central Sulawesi Police Mobile Brigade, and Indonesia Military to carry out the pursuit of the Ali Kalora group," Brig. Gen. Awi Setiyono, the National Police spokesman, said on Saturday.

The police first received a report on Friday that an unknown group attacked a family in Lemban Tongoa village in Sigi and burned their houses, Awi said. The first police arrived at the scene at 01:00 on Friday, finding four bodies and seven houses burned down. Two of the bodies were mutilated, while one of them was beheaded.

Adjutant Chief Comr. Yoga Priyahutama, the Sigi police chief, lead an investigation team that questioned five witnesses at the scene.

"It was stated that the perpetrators were at least 10 people, three of them carried firearms," Awi said.

The witnesses identified three of the attackers as members of East Indonesia Mujahidin, based on the terrorists' photograph the police shown to them, Awi said.

The other 150 families in Lembantongoa village have evacuated to a safer place to avoid further conflicts.

East Indonesia Mujahidin

MIT was a terror organization mainly operating in Central Sulawesi, with an affiliation to Southeast Asia transnational terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah. Ali Kalora emerged as the group's new leader after a police operation in July 2016 killed MIT charismatic leader Santoso.

In August, the group ambushed and robbed a vehicle carrying medical workers. In a separate incident, MIT took two farmers' hostages and killed one of them. The military operation in the last two years has reduced the group fighting force to around a dozen members, who hide in the thick jungle of Central Sulawesi.

The National police initiated Operation Tinombala in January to hunt down the remaining members of the MIT.

The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army said in a statement on Saturday that the victims were the church's members working in a Sulawesi outpost, looking to establish the church work and develop a society there.

Brian Peddle, international leader of The Salvation Army, denounced the terror attack. "Throughout all aspects of Salvation Army ministry and influence, we work for peace," he said.

"We find the news from Lembantongoa greatly disturbing. Our hearts go out to our people who have been victims of evil and to the families of those whose faith has caused such harm. I call upon all Salvationists to pray for each person who has been affected, for the continuing witness of our people, and for healing in the communities," he said.

Yusak Tampai, The Salvation Army's territorial commander for Indonesia, urged around 60,000 of the church members in the region to "remain calm but alert and careful, spreading a strong message of hope and uniting in prayer to strengthen each other."

Erik A. Kape, The Salvation Army's commander for Palu, said on Sunday that four men falling victim in Friday's attack were part of The Salvation Army's small congregation in the village.

"The congregation consists of 12 families, with around 40 people. They hold regular mass service every week and Sunday school for the children there," Erik said.

He also said that East Indonesia Mujahidin's attack on Friday burned down six-building including The Salvation Army's church.

"I was a little bit disappointed that it was described [in the news] as a residential house used as a church. That was wrong. I can assure you that it was a church because I was the one who officiated it last Christmas," Erik said.

He said he hoped the security forces would catch the terror group soon.

"We hope the security apparatus to arrest the perpetrators immediately. Let this be the last thing. No more innocent victims should die," Erik said.

National Condemnation

Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI) strongly condemned Friday's attack and called for the government to catch the terrorists and secure the area.

"This incident demonstrates barbaric acts that should be denounced by all civilized people," Philip Situmorang, a PGI's spokesman said in a statement on Saturday.

"We continue to pray for and support all the government's efforts to maintain the security and order of the people in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, that is free from acts of terror and extremism," Philip.

The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) also condemned the attack. "There must be no room for terrorists in this country," Dedi Askary, Komnas HAM representative for Central Sulawesi, said.

The Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), and the National Democratic Party also released statements to condemn the attack on Saturday, while other parties remained silent.

Zainal Abidin, the chairman of the Central Sulawesi Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB), called all parties in Central Sulawesi to remain calm and not link the attack to any religion.

"Any religion does not teach and justify the act of killing fellow humans," Zainal, who is also the chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Palu, said.

Christian family killed and beheaded in Central Sulawesi; fire set to six chapels

The victims are a couple, their daughter and her husband, all members of the Salvation Army. Sulawesi police inspector general denies church burning. Relations between Christian groups and Muslim extremists are tense. In 2005, three Christian teenagers were beheaded. In 2006, three Catholics were sentenced to death.



By Mathias Hariyadi

AsiaNews.it (28.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3fSbClo> - Four members of the same Christian family have been found murdered, some of them beheaded. All four belonged to the Protestant Church of Salvation (Salvation Army). Their dismembered bodies were found yesterday, Central Sulawesi police reported today.

The murder took place in the village of Lenowu, Lemban Tongoa district, Sigi. For now, the identity of the killers remains unknown.

The president of the Protestant Christian Synod (PGI), Rev Gumar Gultom, condemned the killings and demanded that the government send a team of experts to open an investigation.

He also denounced some acts of intolerance that took place in the same area some time before the assassinations, namely the burning of six chapels used by the Salvation Army.

His statements contradict Rakhman Baso, inspector general of the Sulawesi police, who said that "no churches were burnt".

The murder victims are a couple, their daughter and her husband. Their bodies were found around 10 am yesterday.

In an official statement, Rev Gultom offers prayers and condolences to the Salvation Army and notes that "this fresh violence reminds us of the sporadic violence of the past that took place in the same area of Sulawesi."

On 29 October 2005, three Christian girls, high school students, were beheaded by Muslim extremists in Poso. The victims were: Theresia Morake (15), Alite Poliwo (17), and Yarni Sambue (17).

According to several observers, these killings were a consequence of sectarian clashes between extremist Protestant Christians and Islamic radicals.

Later, three local Catholics – Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva, and Marinus Riwu – were sentenced to death for sheltering some Catholics who had fled clashes in Poso.

The latter were eventually arrested in 2000, tried and sentenced to death in connection with the deaths of hundreds of Muslims during local interreligious violence between 1998 and 2001.

No Muslim was ever tried for taking part in those clashes, which also caused deaths among Christians as well.

The three Catholics were executed in September 2006. Then Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono refused a request for a pardon, supported by many leading figures, including the Pope.

“In the face of fresh violence,” said Rev Gultom, “I urge Indonesian security forces to eliminate the remaining terrorist fighters, who are still wanted in Sigi and Poso. The presence of the security forces is urgently needed to reassure locals and the country.”

Many people who witnessed the murders fled into the forest to hide. Meanwhile, the investigation into the incident has started. Didik, a spokesman for Sulawesi police, said that for now “the perpetrators of this violence remain unknown”.

Hardline cleric returns from exile to Indonesia

Thousands of supporters turn out to welcome Islamic Defenders Front chief Muhammad Rizieq Shihab.

By Ryan Dagur

UCA News (10.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3ktrCuC> - The leader of a notorious Indonesian hardline Islamic group who fled the country several years ago to avoid a sex charge has returned home from self-imposed exile to a rapturous welcome in Jakarta.

Thousands of people defied pandemic warnings on Nov. 10 to welcome Muslim cleric Muhammad Rizieq Shihab of the Islamic Defenders Front back to Indonesia from Saudi Arabia, where he had fled in 2017 to avoid a pornography case in which he was accused of exchanging lewd texts and pictures with a woman. The charge was later dropped.

After landing and greeting his supporters, Shihab headed to Petamburan in Jakarta, the headquarters of his organization, which has become notorious for targeting religious minorities and attacking free thinkers, often violently.

Shihab arrival followed several reported attempts to return home which he said were aborted because of pressure from the Indonesian government.

Indonesian Security Minister Mahfud MD denied the claim, saying the government has never prevented Shihab from returning home.

“He has the same legal rights and obligations as other citizens,” he said.

Although the sex charge was dropped, Catholic groups say Shihab still has cases to answer after having been accused by the Catholic Student Association of ridiculing the birth of Jesus in a speech that was widely circulated on the internet shortly before he fled.

Petrus Selestinus, a Catholic lawyer who reported Shihab to the police, told UCA News that this case must be followed up by law enforcement.

"We hope that all cases involving him will be reopened," he said.

He said the authorities need to explain to the public the status of the cases reported against him so that there is "no suggestion that the law is blunt against people who have mass support."
