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## **Muslim cleric arrested on blasphemy charges for insulting Christianity**

By Anugrah Kumar

The Christian Post (30.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3DxP2K3> - Police in the Muslim-majority country of Indonesia arrested a Muslim cleric for allegedly blaspheming against Christianity by calling the Bible fictitious and false in one of his sermons.

Police arrested Muhammad Yahya Waloni, a former Protestant who became a Muslim in 2006 and later an imam, from his home in the national capital of Jakarta on Thursday, UCA News [reported](#).

The arrest on charges of blasphemy and hate speech came in response to a complaint filed by a civil group, which was not identified, in April.

"Investigations are still ongoing," police spokesman Brig. Gen. Rusdi Hartono was quoted as saying. "It will be explained in more detail later, we are waiting for data from the Criminal Investigation Department."

Indonesia's Religious Affairs Minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas recently called for a crackdown on people accused of committing blasphemy and hate speech.

"All are equal before the law. Therefore, there must be fair treatment in all cases, including blasphemy and hate speech," he said.

However, Christians complain that law enforcement doesn't treat accused from the majority community the same way they deal with members of religious minorities, including Christians.

"In cases of blasphemy, police and law enforcement officials must be fair instead of siding with a certain group. Christians have been arrested and brought to court in blasphemy cases, while those insulting Christianity or other religions have been left alone," Philip Situmorang, spokesman of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, said in a statement.

Three days earlier, a Muslim convert to Christianity, identified as Muhammad Kace, was arrested in Bali on charges of blasphemy. He allegedly uploaded videos on YouTube saying that the Islamic prophet Muhammad was "surrounded by devils and liars."

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 local groups that typically question the authenticity of the signatures by area residents — a requirement as per law — to obstruct the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship.

The Human Rights Watch previously said that more than 1,000 churches in the archipelago had been closed due to pressure from such groups.

Indonesia is [ranked](#) No. 47 on Open Doors USA's World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most extreme levels of persecution.

Photo: Members of the clergy conduct Easter mass in an empty church and streamed online as part of social distancing measures amidst the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in Jakarta on April 12, 2020. | ADEK BERRY/AFP via Getty Images

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## **Aceh Christians face uphill battle for right to worship**

***The benefits of Indonesia's independence have not been felt by Christians in the Sharia-ruled region***

By Siktus Harson

UCA News (13.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2Xsc1FO> - Indonesia turns 76 this month. Yet the fruits of independence have not been felt entirely by minority groups in many parts of the country.

Thousands of Christians and other religious minority groups remain ostracized and do not feel that the state is there to protect them against harassment.

In Aceh, a semi-autonomous region on the northern tip of Sumatra, Christians are under constant pressure.

Government data shows that the province has 5.3 million people, of whom more than 98 percent are Muslim. Christians only number about 53,000 or roughly 1 percent. They are mostly Protestants, with a small number of Catholics.

A region that completely operates under Islamic Sharia law leaves very little room — in most parts no room at all — for Christians to exercise their faith.

According to Radio Veritas Asia, most districts in Aceh are dominated by Muslims, except in Southeast Aceh district where more than 100 churches serve about 20,000 Christians. On the other hand, in Singkil district, where about 10,000 Christians live, the local government has allowed only one church and four chapels.

In the past seven years, at least 30 churches including Catholic ones have been demolished in Aceh, while permits for new ones are constantly rejected

The province has a special law or Qanun on building a house of worship, which stipulates that the establishment of a church requires the signature of at least 120 local Muslims. It bypasses the national joint ministerial decree that requires only at least 60 signatures of local Muslims.

This has forced Christians and other minority groups to lie low or face the threat of church attacks.

The worst attacks on Christians and churches in Aceh Singkil occurred in October 2015 when a church was burned and 20 others were demolished. One person died and four people were injured, while 2,000 Christians fled to neighboring North Sumatra.

The attack was triggered by a disagreement over the existence of these churches. Local authorities claimed the Christians had violated the "one church only" agreement. The rest were illegal, hence they had to be demolished.

Photo: A woman is publicly caned in Banda Aceh on July 8 as punishment under Aceh province's Sharia laws for being caught in close proximity to her boyfriend. (Photo: AFP)

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## **Christians beheaded in Indonesia terror attack**

The Christian Post (13.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2RpiAun> - Four Christian men were beheaded in a horrific terror attack in Indonesia on Tuesday, Open Doors reports.

The attack occurred in Kalimago Village, Poso Regency in Central Sulawesi, and has been blamed on Islamist extremists belonging to the terrorist group, East Indonesia Mujahidin.

Two victims were members of the Mamasa Toraja Church. Another came from Toraja Church and one from a Catholic Church in the area.

They were aged between 42 and 61.

Their murders come just half a year after four other Christians were killed at a Salvation Army outpost in Sigi, Central Sulawesi.

Open Doors' local partner in Indonesia Ari Hartono — whose name has been changed for security reasons — said, "Central Sulawesi locals are still traumatized from the terrorist attack in Sigi last November and have not recovered yet. We're not sure if the attack is religiously motivated even though the victims are Christians."

"It could be an act of survival. After the Sigi incident, the terrorists in Central Sulawesi have been increasingly pressed by the police and the Army," he added. "Their logistics is exhausted. The only way to survive is to rob people of food. In this area, there are many

farmers who live in the forest far from the village and they were the ones targeted by the terrorists."

Indonesia is ranked No. 47 on Open Doors' World Watch List, an annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.

Ari is asking Christians to pray for the peace of God in the area.

"Fear and intimidation are trying to take over people's hearts, but God's power is more powerful," he said.

"Pray for protection over God's people in Poso and Central Sulawesi. As long as these terrorists are not caught, the threat lingers.

"People are afraid to go to their field, therefore they cannot work and produce crops. This will affect their economic situation. The Madago Raya Task Force are hunting this terrorist group. We pray for their protection, strength and wisdom to do their job, and pray that they will catch these perpetrators."

Christians have been targeted in parts of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, in recent years.

In Makassar, South Sulawesi, 20 worshipers were injured in a suicide bomb attack as they left a Palm Sunday church service marking the start of Holy Week.

Dozens were killed in a church suicide attack in Surabaya, East Java, in 2018.

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## **Pressure and attacks on women who don't wear headscarves increase**

***More and more cases of violations and abuses are reported in schools, workplaces, and public buildings. Since 2001, at least 60 national and local rules or laws have been adopted discriminating on the basis of dress. For Alissa Wahid, an "inclusive paradigm" has morphed into an "exclusive" vision that leaves "a single interpretation of Islam".***

AsiaNews/Agencies (19.03.2021) – <https://bit.ly/312StX6> - Increasingly, women, especially if they are young, are subjected to pressure, intimidation, threats and even actual physical violence for not following an Islamic dress code.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), attacks take place in schools (as **happened** recently in Padang), in the workplace as well as in the government buildings of the world's most populous Muslim nation.

Since 2001, at least 60 laws and regulations that discriminate on the basis of dress have been adopted in the Asian country at the national, regional or provincial levels.

Human rights activists and NGOs note that the "dress code" is a sign of growing religious intolerance and conservative attitudes in a nation that, at least officially, recognises six faiths (including Catholicism) but more than 85 per cent of its 270 million people are Sunni Muslims.

After 2014, when the national government introduced regulations on school uniforms, "many regencies and provinces interpreted [the suggestion that a jilbab should be worn]

as compulsory, so you had the situation where local education officers and public schools began to rewrite the school rules and to enforce the jilbab (hijab) as part of the school uniforms," said Elaine Pearson, the Australia director of HRW's Asia Division.

This was especially the case in more conservative areas, such as West Sumatra and Central Java where the dress code was imposed on non-Muslims as well. The same is the case for Aceh, the only Indonesian province where Sharia, Islamic law, is enforced.

The National Commission on Violence Against Women has identified 32 regencies and provinces across the archipelago that now require girls and women to wear jilbabs (hijabs) in public schools, government buildings and other public spaces.

In some cases young women have been punished by having their hair cut, expelled from schools, penalised or fired from their jobs for a rule that is not supposed to be binding.

Alissa Wahid, daughter of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, one of the most active in protecting minorities through the Gus Dur movement, and coordinator of the Gusdurian Network, explains that the dress code is part of a very conservative view that prevails in some parts of the country.

For her, this trend represents a transformation from an "inclusive paradigm" into an "exclusive" vision that leaves "a single interpretation of Islam". That is also why there are "increasingly Sharia-based regulations".

The activist also notes that while President Joko Widodo's move to ban the mandatory use of the hijab in public schools is a "positive step," much remains to be done to counter growing religious extremism and to protect women's rights.

In her opinion, regulations mandating the wearing of hijabs by women and girls could lead to other social limits, such as curfews and being forced into early marriage.

In the long term, such limits could lead to women's "loss of capacity and self-determination", and ultimately have a greater impact on women's lives than hijab regulations alone.

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## **Pluralism and Pancasila: the fight against mandatory hijab**

*by Mathias Hariyadi*

***The daughter of former president Abdurrahman Wahid maintains it is not just a question of "school uniform", but of interference in social life. Three ministers draw up a decalogue against the obligation of the veil. The province of Aceh is an exception. Executive Secretary Kwi approves the initiative and defends the school as a "meeting place".***



AsiaNews (04.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/39Lnm7M> - "Let's not think this is only a matter of school uniform, the prohibition or permission to wear the hijab. It's more about a trend-setter to cement the majority religion's ideology and exclusivism with its final objective not just regarding Islamic outfits but social life as a nation," wrote Alissa Wahid, the daughter of the late President Abdurrahman Wahid.

Wahid is a young lady whose strong contribution to the nation to promote interfaith spirit is undeniable through GusDurian Movement -the fans of Gus Dur club.

In the recent issue concerning **the obligation to wear the veil imposed on a Christian high school student** in Padang, in the province of West Sumatra, and which has raised controversy and protests, the activist speaks bluntly of an act of intolerance.

"Our Ministry for Education and Culture should make clear that school's environment -- despite its majority Muslim students--should not force its non-Muslim student to wear the hijab," she writes. The reference is to the incident that occurred in mid-January in Padang when Elianu Hia, father of Jenny Hia, opposed the obligation to wear the veil for his non-Muslim daughter.

A case similar to many others in the most populous Muslim nation in the world, but which had so far passed over in silence due to the lack of reporting or fears of repercussions. There are at least 46 non-Muslim students who attend the same school as Jenny Hia, but only the latter's father has fought against the imposition of the mandatory veil during school hours.

In response to the story, the Minister for Education Nadiem Makarim, a devout Muslim married to a Catholic and defender of the principles of state secularism and pluralism sanctioned by the Pancasila, the colleague of the Interior and the holder of Religious Affairs intervened in these hours.

The following points are outlined in the document signed by the three government leaders: school is part of the nation and home to everyone, regardless of ethnicity or religious faith; the decree will be implemented in all state institutions; the choice of uniforms is entrusted to teachers and students, but clothing or clothing that refers to a religion cannot be imposed; schools and local authorities must remove any obligations [such as that relating to hijab] still in force within 30 days; any violations of the new provisions, Minister Makarim concludes, will be punished according to the law and regulations in force, with the sole exception of the province of Aceh, the only one in which the sharia (Islamic law) is in force and which can derogate from these new standards.

Asked by *AsiaNews* Fr. Heri Wibowo Pr, executive secretary of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (Kwi), applauds the inter-ministerial initiative aimed at promoting pluralism in the country's public schools. "On a personal basis - he adds - I approve and support this movement, which is in line with the spirit of the Pancasila". And it is nice to think, he concludes, that institutes are places where "students from different backgrounds can meet".

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