



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ATTACKED IN INDONESIA

USCCB Fact Sheet

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The Plight of Religious Minorities: Struggling to Survive in Indonesia

Though Indonesia has made some strides in recent years to build a stronger democratic government with a viable civil society and an independent media, serious human rights violations continue to mar progress. Even as top officials offer rhetoric about protecting the rights of all, hesitancy remains in ensuring compliance with international human rights standards and effectively prosecuting crimes.

Indonesia's constitution, laws, and policies establish freedom of religion, but some courts and law enforcement officials fail to protect religious minorities and prosecute violators, fostering impunity that continues to be a significant hindrance to religious freedom and human rights.

Indonesia has a population of about 237 million, almost 88% of which is Muslim. A large number of religiously-based acts of violence are perpetrated by non-mainstream Muslims. Most Indonesians practice a very moderate and tolerant expression of Islam, but more militant groups have become increasingly active in recent years. These extremists groups tend to be the source of aggravated attacks directed at other Muslim sects and non-Muslims alike.

Acts of violence against religious minorities have become more alarming since 2011. Religious extremists have coordinated attacks on minority groups, including Christians and both Ahmadi and Shia Muslims at prayer in Java, Sumatra, and other provinces. The U.S. State Department reports that in 2010 alone, about 125 attacks against religious minorities were recorded. This number is estimated to have been even higher in 2011 and 2012.

What may be most troubling about these attacks is the perfunctory response they have drawn from many Indonesian courts and police forces. In February 2011, a small Ahmadiyah mosque was attacked by a mob of extremists. Three men were killed as police forces stood by and watched. Though some members of the militant mob were arrested, murder or manslaughter charges were not pursued. Instead, the courts opted to bring minor charges of "incitement, assault, and torture" against the persecutors, who received light prison sentences of about 6 months. Tragically, victims who survived were also sentenced to six months in prison for "inciting the violence."

Christians have faced harassment and been prevented from worshipping. Churches have been burned to the ground. Christians have been attacked—including one priest who was stabbed to death outside of his church—with few repercussions against those perpetrating the violence. For religious minorities living in Indonesia, the deck is stacked against them. They face persecution and are inadequately protected by government authorities.

A blasphemy law dating back to the mid-1960s has also contributed to imprisonment, mistreatment, and harassment. In 2012, a Muslim-born man was imprisoned for giving up his faith. The law has also emboldened extremists by providing a "legal basis" for their actions. In Indonesia, much more should be done to promote the freedom of all people to practice their faith in peace. Protecting this foundational freedom will ultimately strengthen the rule of law and benefit all Indonesians.

What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom at home and abroad?

Text the word "Freedom" to 377377 for updates from the bishops on current threats to religious liberty. Also, please visit www.usccb.org/freedom for more information on how you can take action to protect religious liberty!