

Christians Ordered by Muslim Mob to Stop Worshiping Amid Accusations

A Muslim crowd near Jakarta, Indonesia demanded a congregation suspend worship on Sunday (Sept. 21), sources said.

In Tangerang, a satellite town of Jakarta, at least 20 Muslims arrived at the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI) at 9 a.m., an hour before the congregation was to begin worship in a shophouse of a commercial complex in Gerendeng Pulo village, Karawaci District, a video recording shows. The Muslims demanded a halt to all worship until the church obtains all relevant permits.

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"There should be no religious activities here," an elderly Muslim told Pastor Melky Gerung, to which a police officer interjected that mediation should take place to maintain social peace in Tangerang city.

Unlike other worship stoppages, the Muslim crowd displayed no violence, insults or loud chanting of the jihadist slogan "Allahu Akbar [God is greater]," the video shows.

A man later identified by media as the local neighborhood citizens' head is seen telling Pastor Melky that permission previously granted by residents was obtained through bribery as the church had provided for some of their needs. The pastor replied that church leaders would review the case.

Officers brought the parties to the police station to discuss the conflict.



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Pastor Melky told media on Monday (Sept. 22) that when the crowd arrived, he became fearful, locked the gate and called police. Plainclothes officers were already nearby as a similar incident had occurred the prior week, when residents entered the second-floor shophouse church during worship, he said.

Church leaders on Monday met with the Karawaci Police Chief and representatives of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerja Sama Umat Beragama, FKUB), who cited a letter of rejection from residents of neighborhood units 02 and 05 regarding the presence of the church, according to a police statement on Facebook.

"The situation is safe and conducive," the police stated.

The church has obtained permission from 20 residents and the Mosque Prosperity Council, a mosque management body, to carry out church activities at the site, a source said.

Cause Unclear

The Indonesian Movement for All (Pergerakan Indonesia untuk Semua, PIS), a non-governmental organization dedicated to democracy, stated that the underlying cause of the conflict was unclear, according a statement on its Instagram account, gerakanpis.

"The church has collected signatures of around 20 residents' ID cards and completed it with the permit application," it stated. "The police at the scene did not take any action."

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Edy Suhardono, director of the IISA Assessment and Research Centre and a lecturer at various universities, said such cases

reflect a regulatory failure.

"The numerous cases of bans on the construction of houses of worship and religious services are merely an implicit recognition of the current regulatory framework failure," the social psychologist told Morning Star News.

Edy stated on , a leading media conglomerate in Indonesia, that the 2006 Joint Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs on religious institutions has "created a harsh reality where many religious communities, particularly those from minority groups, are unable to meet their extraordinarily stringent administrative requirements, forcing them to use their homes as 'houses of prayer,' a legally ambiguous status that makes them highly vulnerable to persecution under the pretext of 'lack of permits.'"

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Such cases will continue to occur in Indonesia, an Instagram user noted in response to the PIS statement.

"The ban on worship will continue...because they know they won't be jailed," account user agussianipar76 stated. "At most, it will be resolved through deliberation with a 10,000 rupiah stamp and then clarify that this was just a misunderstanding."

Indonesian society in recent years has adopted a more conservative Islamic character, and churches involved in evangelistic outreach are at risk of being targeted by Islamic extremist groups, according to Open Doors.

This article originally appeared on Morning Star News, and is reposted with permission.