

Extremist Mob Halts 'Illegal' Christian Worship Service

SURABAYA, Indonesia (Morning Star News) – Officials in Indonesia said they regretted the surfacing of a video showing Muslims halting worship of a church service in March, as authorities have since provided a temporary site for the congregation's services.

Soma Atmaja of the Tangerang Regency government said on the agency's website that his administration had provided a temporary place for the Thessalonica Church congregation in Banten Province to worship, as their prior site lacked a building permit. The church previously held services illegally in a rented house in Puri, Kampung Melayu Timur Housing, Teluk Naga Subdistrict, Tangerang Regency, outside Jakarta, Soma said.

A video that first appeared on July 21 shows a mob of mostly men dressed in typical Indonesian Muslim clothing storming the site and stopping the church worship, saying it was in a majority-Muslim area, according to local media. The intruders also mocked the congregation for worshipping in a rented house, according to .

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"You're holding worship and holding it in a [settlement] where the majority of the population is Muslim – here everyone is Muslim!" says one resident to loud cheers of support while another shouts the jihadist slogan, "Allahu Akbar, [God is greater]," according to .

After a church member explains their reasons for worshipping at the home, the crowd becomes louder and retorts that they should only worship at a church building. The church

representative says the lease at their prior venue in the Puri Naga Indah Complex had expired, as the mob laughs and mocks them.

Teluk Naga Police Chief Wahyu Hidayat said he was confused why video of the altercation had surfaced only last week.

"This was an old incident, three months ago," Wahyu told national news channel Medcom, owned by Metro Television.

Wahyu said the conflict had been peacefully resolved.

Indonesia's Joint Ministerial Decree of 2006 requires a permit only for worship venues used on a permanent basis, "excluding family places of worship," rights activists say.

"According to The Joint Decree of the Two Ministers, Chapter 1, Article 3, what needs a permit is the construction of a church," rights activist Permadi Arya, known as Abu Janda, wrote in 2023. "Holding worship at home, shop-houses and cafes needs no permission."

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Such homes, cafés and shop-houses can be equated with Muslim traditional prayer-rooms (*musholla*), and since Muslims need no permission for those, Christians should receive equal treatment, he said.

Islamic extremists have been largely responsible for using lack of building permits as a pretext for closing or attacking churches since the passage of Indonesia's Joint Ministerial Decree of 2006, which made requirements for obtaining such permits nearly impossible for most new churches.

Even when small, new churches were able to meet the requirement of obtaining 90 signatures of approval from congregation members and 60 from area households of different

religions, they have often met with delays or lack of response from officials.

Indonesia ranked 42nd on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Indonesian society 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 the WWL report.

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