

Indonesia Rioters Storm Churches

Indonesian police stood guard outside churches on Wednesday after a wave of anti-Christian violence swept across the Muslim country.

Todd Nettleton with Voice of the Martyrs explains, "This mob was raised up by a guilty verdict in a case of blasphemy against a Christian man in an Indonesian court."

The case took place in Central Java, where a Christian man was accused of distributing materials and leaflets that allegedly blasphemed Islam.

As judges decided the case, instigators outside began to inflame anti-Christian fanaticism. Nettleton explains that the extremists were dissatisfied with the sentencing. Not long after the verdict, around 1,000 protesters expressed their ire. "The man was found guilty. He was sentenced to five years in prison. The mob was angry because they wanted him to get the death sentence. In fact, they wanted the judge to immediately turn him to the mob so that they could execute him."

The sentence was thought too lenient, and the mob rampaged the courthouse, two police stations, and two churches. There were reports that the protests quickly spread. "A couple of members of an Islamic sect (another minority group) were executed by radical Muslims in Indonesia. The reports are that the video shows police standing by and watching while this execution took place."

Grisly video of the murders showed hardliners running amok. That's really what's causing the disconcerted response. "For Christians, and for other religious minorities in Indonesia, when they hear that police stood by while people were killed,

it doesn't give them a sense of confidence that the police will step forward and really provide protection that Indonesia's constitution calls for."

Additionally, even as the government tries to restore order, the details on the scope and damage of the riots are sketchy because the situation hasn't been totally put down. Nettleton says, "There are reports that stones were thrown and windows were broken; there are reports that they were burned. Hopefully, more information is coming that will clarify that."

VOM was not directly affected, but there is a team investigating. "We will have somebody who will go to the area and try to get some additional details, try to see what the church there needs, how we can provide assistance for them and help for them. But we're so early in this situation, that I don't know exactly what steps will be taken as we move forward."

Pray. Nettleton notes the tension there, and it could have an impact on ministry. "It would be natural for there to be a sense of fear, or a sense of foreboding that 'if I follow Christ, bad things are going to happen to me'. I think we need to pray against that spirit."

Intimidation is a big factor, too. Believers need boldness in their faith, but what they've witnessed makes them nervous. "Pray directly for Muslims in Indonesia to come to know Christ in a personal way. I think Christ has the ability to take hearts that are filled with hatred and anger, and make them hearts that are peaceful, and hearts that are filled with love."