

Indonesian Church Reports Defiant Mayor to National Police

✖ A month that saw the Bogor city mayor defying a Supreme Court decision granting a building permit for a church in Bogor, West Java culminated in police turning away those seeking to worship—and church leaders today filing a police complaint on the mayor with National Police.

Bogor Mayor Diani Budiarto issued a decree revoking the building permit for the Christian Church of Indonesia (GKI) in Yasmin Park on March 11, citing unrest among local Muslims and charging the church with having lied about obtaining area residents' approval when the permit was originally processed. Bogor city officials have also decided to try purchasing the land where the church meets.

Church leaders and rights groups scoffed at the city's claims and its attempt to remove the church from the area after years of protests from Islamic groups. At a press conference last month, Bona Sigalingging, spokesperson for the GKI Yasmin church, read a statement in which the church and 12 interfaith and rights organizations rejected the mayor's decree.

"The mayor of Bogor has publically lied and twisted the facts, which are both crimes and public moral failures," Sigalingging said.

When GKI Yasmin representatives checked the city's claims of a document with false signatures of area residents approving the church, they found such a document had never been submitted; it did not appear in the application file.

"The entire building permit file had been submitted in 2005, and there have never been any additions," Sigalingging said,

adding that the mayor was rash in issuing the baseless decree. "The reasons [for revoking the church permit] are clearly contrived and unfactual."

He said the decree not only contravened the 1945 Constitution but was also a violation of law.

"The mayoral decree was [directly] opposed to the court decision that the building permit was legal and binding," he said. "We also request that the mayor rescind Mayoral Decree No. regarding the revocation of the GKI Yasmin building permit and recognize the court decision that the building permit is legal and binding."

Supporting the GKI Yasmin church were 12 interfaith organizations: The Wahid Institute, the Human Right Working Group (HRWG), the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, the Legal Aid Institute (LBH) Jakarta, the Commission on the Lost and Victims of Oppression, the Fellowship of Indonesian Churches, Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, the Synode of the Christian Church of West Java, the Indonesia Legal Research Center, the National Diversity Alliance, the Legal Aid Foundation of Indonesia and the Gusdurian Forum.

Church lawyers today filed a complaint on the Bogor mayor with the National Police detective unit in response to a statement Budiarto made yesterday (March 31) to newspaper Radar Bogor that attorney Jayadi Damanik described as a threat, *The Jakarta Post* reported.

Citing a report from , the Post quoted Damanik as saying, "We believe Diani Budiarto has committed unpleasant conduct, issuing threats of violence. We think the police need to deal with this."

The mayor had called for action against the church if it insisted on standing by the Supreme Court ruling granting its building permit, according to the Post. It also reported that Damanik said the church had sent a legal representative to the

Home Ministry to report the Bogor mayor for overstepping his duties.

Budiarto was not immediately available for comment.

On March 13, some 200 police officers blockaded the church, lining each side of KH Abdullah Bin Nuh Street in Bogor under the pretext that they were preventing clashes with about 20 Muslim protestors, church leaders said.

Authorities set up barricades and questioned every person who wished to go to the church location. Compass observed them turning away several GKI members carrying Bibles and heading toward the worship venue. Police parked nine cars and trucks along the fence in front of worship site—the congregation has been worshipping on a strip of land between the road and a fence—in order to keep the congregation out. A vehicle with a water cannon was parked about 500 meters from the site.

Eventually the congregation realized that they could not worship there and left.

The previous Sunday, March 6, the congregation had been able to open the lock that the city had placed on its church building on April 10, 2010. After pushing and shoving between police and church members, the congregation was able to enter and hold a one-hour service led by GKI Yasmin Pastor Ujang Tanusuputra.

As the service was taking place, Bogor Police Chief Nugroho Slamet Wibowo ordered GKI Yasmin church lawyer Damanik and the congregation to stop the service. Wibowo suggested they shift to the Harmony Building, some 500 meters away, in order to avoid clashes with 2,000 Muslim demonstrators outside the mayor's office whom Wibowo said would be arriving.

Citing the court ruling that declared the congregation could worship at the church site, Damanik declined.

The worship service finished peacefully, and the congregation happily departed. The predicted 2,000 Muslim protestors failed to materialize.

The next day, Bogor city officials invited GKI leaders to discuss the conflict, and the church representatives were accompanied by the LBH Jakarta, the HRWG, a representative of the Wahid Institute, the Interfaith Society and others. In the meeting, Bogor officials announced that the city was revoking the building permit and buying the disputed land.

“Upon hearing this, the GKI rejected the sale and reminded the Bogor government to obey the Supreme Court’s decision,” said Fatmawati Hugo, a member of the GKI legal team.

On March 12, GKI representatives met with police at the Giant Shopping Mall in Yasmin Park, where authorities ordered the church not to take unilateral action.

The police also guaranteed that firm action would be taken against anyone who tried to lock the GKI Yasmin site, but, ironically, that night at 11:30, policemen accompanied members of the Public Order Agency as they padlocked the gate to the GKI Yasmin church, Hugo said.

About 20 church members, mostly women, could only look on with sadness, he said.

“It’s odd that the police accompanied those who locked [the gate] rather than obeying the law and stopping the sealing,” Hugo said.

A few minutes later, at 12:05 a.m., police issued an ultimatum: All persons and vehicles were to clear the area in front of the church. A tow truck arrived and approached a member’s car parked in front of the gate.

“The church members chose to stay and sang several Christian songs,” said Hugo.

Police officers advanced and tried to take congregation members by force. The women were prepared to be arrested, but efforts to detain them ended when a GKI lawyer asked for reasons for the arrests and for arrest warrants. Church members stayed and unrolled mats so that they could hold a part of the roadside strip for the 8 a.m. worship service. About 15 prayed and sang songs through the night.

Around 4:30 a.m., more police arrived. A mobile brigade commanded by West Bogor Police Chief Hida mobilized to force out those on the side of the road; the crowd dispersed in the face of fully armed police.

"Because they were terrorized, they abandoned the roadside strip," Hugo said.

After clearing the area, police blockaded 500 meters of KH Abdullah Bin Nuh Street at about 7 a.m., using six truckloads of mobile police and an armored car. They had used the same tactic on Dec. 26, 2010, to prevent the congregation from a Christmas service.

At 7:30 a.m., about 20 Muslims unrolled banners at a corner near the Giant Shopping Mall charging the GKI Yasmin church with deception. "Hard-heads, want to build an illegal church here? Step over our dead bodies first," read one banner.

The congregation held a short worship service at 8:30 a.m. in the home of a nearby member.