

# Indonesian Pastor in Tortured Psychological State Over Case Against Him

An Indonesian pastor remains in a tortured psychological state as a legal case against him lingers on.

Palti Panjaitan, who runs the HKBP Filadelfia church in the village of Jejalen Jaya, east of Bekasi, was accused by an Islamic leader of assaulting him on Christmas Eve last year.

The pastor has always maintained that he did not assault Abdul Aziz Bin Naimun and was in fact the subject of intimidation and death threats by his accuser.

However, some eight months after the incident, the case goes on and the pastor was deemed too psychologically fragile to attend his latest hearing last month.

The Asian Human Rights Commission wrote a letter to the Indonesian national police on Thursday imploring them to drop all charges against the pastor and questioning the logic of the local police.

The AHRC stated the case against Panjaitan was “fabricated” and “lacking evidence.”

“With no evidence to support the case against Rev. Panjaitan, we are questioning the legal and moral reasoning of your officers at Bekasi District Police in being so persistent in this case,” AHRC wrote.

The human rights group also claimed the pastor was “more a victim than a perpetrator of a crime,” referencing the hostility of many local residents against the pastor and his congregation.

This position was seconded by Panjaitan's lawyer, Thomas Tampubolon, who said at a July 29 press conference that there was no case to answer.

Panjaitan, who was questioned twice by police, said he acted in self-defense and that his accuser was only trying to defame him.

"It is slander," he said. "Abdul Aziz, with [other] Islamic hard-liners, tried to gang up on me. When he approached, I held him [with] both hands in order to protect myself and my wife. That's the truth."

The pastor also said Aziz and others had prevented members of his congregation from reaching the church on Christmas Eve and had pelted them with rotten eggs, animal feces and raw sewage.

A separate case has been filed against Aziz, who was accused of "committing unpleasant acts," the very same accusation Panjaitan faces. The crime carries a penalty of up to one year's imprisonment and a fine of 300,000 Indonesian rupiahs, or \$30.

Aziz faced additional charges of hampering a religious service and making death threats, but these were later dropped. He admitted saying to the pastor: "I'm going to cut your throat." However, he claimed he was not aware he acted illegally and the charges were dropped.

Both Panjaitan and the Asian Human Rights Commission have questioned whether the local police have bowed to popular pressure by refusing to close the case against the pastor.

Christians make up about 16 percent of Indonesia's 240 million people, most of whom are Muslim. As many as five churches have been forcibly closed or demolished in Bekasi alone since 2005.

Panjaitan's HKBP Filadelfia has been conducting its services outdoors since being forced to close in January 2010. The

church won its court case against the local government in June 2011 in the Supreme Court, but the local authorities have failed to authorize the church's reopening.

For two years, the church has held services every other week, alongside the congregation of the GKI Yasmin church, in front of the state palace.