

Islamist Mob Throws Urine on Church in Indonesia

No arrests have been made since 600 Islamists hurled bags filled with urine and ditchwater at about 100 members of a church last week and threatened to kill its pastor.

Police looked on as the mob attacked the Philadelphia Batak Christian Protestant Church worshipping on the street in Bekasi, near Jakarta in West Java Province, on May 17, church attorney Saor Siagian told Compass by phone.

The mob, which included the chairman of the Bekasi chapter of the extremist Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), began to throw urine, ditchwater, rotten eggs, stones and dirt when Pastor Palti Panjaitan came to address the congregation. The church had to disperse, Siagian said.

Panjaitan told local media he received a death threat and has filed a police complaint.

Authorities had asked the church, part of the *Huria Kristen Batak Protestan* denomination and located in Jejalen Raya village, to worship at a site about six miles from church land, Siagian said.

The church applied for a permit to construct its **house of worship** five years ago as mandated by law. The local administration asked it to shut down in December 2009. The Supreme Court overruled the administration's decision in July last year, saying the church was eligible for a permit, but due to pressure from Islamist groups, Bekasi officials insist the congregation meet elsewhere.

Like the Batak Christian Protestant Church, the Gereja Kristen Indonesia church (GKI-Yasmin Church), also is being denied permission to meet for worship on its property despite a

favorable Supreme Court order.

The Protestant Church Union (known locally as PGI) is urging the government to take action.

"The problem is police and government are not strict," *The Jakarta Globe* quoted the PGI's Jeirry Sumampow as saying. "We don't have certainty now. We don't know who will back us. We cannot do anything without the state's guarantee [on religious freedom] ... Performing religious duties should be acknowledged as religious expression and therefore should be protected."

Indonesia's most influential Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah, also criticized the government.

"By law, the government has a duty to offer security and protection if there is a citizen, regardless of religion, who feels that they cannot perform their religious duty, or feels threatened when doing so, including building places of worship," Abdul Mufti, the group's secretary, reportedly said.

Nusron Wahid, chairman of GP Ansor, youth wing of the country's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, offered to mediate between the church and its opponents.

New Bekasi District Chief Neneng Hasanah Yasin, however, appears to be following the former chief's policy of prohibiting the church from constructing a place of worship in order to "avoid" interreligious tensions. The Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission called on the new chief, who took office on May 14, to "take steps that are in line with the law and human rights principles in overcoming the matter."

With about 186.7 million Muslims accounting for 80.3 percent of the total population, according to *Operation World*, Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, mostly Sunni from the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisdiction. The school is considered moderate compared with the strict and conservative Hanbali jurisprudence practiced on the Arabian

Peninsula.

There are about million Christians in Indonesia, which make up about 15.9 percent of the population, according to *Operation World*.

The Indonesian Constitution is based on the doctrine of *Pancasila*—five principles held to be inseparable and interrelated – the nation's belief in the one and only God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, and social justice for all.

Islamist extremists, however, have been growing in both numbers and political clout in the country, which is otherwise touted as a model of Islam's compatibility with democracy. Last year, the PGI counted 54 acts of violence and other violations against Christians – up from 30 in 2010. Other minorities, such as Baha'is, Shiites, Sufis and members of the Ahmadiyya faith, are also persecuted.