

Theology Students in Indonesia Still Seek Facilities, Compensation

Two and a half years after an Islamic attack on a seminary here left hundreds of students without facilities, they are still in temporary shelters and the government has not compensated the loss of eight buildings.

Students from the Arastamar Evangelical Theological Seminary (SETIA) have until the end of this month to leave the Wisma Transito building, and no alternative shelter has been arranged. At the same time, the school is still wrangling with the Jakarta Provincial Government over compensation for eight buildings the government took in Kampung Pulo, Pinang Ranti, East Jakarta.

More than a 100 SETIA students demonstrated in front of Jakarta City Hall on Dec. 14 over compensation for their property that was expected a year ago. They urged officials to pay 7 billion rupiah (US\$765,100) immediately so they can buy a school building to accommodate 1,000 students, that have been staying at Wisma Transito and Wisma Daan Mogot shelters in Jakarta.

"We demand the governor follow up on its promises immediately," said the chairman of the SETIA Student Senate, identified only as Suriedi. "Also, help us to provide proper educational facilities."

On July 25, 2008, a group of Muslims claiming to be residents attacked the SETIA campus, leaving more than 1,000 students without classroom or housing facilities.

Suriedi said SETIA students are tiring of holding classes as refugee for two and half years.

"This clearly would disrupt the teaching-learning process that did not work as it would on a campus," he said.

Suriedi said that he and other students would continue to demonstrate until the governor of Jakarta answers their demands.

The Rev. Matheus Mangentang, rector of SETIA, said that the most recent meeting with the head of the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP) Jakarta, Effendi Anas, had not yet produced an agreement over the SETIA buildings.

"Satpol PP insisted on paying 5.3 billion for the eight buildings owned by SETIA, while we still want to be paid a price of 7 billion rupiah," he said.

Mangentang said Jakarta Provincial officials are standing firm on a price of 5.3 billion rupiah (US\$579,300), based only on land prices as assessed for tax purposes.

SETIA, he added, is asking for only 7 billion rupiah of the total 10 billion rupiah that local governments promised. And 7 billion rupiah figure is not categorized as a commercial exchange, but a form of compensation for SETIA as a victim, he said.

"The provincial government must remember that SETIA never intended to sell the land," Mangentang said.

The 7 billion rupiah figure, he said, is well below the material and moral losses that have been suffered by SETIA.

"Even 7 billion rupiah is actually not enough," he said. "When calculated as a whole, including the value of the building, then SETIA suffered losses of more than 20 billion rupiah."

In earlier meetings, Mangentang said he had expressed regret that the governor of Jakarta was not handling the issue directly, but rather had handed it over to Satpol PP.

"We will continue to struggle, because the contract term in Wisma Daan Mogot will already be exhausted by the end of December," he said. "We must extend the contract period, or the rent will rise from 290 million rupiah to 700 million rupiah."

Mangentang said the East Jakarta mayor had told him that the deadline for students taking shelter at the Wisma Transito facility is also the end of December, and so far SETIA has yet to find an alternative for students.

"We need money to pay the contract and other operational costs," he said.

The Jakarta Provincial Government had claimed to have allocated funds in the 2009 budget for the SETIA buildings. The vice governor of Jakarta, Prijanto, said in February 2009 he would pay for the eight buildings owned by SETIA in accordance with market prices.