

Indonesian Theology Students Withstand Threats, Illness

Some 1,000 seminary students are resisting efforts to evict them from the former municipal building of West Jakarta where they have taken refuge after Muslim protestors drove them from their campus last year.

On Oct. 27 officials began evicting about 300 students of Arastamar Evangelical Theological Seminary (SETIA) from blocks I and II of the former mayoral building, but those in blocks III, IV, and V chose to remain.

The students, some of whom had sown their mouths shut as part of a hunger strike, asserted that new quarters offered by the Jakarta Provincial Government are not yet fit for occupancy—dirty and unkempt with broken windows and doors. They said the property offered, the North Jakarta Transmigrant building, has not functioned since 1999, and its five buildings accommodate only 200 to 300 students.

The seminary students told Compass that unidentified mobs have threatened them, telling them to leave the former municipal complex immediately.

“They threaten us and tell us that if we do not move, our safety cannot be guaranteed,” said SETIA’s Yulius Thomas Bilu.

The Rev. Matheus Mangentang, rector of SETIA, confirmed that the threats had been made. Asked about the identity of the mobs, he said he knew only that they appeared daily to intimidate and threaten students.

“We are going to move as soon as possible—Dec. 31 at the latest,” Mangentang said. “If we don’t, the place is no longer safe.”

He added, however, that they would not move until their new location was clear.

“We have not wavered in our desire to return to our own place, because we actually have our own campus in Kampung Pulo, East Jakarta,” Mangentang told Compass.

The Jakarta Provincial Government has not allowed the students and staff to return to their campus, citing fear of more violence.

“It is not permissible for them to return to Kampung Pulo; conditions are not conducive,” the Jakarta area secretary who goes by a single name, Muhayat, told Compass.

In July 2008 hundreds of protestors shouting “*Allahu-Akbar* [“God is greater]” and brandishing machetes forced the evacuation of staff and students from the SETIA campus in Kampung Pulo village. Urged on by announcements from a mosque loudspeaker to “drive out the unwanted neighbor” following a misunderstanding between students and local residents, the protestors also had sharpened bamboo and acid and injured at least 20 students, some seriously.

Water and Electricity Crisis

Conditions for the 1,000 students living in the former West Jakarta mayor’s complex are worsening.

“Since the end of October, we have had no electricity and no water,” said Alexander Dimu, head of the student senate. “We have to depend upon our own resources and donations to buy water. We need about