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Indonesia must commit to freedom of religion

Amnesty International urges the Indonesian government to repeat its commitment to protecting the right to freedom of religion in the face of calls from radical groups to outlaw a religious minority community.

Several hundred members of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and other groups staged a demonstration in the capital Jakarta on 18 February calling on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to disband the Ahmadiyya group. A second protest is planned outside the Presidential Palace for 1 March 2011.

"The Indonesian government must state, clearly and publicly, that it will protect the rights of all Indonesian citizens, regardless of their religion – and that includes the rights of the Ahmadiyya community," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director.

"The President should denounce public statements inciting violence against the Ahmadiyya and take steps to ensure that all religious minorities are protected and allowed to practise their faith free from fear, intimidation and persecution."

Three members of the Ahmadiyya were killed on the island of Java on 6 February 2011 when more than 1,000 people wielding rocks, machetes, swords and spears stormed the house of an Ahmadiyya leader in the sub-district of Cikeusik, Banten province.

An interview with FPI Chairman Habib Rizieq Syihab was posted on the group's website on 18 February in which he reportedly stated: "... if today, just three infidel Ahmadi were murdered, possibly tomorrow or the next day there will be thousands of Ahmadi infidels who will be slaughtered by Muslims."

The Ahmadiyya are a religious group who consider themselves to be a part of Islam. Many mainstream Muslim groups say they do not adhere to the accepted belief system.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of intimidation and violence against the Ahmadiyya community by radical Islamist groups in various parts of Indonesia.

"We welcome the efforts to investigate the violence that led to the death of three Ahmadiyya followers in Cikeusik, but it's essential that the Indonesian government demonstrate that it will seriously investigate and address all attacks on religious minorities," said Sam Zarifi.

Amnesty International also calls for the repeal of laws and regulations that restrict the right to freedom of religion that have fuelled harassment and attacks against the Ahmadiyya community.

A joint ministerial decree was issued in 2008 forbidding the Ahmadiyya from promoting their activities.

Most recently a local regulation was issued on 20 February 2011 in the Pandeglang district where the attacks occurred, forbidding Ahmadiyya activities.

The right to freedom of religion in Indonesia is guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Indonesia is state party, as well as the Indonesian Constitution.