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Indonesia: Four Ahmadiyya places of worship closed in a month, one more at imminent risk

The Indonesian authorities – and in particular the Ministry of Home Affairs – must immediately reopen at least four Ahmadiyya places of worship in West Java which have been sealed by local authorities since early April, and ensure that a fifth Ahmadiyya place of worship is not arbitrarily closed.

On 29 April 2013 an Ahmadiyya congregation in Sukabumi, West Java received a letter from the Sukabumi Mayor's office informing them that due to "security reasons" they would have to handover the building to the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs or action would be taken against them. One month earlier hundreds of members the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a radical Islamist group in Indonesia, had gathered outside the building calling for it to be shut down. Should the Sukabumi Ahmadiyya place of worship be closed, it would become the fifth Ahmadiyya place of worship closed in West Java since early April.

The closures of four other Ahmadiyya places of worship in a month come amid ongoing attacks, intimidation and state discrimination against religious minorities in Indonesia. Despite commitments to tackle religious intolerance, the Indonesian authorities are failing to protect religious minority groups and to revoke laws and regulations which are discriminatory and violate the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

On 12 April 2013 three Ahmadiyya places of worship in Cianjur, West Java were shut down by the local office of the Co-ordinating Board for the Monitoring of Mystical Beliefs (*Bakorpakem*), which is under the Attorney General's Office. *Bakorpakem* officials were accompanied by members of the FPI. Police reportedly stood by watching.

On 4 April 2013, dozens of members of the Bekasi Administrative Police (Satpol PP) sealed the Al-Misbah place of worship belonging to the Ahmadiyya. The local authorities had threatened to close the place of worship in Bekasi, West Java in February 2013 reportedly after facing pressure from the local branch of the FPI. At least 20 Ahmadiyya followers refused to leave and remain at the site three weeks after it was sealed in protest against the closure and also to protect their belongings.

According to the local authorities, the actions in Bekasi were based on the West Java Governor Regulation No. 12/ 2011 concerning Prohibition of Activities of the Indonesian Ahmadiyya Congregation in West Java as well as the 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree (No. 3) forbidding the Ahmadiyya from promoting their activities. Amnesty International has stated on several occasions that this Decree, and the 1965 Defamation Law that it is based on, are fundamentally incompatible with Indonesia's international human rights obligations on freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and equality.

The arbitrary closure of these Ahmadiyya places of worship, based on such laws and regulations, therefore clearly contravenes Indonesia's obligations as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In particular, Article 18(1) of the ICCPR guarantees everyone the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The right to freedom of religion is also enshrined in the Article 28E (1) of the Indonesian Constitution which provides that "[e]very person shall be free to choose and to practice the religion of his/her choice".

The central government must revoke the Regulation of the Governor of West Java No. 12/2011 and all other regional and national legislation and regulations that restrict the religious activities of the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia. These have been used by local authorities and radical Islamist groups to justify discrimination, intimidation and attacks against the Ahmadiyya community in many parts of the country.

The Ahmadiyya are a religious group who consider themselves a part of Islam, although many Muslim groups say they do not adhere to the accepted Islamic belief system.

Amnesty International continues to receive credible reports of harassment, intimidation and attacks against other religious minority groups in Indonesia, including Shi'a and Christians. These include the closure, attacks and burning of places of worship and homes, at times leading to the displacement of communities belonging to these groups. Those who commit acts of violence against religious minorities are rarely punished

At least 168 Shi'a followers in Sampang, East Java, including 51 children, have been prevented from returning to their village by the local authorities nearly eight months after an anti-Shi'a mob attacked their village killing one person and setting fire to 35 homes in August 2012. They continue to live in a temporary shelter without adequate access to food and medical facilities. Some had previously been harassed by local government officials who told them to convert to Sunni Islam if they want to return to their homes. Five people were sentenced to between eight months and four years' imprisonment in connection with the attack. A sixth person accused was acquitted.

In February 2013, five churches in Makassar, South Sulawesi were the target of arson attacks by unidentified persons using molotov cocktails. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no one has been brought to justice for these attacks.

Amnesty International urges the Indonesian government to uphold its commitments to the protection of freedom of religion made during its Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in May 2012, repeal discriminatory "defamation" laws, denounce all incidents of violence against religious minorities in Indonesia and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. The authorities must also develop a concrete strategy to strengthen respect for freedom of religion and religious tolerance, which has clearly deteriorated in recent years.