

URGENT ACTION

CHRISTIAN MINORITY IN ACEH UNDER THREAT

Local authorities in Aceh province have increased religious tensions by tearing down seven churches. A mob had already destroyed one church, leaving one person dead.

Religious tensions between Muslims and Christians in the Aceh Singkil region have been increasing, after the authorities tore down seven churches over the last two weeks.

The government decided on 12 October to close 10 churches, as demanded by members of a group calling themselves the *Pemuda Peduli Islam* (Youth who care about Islam) who had assembled outside the district head administrative office on 6 October. Some of the 10 churches were built decades ago, but the group said they violated local regulations and gave the local authorities until 13 October to shut them down.

Despite the government giving in to the demands of this group, on 13 October a mob of around 500 people burnt down a Protestant church in Suka Makmur village. They then moved onto another church in Danggaran village but were prevented from destroying it by the police and the military. One of the attackers was killed. The violence caused widespread panic among Christians in Aceh, and around 4,000 people fled to neighbouring North Sumatra province. Some have since returned. Although local police had known that the attack on the Protestant church was planned, they did not provide the church in Suka Makmur with adequate protection or take measure to prevent the attack.

Human rights groups have found regulations on establishing places of worship to be discriminatory against religious minorities, with requirements that are virtually impossible to follow. The decision to demolish the churches was a clear violation of the right of every person to practice his or her religion.

Please write immediately in English, Bahasa Indonesia or your own language:

- Urging the Indonesian authorities to halt the destruction of places of worship in Aceh Singkil immediately;
- Calling on them to order thorough, independent and impartial investigations into the attacks in Aceh Singkil and bring those responsible to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards;
- Urging them to ensure that all religious minorities are able to practice their faith free from fear of intimidation and attack;
- Urging them to review or repeal national and local laws that discriminate against religious minorities or otherwise violate their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 DECEMBER 2015 TO:

Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal
and Security Affairs

Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan
Ministry for Political, Legal and Security
Affairs
Jl. Medan Merdeka Barat No. 15
Jakarta Pusat, 10110, Indonesia
Fax: +62 21 345 0918
Twitter: @lapor1708
Salutation: Dear Minister

Head of National Police

Badrodin Haiti
Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia
Jl. Trunojoyo No.3
Jakarta, 12110, Indonesia
Fax: +62 21 721 8741
Email: mabes@polri.go.id
Salutation: Dear General

And copies to:

Regional Head of Aceh Singkil
Safriadi Manik
Pemerintahan Daerah Aceh Singkil
Jl. Bahari Nomor 54
Pulo Sarok Singkil
Aceh Province, Indonesia
Fax: +62 6 582 1217
Email: humas_acehsingkil@yahoo.com

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The closure of Christian churches in Aceh Singkil district began in 2012 when the local authorities sealed 19 churches and one native-faith house of worship following protests from the local chapter of the hardline Islamist group the *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front, FPI). The FPI demanded the closure of the churches on the grounds that they did not have a permit to establish places of worship in accordance with Joint Ministerial Decree No. 8 and No. 9/2006, even though all these churches had been established before the decree came into force. Some of the churches had been established as far back as the 1930s.

The Aceh Singkil district authorities also justified the closure of the churches on the basis of agreements between various religious groups in Aceh Singkil reached in 1979 and 2001. In 1979 it was decided that only one church and four smaller Christian places of worship were allowed to be established in Aceh Singkil. However, according to local human rights groups, Christian minorities only agreed to this due to pressure from the security forces. While the majority of Aceh Singkil's population of around 110,706 are Muslim, an estimated 14,000 are Christians.

The Aceh provincial and Aceh Singkil local government have issued Governor Regulation No. 25/2007 and Qanun Aceh Singkil No. 2/2007 respectively concerning the Establishment of Places of Worship. The two local regulations restrict religious minorities from building their places of worship and contain stricter requirements than the national regulation concerning the establishment of places of worship (the Joint Ministerial Decree No. 8 and No. 9/2006). These regulations have been used by vigilante Islamic mass organization in Aceh Singkil to justify the closure of Christian churches with support from the local authorities.

Name: Christian minority in Aceh

Gender m/f: both

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