

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Indonesia: Release Tajul Muluk and resolve situation of evicted Shi'a community in East Java**

Amnesty International continues to be concerned about the ongoing imprisonment of Shi'a religious leader, Tajul Muluk, for blasphemy, nearly two years after his conviction. The organisation calls on the President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and his right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Tajul Muluk is currently serving a four-year sentence for blasphemy under Article 156(a) of the Indonesian Criminal Code. On 29 December 2011, Tajul Muluk was forcibly evicted with over 300 other Shi'a villagers, when an anti-Shi'a mob of some 500 people attacked and burned houses, a boarding school and a Shi'a place of worship in Sampang district, East Java. On 1 January 2012 a religious decree (*fatwa*) was issued by the Sampang branch of the Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI), a non-governmental body, about what was described as Tajul Muluk's "deviant teachings" and on 16 March, the East Java regional police charged Tajul Muluk with blasphemy.

He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for blasphemy on 12 July 2012 by the Sampang District Court. In particular, the Court found him guilty for saying that the version of the Qur'an that Muslims were using was not the original text. Tajul Muluk has denied these allegations. His sentence was increased on appeal to four years on 10 September by the Surabaya High Court. The Court explained that the increase was because Tajul Muluk had caused "disharmony among Muslims" and was meant to have a "deterrent effect".

Amnesty International believes the charges and sentence imposed on Tajul Muluk are in contravention of Indonesia's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - particularly Article 18, which protects an individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and Article 19, which guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The authorities must also repeal blasphemy provisions in the Criminal Code and other laws that have been used in Indonesia to imprison people for as long as five years, simply because they have peacefully exercised their rights to freedom of expression or freedom of religion. These provisions are often used to target individuals who adhere to a minority religion or belief.

Amnesty International also calls on President Yudhoyono to fulfil his promise to the displaced Shi'a community in Sampang, to which Tajul Muluk belongs. The community was forcibly evicted a second time on 26 August 2012, after an anti-Shi'a mob attacked their village. Since then, the local authorities have prevented members of the community from returning. They were first moved to a temporary shelter with minimal facilities at a sports complex in Sampang, where they lived for ten months. During their stay, they faced intimidation and harassment by local government officials pressing them to convert to Sunni Islam if they wanted to return to their homes. On 21 June 2013, the Sampang district authorities forcibly moved the community to a housing facility in Sidoarjo, East Java where at least 168 Shi'as continue to live.

In July and August 2013 the President promised to ensure their safe, voluntary and dignified return to their village in Sampang and to rebuild homes and other buildings that were destroyed. However the community remains displaced, in limbo and uncertain about the future.

By resolving their situation the President would highlight his commitment to protecting the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and lay the groundwork for the new administration to protect the human rights of religious minorities more effectively in Indonesia.

This week, Amnesty International members and supporters will be sending messages to the President to call for Tajul Muluk's release and remind him of his promises to the displaced Shi'a community in East Java.