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Indonesia: Stop attacks against Shi'a community in East Java

Amnesty International urges the Indonesian authorities to ensure that all those involved in repeated attacks against the Shi'a community in East Java are held to account, and that immediate steps are taken to protect the displaced communities and prevent further attacks. The latest attack, on 26 August, which left at least one person dead, reflects the continued failure of the Indonesian government to protect religious minorities from intimidation and attacks and to bring the suspected perpetrators to justice.

On the morning of 26 August 2012 an anti-Shi'a mob of around 500 people armed with sharp weapons and stones attacked a Shi'a community in Nangkrenang village in Sampang, Madura island. Muhammad Hasyim was slashed to death while another victim, Muhammad Thohir, was stabbed and is in a critical condition. Stones thrown by the mob injured dozens of others. At least four people with serious injuries are being treated at the Sampang hospital. Thirty-five houses belonging to the Shi'a community were also set on fire by the mob. Many from the community have fled the village into hiding. Others have been evacuated to a temporary shelter at a sports complex in Sampang.

Amnesty International welcomes reports that the President has called for decisive action in response to the incident and that the Sampang police have arrested at least eight people allegedly involved in the attack. However, the failure of Indonesian authorities to adequately deal with previous attacks against the Shi'a community raises serious questions about its willingness to ensure that the suspected perpetrators of the Sampang attack are brought to justice, to provide the victims with reparations, and to prevent further attacks on minority groups.

The Shi'a community on Madura island has been intimidated and attacked before. On 29 December 2011, a mob set fire to a place of worship, boarding school and various homes in the vicinity. Security forces were seen filming and watching the attack as it occurred. Only one person was eventually charged and sentenced to three months' imprisonment for the attack.

Following the December incident Tajul Muluk, a Shi'a religious leader from the community, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for blasphemy. Amnesty International considers Tajul Muluk to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Amnesty International also calls on the Indonesian authorities to investigate reports that the local Omben sub-district police had prior knowledge of the threats against the Shi'a community but did not take necessary preventive measures against the recent attack, including mobilization of adequate numbers of police personnel. According to the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) only five police personnel were at the scene. As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Indonesia has an obligation to ensure the right to life, security and freedom from torture and other ill-treatment. Under Article 2(1) of the ICCPR, such protection must be provided without discrimination, including on the basis of religion.

Amnesty International continues to receive reports of attacks and intimidation against religious minorities in Indonesia, including Shi'a, Ahmadiyya and Christian communities. Many communities

have been displaced by attacks including arson, and in many cases the perpetrators have gone unpunished. It is high time that Indonesia develops a concrete strategy to prevent and respond to incidents of religiously-based violence, including strengthening respect for freedom of religion and religious tolerance which has clearly deteriorated in recent years.