



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Indonesia

Indonesia – IDN37871 – Christians –  
Pentecostal churches – Muslims

30 November 2010

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**1. Please provide any information regarding any recent adverse treatment of Pentecostal Christians by Muslims in Indonesia.**

Recent reports indicate that Pentecostals are amongst those Christian groups in Indonesia that have received adverse attention from some Muslims, including during 2010.

The US Department of State's recently released report on religious freedom in Indonesia makes no specific mention of the treatment of Pentecostal Christians by Muslims; however, it does note that there have been reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious difference in the past year, and that some hard-line Muslim groups have "engaged in violent activity against free religious expression, and various other activities deemed contradictory to their view of Islamic values".<sup>1</sup>

The report notes a number of incidences of Protestant churches being closed or threatened with closure, or having religious services cancelled. For example, the Tambun Batak Protestant Church in Bekasi was targeted by members of radical groups on Christmas Day 2009 and was later closed by local authorities. Similarly, the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP church) in Karawang, West Java was closed by police in January 2010, following protests and pressure by members of radical Muslim organisations, although the church later resumed religious services with the authorisation of the local government.

Other churches faced delays in decisions on applications for building permits. The 2006 Revised Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship requires that religious groups seeking permission to build a place of worship must obtain the signatures of at least 90 members of the group and 60 persons of other religious groups in the community stating that they support the construction, as well as approval from the local religious affairs office, the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB). The local FKUBs, although designed to serve in part as interfaith arbiters, were often dominated by the majority religious group, which could oppose or stall provision of licenses to minority groups; in a number of reported cases, small churches faced difficulties obtaining licenses due to opposition in the FKUB.<sup>2</sup>

The US Department of State's report details a number of attacks upon churches during 2010, including in the capital, Jakarta, and elsewhere in West Java, Central Java and North Sumatra, noting that:

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Indonesia*, November, Introduction – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Indonesia*, November, Section II – Attachment 1.

local government officials and local communities forced the closing of at least 28 licensed and unlicensed churches during the reporting period. Many of the targeted churches operated in private homes and storefronts, and some churches moved their services to rented spaces in public shopping malls to lessen the potential of threats from hardline groups.<sup>3</sup>

A recent briefing by the International Crisis Group (ICG) has reported that:

Religious tolerance in Indonesia has come under increasing strain in recent years, particularly where hardline Islamists and Christian evangelicals compete for the same ground. Islamists use “Christianisation” – a term that generally refers both to Christian efforts to convert Muslims and the alleged growing influence of Christianity in Muslim-majority Indonesia – as a justification for mass mobilisation and vigilante attacks.<sup>4</sup>

The ICG briefing notes both the growth of “Islamic vigilante organisations and various like-minded coalitions that have become a public order menace” and “[a]ggressive evangelical Christian proselytising in Muslim strongholds”, observing that these “clashing fundamentalisms” have led to an increase of Christian-Muslim tensions in Indonesia. In the Jakarta suburb of Bekasi, for example, a series of disputes have occurred in the past two years over church construction, alleged conversion efforts and affronts to Islam:

The incidents in Bekasi exemplify some of the dynamics involved. Islamist organisations like the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII) and Islamic Student Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Islam, GPI) have long been active there, both with a strongly anti-Christian streak. Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) has had a strong presence for the last decade, and recent years have seen the formation of a variety of anti-apostasy coalitions. Bekasi also has a well-entrenched salafi jihadi community, and Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), the organisation established by the radical cleric Abu Bakar Ba’asyir in 2008, held its inaugural ceremony at the dormitory for Mecca-bound pilgrims there.

On the Christian side, several evangelical organisations committed to converting Muslims have also set up shop in Bekasi, some funded internationally, others purely homegrown. Yayasan Mahanaim, one of the wealthiest and most active, is particularly loathed by the Islamist community because of its programs targeting the Muslim poor. Another, Yayasan Bethmidrash Talmiddin, run by a Muslim convert to Christianity, uses Arabic calligraphy on the cover of its booklets, suggesting they are Islamic in content, and requires every student at its school as a graduation requirement to convert five people.<sup>5</sup>

Concern over “Christianisation” reportedly has been part of Islamist rhetoric in Indonesia since the 1960s;<sup>6</sup> in recent years, that concern has prompted a series of increasingly violent

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Indonesia*, November, Section III – Attachment 1.

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, ‘Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114’, International Crisis Group website, 24 November, p.1 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx> – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 2.

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, ‘Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114’, International Crisis Group website, 24 November, p.1 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx> – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 2.

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, ‘Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114’, International Crisis Group website, 24 November, p.2 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx> – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 2.

efforts on the part of the Islamists to prevent church construction.<sup>7</sup> In an April 2010 article in *Time Magazine*, it was similarly observed that:

Last year, the Indonesia Ulema Council, an influential Islamic clerical body, sounded the alarm about Christian proselytization and called on Muslims to more staunchly guard their faith. The pace with which unlicensed churches are being shut down by local authorities is also increasing. Christians complain that gaining official sanction to build a mosque is easy while getting similar permission for churches is glacial. As a consequence, most Christian houses of worship are unofficial. “There is a real fear that Christianity is on the march,” says Mike Hilliard, a Scottish minister who with his Indonesian wife runs an orphanage outside Jakarta that has been targeted by militant Muslims. “Because of this fear, emotions are easily stirred up and mobs can form quickly.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Is the Pentecostal church growing in Indonesia?

The International Crisis Group has reported that evangelical Protestantism has seen significant growth in recent years. According to the ICG:

Most agree that West Java is one of the fastest growing areas for evangelical Christianity. An official at the Indonesian Communion of Churches, a Protestant umbrella organisation, said the big evangelical organisations were deliberately targeting West Java and Banten, the provinces that ring Jakarta, in the hope that a pincer movement of proselytisation would eventually gain them a bigger foothold in the capital. Others attributed the growth simply to the large amounts of funding available for Christian outreach activities in the wider metropolitan Jakarta area.

While much of the evangelical outreach is aimed at mainstream Christians, not Muslims, some of these organisations have specific projects aimed at conversion.<sup>9</sup>

In 2008, the *Jakarta Post* reported on the increasing number of young Indonesian Christians “flocking to the modern church”, noting that Indonesia had seen a significant rise in Evangelical and Pentecostal churches since 1996. It mentions Bethel Church Indonesia as one of the pioneer Indonesian evangelical churches: established in Jakarta in 1998 with 400 members, in 2008 it had grown to 650 local churches with 300,000 members.<sup>10</sup>

The previously mentioned article published by *Time Magazine* in April 2010, reported that Indonesia was being transformed by a “religious revolution” characterised by Muslims embracing a more conservative form of faith and, at the same time, a “boom in Christianity”.

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<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, ‘Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114’, International Crisis Group website, 24 November, p.9 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx> – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 2.

<sup>8</sup> Beech, H. 2010, ‘Christianity's Surge in Indonesia’, *Time Magazine*, 26 April <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1982223,00.html> – Accessed 16 November 2010 – Attachment 3.

<sup>9</sup> International Crisis Group 2010, ‘Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114’, International Crisis Group website, 24 November, p.2 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx> – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 2.

<sup>10</sup> Emmanuelle, A. 2008, ‘Young in Spirit’, *Jakarta Post*, 23 September <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/09/23/young-spirit.html> – Accessed 17 November 2010 – Attachment 4.

The article noted that much of the growth of Christianity in Asia in recent years has come from Pentecostal and Evangelical conversions, and observed further:

For many in the global Evangelical community, though, it is the faith's inroads in Indonesia – a nation with some 215 million Muslim adherents – that are most riveting. Exact figures are hard to gather in a country where conversions from Islam to Christianity face a stigma and likely lead to an underreporting of Christian believers. The 2000 census counted just under 10% of Indonesians as Christians, a figure many Christian leaders believe is too low. Anecdotal evidence paints a compelling picture of the faith's rapid rise. In the early 1960s, for instance, there were no Evangelical churches in Temanggung, where the soccer-field revival took place; now there are more than 40. In the capital Jakarta, newly built megachurches that might seem more at home in Texas send steeples into the sky. Other Christians worship at unofficial churches based in hotels and malls, where Sunday services rival shopping as a popular weekend activity. Asia's tallest statue of Jesus Christ, built in 2007, presides over Manado city in eastern Indonesia, while Indonesian cable TV beams 24-hour Christian channels.

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Muslim converts to Christianity are also targets, their apostasy viewed by some radical Islamic scholars as deserving of execution. Syaiful Hamzah grew up as the madrasah-attending son of a Muslim family in Jakarta that helped build the neighborhood mosque. But while working in eastern Indonesia's Maluku archipelago, which has a substantial Christian population, he was swayed by Evangelical teachings. By 2000, he had been baptized at a Pentecostal church and returned to Jakarta to begin theological studies. His family cut him off; one brother threatened to burn his house down. Undeterred, he began lay-preaching to a house-church congregation in his modest home near Jakarta's port. In 2008, a mob armed with clubs showed up and demanded Syaiful stop. He shuttered his church but still guides Muslim converts to Christianity, the number of which he says is growing, in part, because of the terror attacks unleashed in Indonesia in the name of Islam. "So many have converted," he says, "but they are afraid to say so publicly because Muslims will harass them."<sup>11</sup>

The US Department of State has recently observed that voluntary conversions between religious groups are allowed by law and do occur, but have remained a source of controversy.<sup>12</sup>

## Attachments

1. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Indonesia*, November.
2. International Crisis Group 2010, 'Indonesia: "Christianisation" and Intolerance – Asia Briefing No.114', International Crisis Group website, 24 November, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/B114%20Indonesia%20-%20Christianisation%20and%20Intolerance.ashx) – Accessed 30 November 2010.

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<sup>11</sup> Beech, H. 2010, 'Christianity's Surge in Indonesia', *Time Magazine*, 26 April <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1982223,00.html> – Accessed 16 November 2010 – Attachment 3.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Indonesia*, November, Section III – Attachment 1.

3. Beech, H. 2010, 'Christianity's Surge in Indonesia', *Time Magazine*, 26 April  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1982223,00.html> – Accessed 16 November 2010.
4. Emmanuelle, A. 2008, 'Young in Spirit', *Jakarta Post*, 23 September  
<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/09/23/young-spirit.html> – Accessed 17 November 2010.