



Why Are Ahmadiyah Followers in Indonesia Attacked?

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Jakarta. The government must ensure the freedom of religion for its citizen, including for Ahmadiyah believers in Indonesia, as is guaranteed by the Constitution and international covenants.

A series of attacks on Ahmadiyah followers in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, this month has added to long-term persecution toward the worshipers for more than a decade in the predominantly Muslim nation.

Fresh Attacks

On May 19, at least seven Ahmadiyya families, consisting of 24 people, were evacuated to the East Lombok Police headquarters after mobs from East Sakra subdistrict attacked and destroyed their houses in an effort to force them to leave their village.

The mobs damaged those victims' vehicles and belongings in several other locations in neighboring areas.

The following day at 6.30 a.m., mobs then continued attacking the property of Ahmadiyah followers in different locations, in the same subdistrict in West Nusa Tenggara's East Lombok. The attack was allegedly fueled by hatred against their religious belief.

According to police, no fatalities were recorded.

The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) said the Ahmadiyah



followers were forced to close down their mosques, when attackers attempted to break up and disturb their religious events as well as prayer sessions, and sexually harassed female Ahmadiyah followers.

Ahmadiyah Prone to Persecution

Ahmadiyah followers have faced ongoing threats, discrimination and abuse for many years in Indonesia, especially after reforms in 1998.

In West Nusa Tenggara, where many Ahmadiyah followers live, those attacks began in October 1998.

The conflict continued to escalate between 2005 to 2006 when mobs ousted some of the 90 Ahmadiyah followers from their homes, forcing them to seek refuge in Transito and Praya districts in Central Lombok.

They have been living in temporary housing in Transito and Praya due to the uncertainty of security and protection.

The violent attacks have occurred in other regions across the archipelago, such as in Cikeusik, Banten in 2011 as well as in Kuningan and Banten in West Java.

Muslim hardliners, including the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), had recommended that Ahmadiyah teachings should be banned as they diverge from fundamental Islamic principles.

The Ahmadiis do not believe that the Prophet Muhammad is Islam's final prophet, but claim that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the final prophet and messiah. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the founder of the sect.

The persecution mounted following the issuance of a controversial joint ministerial decree by then-President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, known as SBY, in 2008. The decree ordered the Ahmadiyah followers to stop spreading their teachings and conducting activities that deviate from the fundamental principles of Islam.

The decree also imposes up to five-year jail terms to anyone who propagates Ahmadiyah teachings.

Following the decree, hardline Muslims attacked 25 Ahmadiyah followers in Cikeusik, Banten, in February 2011, killing three and injuring five followers of the sect.

After Jokowi took office in 2014, the reported attacks against religious minorities were plummeting, but Human Rights Watch reported that at least seven Ahmadiyah mosques remained closed in Indonesia under the 2008 ministerial decree.

"The recurring attacks on Ahmadiyya communities by vigilante mobs in the region during the past decade are encouraged by the police's reluctance to stop and investigate perpetrators of past attacks, making attackers feel that they are above the law," said Amnesty International executive director Usman Hamid.

"Moreover, such acts are no doubt encouraged by discriminatory legislation as well as repressive measures taken against the Ahmadiyya by the authorities themselves, such as the closure of mosques.

This discrimination and impunity must stop," Usman added.

Condemnations

Komnas Perempuan, along with civil group Amnesty International, condemned the attack on dozens of Ahmadiyah followers in West Nusa Tenggara recently.

"Although Ahmadiyah followers had been reporting that there is an indication of violence and attack by mobs to National Police since March, the authorities still have yet to prevent the religious intolerance conflicts," Komnas Perempuan said in a statement on May 21.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International said that the rights of Ahmadiyah followers to hold and manifest their religious beliefs is not recognized by law, which deems their beliefs as "deviant," a violation of international law.

"This brutal act is a clear abuse of the human right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as it was in all likelihood motivated by hatred against the Ahmadiyah community due to their belief," Usman said in a statement on May 20.

"The authorities must protect Ahmadiyah members' right to freely and safely manifest their religious beliefs. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in Indonesia, a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects this right at all times," Usman said.

Usman said the authorities must ensure that all such attacks are stopped and the incident is investigated thoroughly, while perpetrators will be brought to justice.

"The authorities must ensure that any damage to property is repaired or compensated for and that members of the Ahmadiyah community are allowed back to their homes and neighborhood as soon as repairs are completed. Police must guarantee the safety of members of the Ahmadiyah community much more efficiently from now on," said Usman.

"The ill-treatment against religious minorities has a significant impact on women's lives. Although male victims also suffered from the persecution, women are more prone to violence due to their role as wives, mothers, and also the member of society," Komnas Perempuan said.

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