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INDONESIA Constitutional Court rejects repeal of blasphemy law

Indonesia's Constitutional Court has rejected the repeal of the country's blasphemy law, in a ruling on Monday. The verdict came despite representations from seven Indonesian human rights organizations and four prominent individuals.

The blasphemy law was introduced in 1965, in a regulation which restricts government recognition to six official religions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Article 156A in Indonesia's Criminal Code imposes a maximum prison sentence of five years for blasphemy against any of these six religions. Many religious leaders have been prosecuted and jailed for blasphemy.

Calls for the repeal of the blasphemy law were led by former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, who died on 30 December, 2009, and three other Muslim scholars, who worked with seven Indonesian human rights organizations to submit a 59-page appeal to the Constitutional Court on 28 October, 2009.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said: "We are deeply disappointed by the Constitutional Court's decision, which is a major setback for religious freedom. Indonesia has a proud tradition of religious pluralism, and its constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but the blasphemy law set out in article 156A of the Indonesian Criminal Code violates its own constitution and damages Indonesia's reputation as a pluralistic and tolerant society. We urge the Indonesian government to seriously consider legislating to repeal this law, which infringes religious liberty, contributes to religious tension and conflict and damages Indonesia's democracy and international reputation."