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## INDONESIA CSW urges defending religious freedom following increased violence against religious minorities

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today expressed deep concern over violent attacks this week on religious minorities in Indonesia, and called on the Indonesian government to take action to protect religious minorities, defend its tradition of pluralism and religious freedom, and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice.

On February 8, three Christian churches in Temanggung, Central Java, were attacked by a mob of extremist Islamists following the trial of a Christian charged with blasphemy against Islam. The accused, Antonius Bawengan, was sentenced to five years in prison, a sentence regarded by extremists as too lenient. The mob burned two churches and damaged a third, attacked the police outside the courthouse with stones, damaged cars in the area, and called for the death penalty to be applied for blasphemy.

Two days earlier, a crowd of up to 1,000 people attacked 20 Ahmadiyya Muslims in Cikeusik, Banten province. Three Ahmadiyya Muslims were killed, and five others were seriously injured by the attackers, who were armed with machetes, spears, knives and other weapons. A house belonging to an Ahmadiyya family was destroyed, along with vehicles and other property.

On February 9th the Ahmadiyya community in Bogor, West Java was attacked and the Protestant Church of West Indonesia Galilea, in Taman Galaxi, Bekasi, West Java, was sealed by an extremist mob.

These attacks follow the release of research last week by the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, based in Jakarta, that found that violations of religious freedom to 91 documented incidents in 2010. Incidents affecting Christians rose to 75 last year, compared to twelve in 2009.

At the same time, leaders of major religions in Indonesia are increasing efforts to promote inter-faith dialogue and harmony. On February 6th, 6,000 people participated in a celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week at Jakarta Sport Palace, sending extremists and the Indonesian authorities a strong message promoting pluralism and religious freedom.

One of CSW's sources in Indonesia issued a statement this week calling for "an impartial investigation into all cases of religious violence" and urged the Indonesian government and police to take action against religious intolerance. "We see the increasing use of extreme violence [by those with] fundamentalist religious views as a result of the inaction ... and blatant negligence by the government," he said. Negligence by the authorities in many cases "amounts to consent to such violence", and has resulted in a "serious deterioration of the situation of religious freedom."

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "Over the past two years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of violent attacks against religious minorities in Indonesia, which is a cause for serious concern. Indonesia has a long tradition of pluralism, enshrined in its state philosophy, the 'Pancasila', and we urge the Indonesian authorities to defend those values. We urge the Indonesian government to repeal the blasphemy law and the joint decree restricting the Ahmadiyyas, provide protection for religious minorities vulnerable to attack, establish an independent investigation into these recent attacks and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to

justice. If extremists are allowed to continue to terrorize religious minorities with impunity, Indonesia's proud tradition of pluralism and religious freedom will be under threat."

***Notes to Editors:***

1. The Ahmadiyya are a religious group who consider themselves Islamic, although many other Muslims do not accept them as part of Islam. They face serious discrimination in Indonesia, and are banned from promoting their beliefs under a government joint ministerial decree issued in 2008. In September 2010, Suryadharma Ali, Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, called for the Ahmadiyya to be banned.