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INDONESIA CSW calls on Indonesia to protect pluralism and religious freedom

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today expressed grave concerns over increasing violations of religious freedom in Indonesia, and called on the Government of Indonesia to take action to protect religious minorities, curb radical Islamist activity, bring the perpetrators of religious hatred and violence to justice, and defend the country's tradition of pluralism enshrined in the State ideology known as the 'Pancasila'.

A CSW delegation returned last week from a three-week visit to Indonesia with first-hand evidence of increasing violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians and the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. CSW visited churches in Bekasi and Bandung which have been forced to close, and met pastors who have faced increasing harassment, threats and attacks. CSW also visited the Ahmadiyya Muslim community and met victims of violence in Cisalada and Cikeusik.

On February 6, 2011 a mob of 1,500 attacked 21 members of the Ahmadiyya community in Cikeusik, Banten province, killing three people and injuring many others. CSW met four survivors of the attack in Jakarta. One man told CSW, "When the attackers caught me, they stripped me naked on the road, dragged me through a river, beat me with sticks and machetes and tried to cut off my penis. They bashed stones on my head, and dragged me around the village. One man used a bamboo spear to hit my eye. They shouted that I was an 'infidel' and should be killed. I lost consciousness." Another man escaped into the river, where he struggled to swim and was pursued by the mob who continued to throw rocks at him, shouting "Kill, kill". He eventually escaped and hid in a bush for four hours. "We just want security," said one Ahmadi. "If the Indonesian government cannot protect us, we ask the international community to help us. We are citizens and have the same rights as other citizens."

Reverend Palti Panjetan, pastor of the HKBP Filadelfia church in Bekasi, West Java, told CSW that despite winning a court ruling granting permission to use their building, the local mayor has forbidden the congregation to use the church. "Even though the court said we can use the church, we are not able to. So we continue to worship outside, on the road. Some parents have baptized their children in the road. We have communion in the road. This is not safe and not suitable. The radicals want to push us to the limit, to see how long we are prepared to worship outside before we surrender. It might be a long time." Local Muslims who have supported the church have also faced intimidation from radical Islamists. "We need support from the international community. There must be religious freedom for all," he told CSW. "The rise of radicalism and violations of religious freedom are not only a problem between Indonesians. There is an international agenda. Wahhabi influence is growing. We need more international pressure. We need the international community to be a watchdog. If there is no help from the international community, we are hopeless, we will be destroyed."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The trends in Indonesia which our team found are a cause for serious concern. Indonesia's long and proud tradition of pluralism, religious harmony and religious freedom is at risk if the Government of Indonesia does not protect minorities, prosecute perpetrators of violence and curb radicalism in all its forms. We urge Indonesia to take firm action, and we encourage Indonesia to invite the UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief to visit this year, to conduct an independent investigation into violations of religious freedom. Indonesia, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council and the G-20, and as

chair of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, has a responsibility to act. It is in its own interests to do so, for its reputation is at stake.”

Notes to Editors:

1. A video of the Cikeusik incident circulated on the internet and the attack drew condemnation from the President of Indonesia, and the United States and European Union.
2. On 26 April, 2011 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, wrote to the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs to express her concerns about violations of religious freedom. While praising Indonesian human rights and civil society organizations as “among the most proactive in the region”, she said that recent incidents of violence and repression against religious minorities “put at risk the human rights guaranteed in Indonesia’s Constitution, including the prohibition of discrimination and the right to freedom of religion and expression”. She called for a review of all laws, particularly those restricting religious expression and practice, “to ensure they comply” with standards set out in the Constitution and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). She urged Indonesia to accept a request from the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit the country later this year.