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## INDONESIA | CSW urges UK to raise religious intolerance and West Papua conflict on President's state visit

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In advance of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's arrival in the UK on 31 October for a three-day state visit, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the British Government to use this opportunity to discuss rising religious intolerance in Indonesia, including violations of freedom of religion or belief, human rights violations in West Papua, and to press the President to protect the rights of religious minorities and defend the rule of law.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, David Cameron and the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, CSW urges the United Kingdom "as a friend of Indonesia" to raise rising religious intolerance and escalating tensions and accompanying human rights violations in West Papua "as matters of urgent and serious concern which, if not addressed, threaten to undermine Indonesia's progress as a democracy and a pluralist, tolerant nation."

In particular, CSW expresses concern over the forcible closure of churches in Indonesia, including churches which have secured legal permission. CSW highlights the cases of GKI Yasmin church in Bogor, and HKBP Filadelfia church in Bekasi, which have been forced by the local Mayor, under pressure from extremists, to close, even though the courts have ruled they should be open. In the case of GKI Yasmin, the Mayor is in defiance of the Supreme Court. "This is a rule of law issue, not simply a religious freedom issue," CSW's letter states.

On 22 October the Jakarta Globe reported the closure of nine churches and six Buddhist temples in Banda Aceh following mounting pressure from local Islamist groups. The churches include the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI), the Pantekosta Church and the Indonesia Christian Church. Meanwhile, in Poso, Reverend Rinaldy Daminik has been documenting acts of terror and violence against the Christian community and wrote to President Yudhoyono last week urging him to take action.

CSW also recommends that the British Government encourage the President of Indonesia to initiate a meaningful dialogue process with representatives of the Papuan people, as proposed in the Papua Road Map, and to work together with the Papua Peace Network to advance a peaceful, political resolution to the long-running conflict in West Papua.

Andrew Johnston, CSW's Advocacy Director, said: "We welcome the visit of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as an important opportunity to deliver some very clear and important messages regarding respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, the rule of law, and the conflict in West Papua. In his final term as President, he has an opportunity to leave as his legacy a reputation for upholding, protecting and strengthening Indonesia's tradition of pluralism, but he also faces the danger that he will be remembered as the President who failed to stop rising religious intolerance. Indonesia's remarkable transition from authoritarianism to democracy over the past decade and its tradition of pluralism and religious harmony deserve to be recognised, but these achievements are being increasingly undermined by rising Islamist extremism, violence against religious minorities, discriminatory laws which are open to abuse, particularly the blasphemy laws, regulations governing the construction of places of worship, regulations relating to the Ahmadiyah Muslim community and the abuses perpetrated by the Indonesian military in West Papua. During this visit, the British Government should raise these concerns as a matter of priority, and urge the President to take action to protect and promote human rights and curb religious extremism and violence."

**Notes to Editors:**

1. On 23 October a peaceful demonstration outside the State University of Papua in Manokwari organized by the West Papua National Committee (KNPB), demanding a referendum on the right to self determination overseen by the United Nations, was attacked by the police, who also shot at protesters. Four injured people were taken to hospital. Oktovianus Pogau, a journalist who attempted to film the police assault on the protesters, was beaten by five police officers. Ahead of the demonstration, at least four KNPB leaders were arrested.