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INDONESIA | CSW Highlights Rising Religious Intolerance

Rising religious intolerance in Indonesia was highlighted at the European Parliament March 4 as Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) presented its new report: *Indonesia: Pluralism in Peril – The rise of religious intolerance across the archipelago* to MEPs at an event hosted by Hannu Takkula MEP.

The report stresses the problem of religious intolerance “is no longer confined to areas such as West Java and Aceh, known to be particularly conservative, nor is it confined to Christians and Ahmadis. Shi’a Muslims, Sufi Muslims, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus, Baha’is, Jews, traditional indigenous believers and atheists are all under attack.”

Among the factors fuelling intolerance is “the inaction and at times complicity of the local, provincial and national authorities.” The report identifies that government ministers, including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, “have not simply been guilty of gross negligence, but have in fact been proactively complicit” by making remarks that encourage intolerance, and implementing or upholding laws which discriminate against religious minorities. The failure to uphold the rule of law and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice has contributed to a culture of impunity, while also giving rise to a disturbing new trend: the criminalization of victims, who are arrested for acts of violence perpetrated upon them by extremists.

Recommendations to the Indonesian government include the repeal of discriminatory legislation and ensuring that violations of religious freedom are properly investigated and the perpetrators are brought to justice. The European Union and Member States are asked to raise concerns about rising levels of violent attacks against religious minorities with the Indonesian government, and to encourage the government to extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit the country.

This week, an Indonesian interfaith delegation and CSW team will brief MEPs and European Commission officials, following a week of advocacy in the UK briefing MPs and ministers, including senior officials at the FCO and Naweed Khan, special advisor to Baroness Warsi.

Rafiq Hayat, National President Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK, said, “I welcome this timely report and hope that its recommendations are implemented. Indonesia has strong traditional of pluralism and it is our prayer that this remains the case so that there is true freedom of religion for Ahmadi Muslims, Shia Muslims, Christians and indeed all Indonesians.”

Benedict Rogers, CSW’s East Asia Team Leader and author of the report, said, “This has been a very significant visit at a significant time for Indonesia as it prepares for parliamentary and presidential elections. We hope that our message this week, and through this report, will be

heard by policy-makers in Indonesia and the European Union and the wider international community, and action will be taken to strengthen, protect, extend and promote Indonesia's tradition of religious pluralism for all and put an end to rising religious intolerance before it is too late."