Indonesia

Barnabas supports this church-planting couple in Indonesia

Indonesia's Christians, whose history dates back to the 16th century, comprise 12-20% of the population in a country that is home to more Muslims than any other in the world. Believers are coming under increasing pressure from Islamists. Local authorities often allow militant Islamist groups to commit anti-Christian violence with impunity, sometimes even collaborating with them, and they also bow to Islamist pressure by refusing building permits for churches.

Pastor Bernhard Maukar was leading a service at his church in West Java in 2013 when it was invaded by a gang of 50 Muslim extremists, who vandalised the building and assaulted him. Instead of arresting the attackers, the authorities jailed Pastor Bernhard for three months for holding services without a permit. The church's attempts to obtain a permit had been blocked by local officials.

For many decades Indonesia, a country founded on the doctrine of Pancasila, which includes a commitment to national unity, was a model of equality and harmonious relations between different religious groups. But in the last years of the 20th century a massive campaign of violence against Christians was launched by Islamists intent on bringing the whole country under sharia law. According to some estimates, Central Sulawesi and the Maluku Islands saw 30,000 Christians killed and half a million driven out during these years. The appalling bloodshed of this time has not recurred on the same scale, but Islamists still wield considerable power and influence.

In Aceh province, local authorities implement sharia law, making life particularly difficult for Christians. Five Christians in Aceh were arrested in September 2013 accused of influencing 70 Muslims to become Christians.

Many other local governments in Muslim-majority areas also attempt to implement sharia-inspired regulations, some of which discriminate against Christians. The authorities have encouraged Muslims to migrate into Christian-majority areas; once they outnumber the Christians, they can press for the imposition of sharia.

The central government also fails to protect Christians. Although the Supreme Court ordered that two sealed-off church buildings in West Java be reopened, the national government has failed to enforce these decisions. Various laws impede the public expression of Christian faith, evangelism and the construction of churches.

Christian schools also came under pressure in 2013. Influential Muslim scholars issued a *fatwa* against Christian schools in Central Java. Then, in August, two petrol bombs were thrown into the compound of a Christian school in Jakarta. Christian students can face harassment at other schools; in September, a nine-year-old Christian boy was too frightened to go back to school after a teacher pressurised him to convert to Islam.

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