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Islamists hurl urine and sewage at Indonesian congregation during services

Country/Region: Indonesia, South and East Asia

The congregation of an Indonesian church has come under attack twice in four days by Islamists who threw bags of urine, sewage, oil, rotten eggs and stones at them.

The first incident happened on 17 May as the Filadelfia Batak Christian Protestant Church (HKBP) met in Bekasi on the outskirts of Jakarta to celebrate the ascension of Christ. A mob of hundreds of Islamists launched their assault, shouting threats and insults at the Christians, as the minister started to address the congregation.

The church meets in Bekasi on the outskirts of Jakarta
Natalia Saragih / CC BY-NC 3.0

The Rev. Palti Panjaitan said:

> *Police tried to talk to them, but the mob passed through police and showered us with urine and dirty water. Others threw stones at us.*

Then on Sunday morning (20 May) as the congregation gathered for a service, they came under attack again by around 400 Islamists. The mob tried to block the Christians from reaching their site, threatened them and then threw sewage, water, used oil, mud, rotten eggs, sticks and other blunt objects at them.

Mr Panjaitan said:

> *What scares us most is that the number of police was so small compared to the angry mob. It is clear that they did not have the strength to repel the attackers.*

The Filidelfia church has faced hostility and opposition from both the local authorities and Islamists for a number of years. It has been holding services outdoors and in homes since its building was sealed off by the authorities in January 2010 following three years of legal wrangling over a permit.

Despite meeting all the requirements for a building permit, the Bekasi authorities refused to grant one. Filidelfia took the case to the Supreme Court, which ruled in their favour in July 2011, ordering the Bekasi authorities to issue a permit. But they have ignored the ruling.

Bomb blast

Elsewhere in Indonesia, a predominantly Christian neighbourhood in Ambon in the Moluccas came under attack in violence that started on 14 May. A bomb exploded, injuring dozens of people, and homes and cars were set alight. Dozens of families have fled, fearing further attack.

And in Picuan, East Minahasa, North Sulawesi, a small Protestant church – the only Christian place of worship in the area – was set on fire. Scores of homes and cars were also torched in the violence on 9 May.

These attacks are particularly concerning because of the history of brutal anti-Christian violence in the Moluccas and Sulawesi regions. Islamist group Laskar Jihad carried out in a genocidal “holy” war there between 1999 and 2001. Militants attacked Christian villages, homes and churches. Some 10,000 people were killed (some estimates suggest 30,000) and half a million were displaced during the conflict. Local Christians were murdered, tortured, forcibly converted to Islam, forcibly circumcised and virtually enslaved.