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2017 Report on International Religious Freedom - Indonesia

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and the right to worship according to one's own beliefs but states citizens must accept restrictions established by law to protect the rights of others and to satisfy "just demands based upon considerations of morality, religious values, security, and public order in a democratic society." In May a panel of judges for the North Jakarta District Court found the Governor of Jakarta, a Christian, guilty of blasphemy against Islam and sentenced him to two years in jail. In March the East Jakarta District Court convicted three senior leaders of the banned Gafatar religious group of blasphemy, and sentenced them to jail terms ranging from three to five years. In Aceh, the authorities carried out public canings for sharia violations, including, in May the first ever punishments for homosexual activities. Some local governments imposed local laws and regulations restricting religious freedom, such as local regulations banning Shia or Ahmadi Islamic practice. Ahmadi Muslims again reported incidents of forced conversion, discrimination, and mosque closures. Many religious groups outside the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law (Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam, which is widely interpreted by the government and society to mean Sunni Islam), reported issues with identifying their religion on their national identification cards (KTPs). On November 7, however, the Constitutional Court struck down two articles in the law that required citizens to either choose from one of six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law, or leave the religion column blank. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) stated that members of indigenous religions were entitled to the same access to basic services, regardless of what they did or did not declare as their religion, and that discrimination against them based on their religion violated the law. President Joko Widodo expressed support for religious tolerance, and the government took steps to address specific longstanding religious disputes, including the construction of the Santa Clara Catholic Church in Bekasi, West Java, which has been opposed by local residents. There were again instances in which local governments and police acceded to the demands of groups, such as the Islam Defender's Front (FPI), Islamic Community Forum (FUI), Islamic Jihad Front (FJI), and the Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI), which are locally labeled as "intolerant groups," to close houses of worship for permit violations or otherwise restrict the rights of minority religious groups. The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), an independent government-affiliated body, stated that the government at both the national and local levels at times failed to prevent or appropriately address intimidation and discrimination against individuals based on their religious beliefs. Both the central and local governments included elected and

appointed officials from minority religious groups, and elected politicians from religious minorities served in majority Muslim districts. There was one Shia member of the national legislature.

Many prominent civil society representatives, including from religious organizations of all faiths, worked to counter religious intolerance and promote pluralism and tolerance of minority religious groups. “Intolerant groups,” however, continued to disrupt religious gatherings, illegally closed houses of worship, and widely disseminated materials promoting intolerance. Muslim minorities and Christians reported threats of violence and intimidation for gathering in public. On February 11, an estimated 200,000 people attended a mass prayer in Jakarta’s national mosque to urge Muslims to vote for a Muslim candidate in the February 14 Jakarta gubernatorial election.

The U.S. government advocated for religious freedom at the highest levels, with both government and civil society leaders, and spoke out publicly against discrimination and religious violence. The Vice President visited Jakarta in April and stressed the importance of religious freedom with government officials, civil society leaders, and religious groups in Jakarta. Embassy and consulate officials engaged government officials on specific issues, including actions against religious minorities; closures of places of worship and access for foreign religious organizations; convictions for blasphemy and defamation of religion; the importance of tolerance and rule of law; the application of sharia to non-Muslims; and religious identification requirements on national identification cards. The U.S.-Indonesia Council on Religion and Pluralism – endorsed by the U.S. and Indonesian governments and comprising religious and civil society leaders, academics, and experts from both countries – facilitated public lectures, academic and religious exchanges, and discussion on religious freedom issues. The embassy and consulates carried the message of respect for diversity and religious tolerance to tens of millions of people in the country through outreach efforts, including events, media interviews, social media initiatives, digital and public speaking engagements, youth exchanges, and educational programs.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 260.6 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the 2010 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Muslim, 7 percent Protestant, 3 percent Roman Catholic, and 1.5 percent Hindu. Those identifying with other religious groups, including Buddhism, traditional indigenous religions, Confucianism, and other Christian denominations, and those who did not respond to the census question comprise approximately 1.3 percent of the population.

The Muslim population is overwhelmingly Sunni. An estimated one to three million Muslims are Shia. Many smaller Muslim groups exist; estimates put the total number of Ahmadi Muslims at 200,000 to 400,000.

An estimated 20 million people, primarily in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua, practice various traditional belief systems, often referred to collectively as *aliran kepercayaan*. There are approximately 400 different *aliran kepercayaan* communities throughout the archipelago. Many religious groups incorporate elements of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, making it difficult to disaggregate the exact number of followers.

There is a Sikh population estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000, primarily in Medan and Jakarta. There are very small Jewish communities in Jakarta, Manado, Jayapura, and elsewhere. The Bahai Faith and Falun Dafa (or Falun Gong) community report thousands of members, but independent estimates are not available. The number of atheists is also unknown, but the group Indonesian Atheists states it has more than 700 members.

The province of Bali is predominantly Hindu, and the provinces of Papua, West Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, and North Sulawesi are predominantly Christian.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees the right to practice the religion of one's choice and specifies that freedom of religion is a human right that may not be limited. The constitution states, “The nation is based upon belief in one supreme God,” but guarantees all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief. The law restricts citizens from exercising these rights in a way that impinges on the rights of others, oversteps common moral standards and religious values, or jeopardizes security or public order.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) extends official recognition to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The government maintains a longstanding practice of recognizing Sunni Islam as the official version of Islam of Indonesian Muslims, though the constitution has no such stipulation. The law prohibits deliberate public statements or activities that insult or defame any of the six official religious groups, or have the intent of preventing an individual from adhering to an official religion. The law also stipulates that in any case of defamation of the six officially recognized religions, the MOHA, the MRA, and the Attorney General's Office must first warn the individual in question before he or she can be charged. The law also forbids the dissemination of information designed to spread hatred or dissension among individuals and/or certain community groups based on ethnicity, religion, or race. Individuals may be prosecuted for blasphemous, atheistic, or heretical statements under either of these provisions or under the laws against defamation, and can face a maximum jail sentence of five years. The law on electronic information and transactions forbids the electronic dissemination of the same types of information, with violations carrying a maximum four-year sentence.

The government defines a religion as having a prophet, holy book, and deity, and being recognized internationally. The six officially recognized religions are deemed to have met these requirements. Organizations representing one of the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law are not required to obtain a legal charter if they are established under a notary act and obtain approval from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Religious organizations other than the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law must obtain a legal charter as a civil society organization from the MOHA. Both ministries consult with the MRA before granting legal status to religious organizations. By law, all religious groups must be registered in some form. Under the law, civil society organizations are required to uphold the national ideology of *Pancasila*, which encompasses the principles of belief in one God, justice, unity, democracy, and social justice, and they are prohibited from committing blasphemous acts or spreading religious hatred. Violations of the law could result in a loss of legal status, dissolution of the organization, and arrest of members under the blasphemy law or other applicable laws. Indigenous religious groups may also register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as *aliran kepercayaan*.

A joint ministerial decree bans both proselytizing by the Ahmadi Muslim community and vigilantism against the group. Violations of the Ahmadi proselytizing ban carry a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy. No Ahmadi has been charged with blasphemy, but Ahmadi sources say provincial and local regulations based on this decree place tighter restrictions on Ahmadis than on the six religions recognized in the blasphemy law.

The government requires all officially registered religious groups to comply with directives from the MRA and other ministerial directives on issues such as construction of houses of worship, foreign aid to domestic religious institutions, and propagation of religion.

According to a joint ministerial decree, religious groups may not hold services in private residences, and those seeking to build a house of worship are required to obtain the signatures of at least 90 members of the group and 60 persons of other religious groups in the community stating they support the construction. Local governments are in charge of implementing the decree, and local regulations, implementation, and enforcement vary widely. The decree also requires approval from the local interfaith council, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). Government-established FKUBs exist at the city or district level and comprise religious leaders from the six official groups. They are responsible for mediating interreligious conflicts.

The law requires religious instruction in public schools. Students have the right to request religious instruction in any one of the six official religions, but teachers are not always available to teach the requested religion classes. Individuals are not allowed to opt out of religious education requirements.

Under the terms of a 2005 peace agreement that ended a separatist conflict, Aceh Province has unique authority to implement sharia regulations. The law allows for provincial implementation and regulation of sharia, and extends the jurisdiction of religious courts to economic transactions and criminal cases. Sharia does not apply to

non-Muslims, foreigners, or Muslim Indonesians who are not permanent residents of Aceh. Aceh’s provincial sharia regulations criminalize homosexual activities, adultery, gambling, consumption of alcohol, and proximity to members of the opposite sex outside of marriage for Muslim residents of the province. An Aceh governor’s decree forbids women from working in or visiting restaurants unaccompanied by their spouse or a male relative after 9:00 p.m. A Banda Aceh mayoral decree forbids women from working in coffee shops, internet cafes, or sports venues after 10:00 p.m. Female Muslim residents of Aceh are prohibited from wearing tight pants in public and must wear headscarves. One district in Aceh prohibits women from sitting astride motorcycles when riding as passengers, but this reportedly is rarely enforced. The maximum penalties for violations of sharia regulations include imprisonment and public caning. There are also regulations limiting the amount of force that may be applied during a caning.

Many local governments outside of Aceh have enacted regulations based on religious considerations. Most of these are in majority Muslim areas, although local governments in non-Muslim majority areas also have enacted regulations based on religious considerations. Many of these regulations relate to matters such as religious education and only apply to a specific religious group. Some religiously inspired local regulations in effect, however, apply to all citizens. For instance, some local regulations require restaurants to close during Ramadan fasting hours, ban alcohol, or mandate the collection of *zakat* (Islamic alms). Other local regulations forbid or limit the religious activities of religious minorities, especially Shia and Ahmadi Muslims.

The marriage law does not explicitly forbid interfaith marriage, but it contains an article stipulating that a marriage must be performed according to the rituals of a religion that is shared by both the bride and groom. A man and woman of different religions who seek to marry may have difficulties finding a religious official willing to perform a wedding ceremony. Some couples of different religions select the same religion on their KTPs in order to marry legally.

The law allows a Muslim man to have up to four wives, provided he is able to support each equally. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, he must obtain court permission and the consent of the first wife. These conditions, however, are not always met in practice.

The marriage law makes polygamy illegal for civil servants, except in limited circumstances. Government regulations require Muslim male civil servants to receive permission from a government official and their first wives prior to marrying a second, third, or fourth wife, and prohibit female civil servants from becoming second, third, or fourth wives.

The law requires the leader of an *aliran kepercayaan* group to demonstrate group members live in at least three regencies, which are administrative designations one level below a province, before the leader is permitted to officiate legally at a wedding. This constraint effectively bars believers of some smaller groups without such

geographic presence from receiving official marriage services from a member of their faith, although groups can aid each other and facilitate marriages by a group with a similar faith tradition and rituals.

The Constitutional Court struck down on November 7 two articles that required citizens to choose on their KTPs either one of the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law, or leave the religion column blank.

A joint ministerial decree requires domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from the MRA to receive funding from overseas donors and forbids dissemination of religious literature and pamphlets to members of other religious groups as well as going door to door for the purposes of converting others.

Foreign religious workers must obtain religious worker visas, and foreign religious organizations must obtain permission from the MRA to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, or financial) to local religious groups.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Summary Paragraph: There were arrests, charges, and convictions for blasphemy and insulting religion, including the conviction and imprisonment of the former governor of Jakarta for blaspheming against Islam and three senior leaders of the banned Gafatar religious group for “contradicting and offending” the religious values of the majority of citizens. In Aceh there were public canings by local officials for sharia violations, including the first ever punishments for homosexual activities and the first case of Buddhists choosing to be punished under sharia rather than civil procedures. There were reports of government attempts of forced conversions of Ahmadi Muslims to Sunni Islam. There were instances in which local governments and police acceded to the demands of “intolerant groups,” such as the FPI, FUI, FJI, and MMI, to close houses of worship for permit violations, or otherwise restrict the rights of minority religious groups. For example, local authorities closed three house churches in Bogor, West Java, by using national regulations in a joint ministerial decree that forbid congregations from holding services in private residences. Komnas HAM reported the government at both the national and local levels at times failed to prevent or appropriately address intimidation and discrimination against individuals based on their religious beliefs. Reportedly, some people who left the religion portion of their identity card blank were denied public services.

The Setara Institute, a domestic nongovernmental organization (NGO) that conducts advocacy and research on religious and political freedom, again stated the central government made efforts to reaffirm constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, promote tolerance, and prevent religiously motivated violence. It also stated the central government did little to intervene at the local level or solve past religious conflicts through its mandate to enforce court rulings, override unconstitutional local regulations, or otherwise uphold the constitutional and legal protections afforded to

minority religious groups. Local governments selectively enforced blasphemy laws, permitting regulations, and other local regulations in ways that affected various religious groups.

According to religious groups and NGOs, government officials and police sometimes failed to prevent “intolerant groups” from infringing on others’ religious freedom and committing other acts of intimidation. Police did not always actively investigate and prosecute crimes by members of “intolerant sectarian groups.” During the year, police worked with human rights activists and NGOs to provide tolerance-training sessions to religious leaders and local police.

The Setara Institute reported 24 cases of government abuses of religious freedom between January and November, compared to 44 cases in the first eleven months of 2016. Abuses cited included the closures of, and protests against, houses of worship and statements by public officials that condoned violence towards minorities, especially towards Ahmadi Muslims.

On March 7, the East Jakarta District Court convicted and sentenced for blasphemy three senior leaders of the banned religious group, Gafatar. The court found that the leaders committed blasphemy because the group’s blending of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic doctrine “contradicts and offends Islamic values held by most Indonesian citizens.” The founder of the movement, Ahmad Moshaddeq, and its President Mahful Muis Tumanurung received five-year prison sentences, and the Vice President, Andri Cahya, received a three-year sentence. Authorities arrested them in May 2016, two months after the government officially banned Gafatar in reaction to local residents forcing thousands of Gafatar members from their homes and communal farms in West Kalimantan. Moshaddeq was previously convicted and imprisoned for blasphemy in 2008 because he declared himself a prophet from the now banned al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah group. The central government relocated most of former Gafatar members to Java, where they reported they still faced discrimination, including when seeking employment. Because they are not followers of one of the country’s six officially recognized religions, some former members had difficulty obtaining new KTPs. During their relocation, some former members also reported that officials forced them to undergo re-education programs or mandatory all-day “patriotic education,” which pressured them to identify with one of the six recognized religions.

On May 9, a panel of judges for the North Jakarta District Court found the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as “Ahok”), guilty of blasphemy against Islam and sentenced him to two years in jail. In September 2016, Ahok, the first Christian governor of Jakarta in more than 50 years, told a crowd that it was wrong to manipulate verses from the Quran for political gain. The FPI, the Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI), and other Muslim groups criticized the governor’s speech and filed a police complaint, resulting in an investigation. Ahok apologized but stated he did not commit blasphemy, saying that he did not intend to insult the Quran and that his comments were directed at his political opponents, not Islam. MUI officials actively participated as expert witnesses during Ahok’s five-month trial. The court’s lengthy ruling referenced these

testimonies and MUI’s October 2016 fatwa (religious opinion) stating Ahok’s remarks were blasphemous as factors leading the judges to conclude that Ahok was guilty of blasphemy.

On August 21, a court in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara Province, sentenced Siti Aisyah to 30 months in prison for spreading “deviant” Islamic teachings. The court found Aisyah, the owner of an independent Quranic school, guilty of violating the blasphemy law and the law on electronic information and transactions. Aisyah stated she began to study an Indonesian translation of the Quran in 2013 because it was difficult to study in Arabic. She said she came to believe the Quran was perfect in its own right, making the *hadiths* (the Prophet Muhammad’s deeds and sayings) and other tenets of mainstream Islam superfluous. In November 2016, she founded a school and began teaching her interpretation of Islam to local youth. In January a Facebook video of her activities was widely disseminated on the internet. West Nusa Tenggara Governor Zainul Majdi subsequently ordered the closure of the school and the local branch of the MUI issued an edict declaring her teaching blasphemous. The police arrested her.

On September 28, a military court sentenced a soldier serving in Papua, a Christian-majority province, to two-and-a-half years in prison for blasphemy after the soldier, possibly inadvertently, burned several copies of the Bible. In May the Bibles were reportedly burned, along with other items, as the soldier discarded boxes from a storage shed at a military installation near Papua’s provincial capital, Jayapura. The authorities also dismissed the soldier from his position in the military. Following the incident, which sparked a small but violent protest, Papua Military Commander Major General George Elnadus Supit publicly apologized for the soldier’s actions and asked community members to respect the legal process. Papuan Christian leaders immediately issued a statement to quell tensions, calling for restraint and respect for the law.

On September 25, a court sentenced Johanda (one name only) to life in prison for the November 2016 attack on a church in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, that killed a two-year-old girl and injured three other children. He was associated with the pro-ISIS group, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah. Four other codefendants received sentences between six to seven years. Johanda was previously convicted for his involvement in attempted bombings in West Java in 2011. In February 2012 he was sentenced to three-and-a-half years but received a remission and was released in 2014 for good behavior.

The proselytizing ban did not prohibit Ahmadi Muslims from worshipping or continuing to practice within their community, but “intolerant groups” invoked the ban to justify their intimidation of Ahmadi communities or to decline to issue KTPs to Ahmadi if they attempt to register as Muslims. On September 11, the Constitutional Court began a judicial review of the blasphemy law at the request of Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI), an advocacy organization, which argued the law was used to discriminate against Ahmadis. The judicial review continued at the end of the year.

Government and sharia officials stated non-Muslim residents of Aceh could choose to be punished under sharia law or civil court procedures, but Muslim residents of Aceh must be punished under sharia law, although some local authorities interpreted the law

to apply also to Muslims visitors to Aceh. On March 10, two Buddhists were caned in Aceh for cockfighting and gambling, marking the first time Buddhists chose to be punished under sharia rather than face civil procedures. Cockfighting and gambling are illegal under both sharia and provincial civil law. On May 23, two gay men, convicted of violating an article of Aceh’s sharia code banning homosexual acts, were each publicly caned 85 times. Both men were reportedly Muslims. This was the first instance in which individuals were convicted and punished for homosexuality under sharia in Aceh, although homosexuality was not illegal under national law. On September 8, sharia officials publicly caned an unmarried man and woman in Lhokseumawe, Aceh Province after a court convicted them of adultery for being found alone together in private. On September 11, sharia officials publicly caned two women and nine men in Banda Aceh. Six were convicted of adultery and five were convicted of gambling. According to the Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, authorities in Aceh caned 350 individuals in 2016.

The MRA maintained its authority at both the national and local level to conduct “development” of religious groups and believers, including efforts to convert minority religious groups to Sunni Islam. In several West Java regencies, local governments continued efforts to force or encourage conversion of Ahmadi Muslims with a requirement that Ahmadis sign forms renouncing their beliefs in order to register their marriages or participate in the Hajj. According to JAI, on July 14, approximately 1,500 Ahmadis in Kuningan, West Java, signed an agreement to renounce Ahmadi teachings in order to obtain KTPs from the local government. According to an Ahmadi spokesperson, the individuals who signed the agreement did not receive KTPs by the end of the year despite assurances from the local government that the issue would be resolved by August.

On February 23, local officials in Depok, West Java, shuttered the Al-Hidayah Mosque, marking the sixth time since 2011 that the Ahmadi mosque was closed by authorities. Ahmadis reported that local groups complained to Depok officials that the mosque, which received a house of worship permit in 2007 and served a community of approximately 400 members, was disturbing the public. On February 24, hundreds of people, including FPI members, protested in front of the mosque, calling for the disbandment of the Ahmadi congregation and the demolition of the mosque. Representatives from the Ahmadi community said the group coexisted peacefully with neighbors of all faiths, rejecting the accusation that they had disturbed public order. Spokespersons for the community complained they were not consulted prior to the closure and reported the incident to the president’s office and Komnas HAM on April 24. As of December, the local government continued to enforce the mosque’s closure, although Komnas HAM urged the local government to protect the Ahmadis.

On March 9, local officials forced three house churches of different denominations (Batak Protestant, Catholic, and Methodist) in Bogor, West Java, to end religious services after local MRA and MUI representatives, in consultation with police and neighborhood leaders, issued a “status quo agreement” forbidding the congregations from holding religious services in private residences. The agreement was based on a 2006 MRA-MOHA joint decree stipulating that private residences could not be used for religious services or as headquarters for religious congregations. The decision to halt religious services at the residential venues came after a crowd comprised of 11 Islamic

organizations gathered on March 5 to protest the approximately 800 congregants gathered at a housing complex for Sunday services. According to the congregations, police dispersed the crowd, but congregants were too intimidated to resume their activities. The congregations have struggled to secure houses of worship following the sub-district government's demolition in 2000, for alleged permit violations, of a shared complex constructed in 1997. The congregations have subsequently met in private residences.

More than 300 Shia from Madura remained displaced on the outskirts of Surabaya, East Java, after communal violence forced them from their homes in 2012. Approximately 200 Ahmadis remained internally displaced in cramped apartments in Mataram, the capital of West Nusa Tenggara, after a mob expelled them from their Lombok village in 2006.

Across the country, minority religious groups, including Muslim groups in non-Muslim majority areas, continued to state that the official requirement for a specific number of supporters to build or renovate a house of worship served as a barrier to construction, either because governments did not issue permits when the requisite numbers were obtained or because neighbors were pressured not to approve. In many local cases, a few vocal opponents from the local majority religious affiliation were reportedly sufficient to stop construction approvals. State-recognized religious leaders in government-supported interfaith forums reportedly found ways to block *aliran kepercayaan* believers from constructing places of worship, largely through stringent house of worship permit requirements. *Aliran kepercayaan* adherents said they were fearful of being accused of atheism were they to fight this treatment in court. Other religious minorities, such as Ahmadis, Shia Muslims, and Christians, faced problems even when seeking approval to move to temporary facilities while a primary place of worship underwent renovation.

Local governments, police, and religious organizations reportedly tried to close religious minority groups' houses of worship for permit violations, often after protests from “intolerant groups,” even if the minority groups had a proper permit. Many congregations could not obtain the requisite number of nonmember signatures supporting construction of a house of worship and often faced protest from “intolerant groups” during the application process, making permits nearly impossible to obtain. Even when permits were issued, some houses of worship were forced to close or halt construction after facing legal challenges and public protests. Protestant and Catholic churches also reported that “intolerant groups” forced them to pay protection money to continue operating without a permit. Some houses of worship that were established before the joint ministerial decree on house of worship construction came into effect reportedly were still obligated to meet the requirements or face closure. NGOs estimated, however, that as many as 85 percent of houses of worship, the majority of which are Sunni mosques, were operating without a permit. Many houses of worship operated without permits in office buildings, malls, private homes, and shops.

Legal uncertainty among local officials and police, anonymous threats of violence, insufficient police protection, and fear of publicity were barriers to reopening Ahmadi mosques that were previously shut down, including mosques in Sukabumi, West Java,

and Tulungagung, East Java that were closed in 2016, and a South Jakarta mosque closed in 2015. Ahmadis reported, however, that police and local government were taking positive actions to protect a mosque in Kendal, Central Java that was vandalized by unknown perpetrators in May 2016. The local government facilitated mediation between the Ahmadi community and its neighbors, and the Ahmadis agreed to halt reconstruction of the mosque pending a police investigation. Following the police investigation, the local village leader initiated a community effort to reconstruct the mosque, and police publicly stated they would protect the Ahmadis’ right to worship in the community.

Construction moved forward on the Santa Clara Catholic Church in Bekasi, West Java. The congregation had waited over 15 years for the approval of its construction permit until it was granted in 2015, and “intolerant groups” regularly targeted the construction site for protests. On March 24, police disrupted a crowd gathered at the construction site to protest the building of the Church. Following the protest, the Bekasi mayor assured the congregation that it would be able to finish construction by December, but construction was not complete at the end of the year.

An Indonesian Christian Church congregation in Bogor, West Java, continued negotiations related to its building permit after local authorities, responding to public pressure, closed its church in 2010. The national ombudsman previously tried unsuccessfully to convince Bogor Mayor Bima Arya to uphold a Supreme Court ruling in favor of the congregation in its dispute with the local government over the building permit. Arya attended the church’s 2016 Christmas service where he announced plans, which were still in negotiation, to allow the congregation to build a church in a complex with a mosque in order to facilitate interfaith harmony, a solution he formulated with the Presidential Chief of Staff’s Office. The congregation regularly held services outside the Presidential Palace in Jakarta, and it had not obtained a permanent complex by the end of the year.

Civil rights activists said locally implemented sharia-based regulations violated the constitution and called on the central government to exercise its constitutional jurisdiction to revoke or review these regulations. On April 5, the Constitutional Court ruled that MOHA did not have authority to revoke local regulations once in force, even if regulations are religiously inspired, such as bans on opening food stalls in the daytime during Ramadan. MOHA, however, retained review authority during the drafting process of local regulations. This ruling invalidated a 2014 law that reaffirmed MOHA’s authority to revoke local regulations concerning religious matters that violated the constitution or national law, although MOHA reportedly never exercised this authority.

Although the MUI’s fatwas lacked legal standing, government figures used them to make legal and policy decisions.

In April female Muslim leaders held a meeting titled, The Indonesian Women’s Ulama Congress, and produced fatwas recommending the criminalization of marital rape and raising the minimum age of marriage for females from 16 to 18. Minister of Religious Affairs Lukman Hakim Saifuddin pledged to present these recommendations to the government.

In January National Police Chief Tito Karnavian publicly reminded police officers that MUI fatwas did not constitute national law and that officers had the responsibility to enforce the constitution, not MUI edicts. On May 25, Karnavian issued a directive forbidding “intolerant groups” from conducting sweeps of food stalls open for business before sundown during Ramadan.

Aliran kepercayaan followers continued to say they were pressured to send their children to a religious education class of one of the six officially recognized religions. Minority religious groups not listed in the blasphemy law said schools often allowed their children to spend religious education time in study hall, but parents were required to sign documents stating their children received official religious education. Ahmadi Muslim students reported religion classes for Islam only focused on Sunni teachings.

Civil servants who openly professed an adherence to an indigenous belief system continued to say they had difficulty getting promoted.

Although the government generally allowed citizens to leave the religion column blank on their KTPs, individuals continued to report difficulties accessing government services and experiencing other forms of discrimination if they did so. NGOs reported that local officials occasionally did not issue KTPs to people who wanted to leave the religion column blank. The lack of a KTP led to issues ranging from an inability to register for health insurance to problems applying for mortgages. Faced with this problem, many religious minority members reportedly chose to identify as a member of a religion listed in the blasphemy law close to their beliefs or reflecting the locally dominant religion. According to researchers, this practice obscured the real number of adherents to any particular religious group in government statistics. The government continued to allow *aliran kepercayaan* believers to omit religious information on their identity cards, but when accessing basic social services, other government forms did not always permit leaving this section blank.

NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the government to remove the religion field from KTPs. Religious minorities reported they sometimes faced discrimination after others saw their religious affiliation on their KTPs. Members of the Jewish community said they felt uncomfortable stating their religion in public and often chose to state that they were Christians or Muslims depending on the dominant religion where they lived, out of concern that local communities did not understand their religion.

On May 8, MOHA and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights provided written support for including local *aliran kepercayaan* on the KTP religion column at a Constitutional Court judicial review. *Aliran kepercayaan* communities petitioned the Constitutional Court to consider the legality of including local *aliran kepercayaan* on KTPs. On November 7, the Constitutional Court subsequently struck down two articles that required citizens to either choose on their KTPs one of the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law or leave the religion column blank. Data from an NGO showed approximately 42,000 followers of several traditional faiths were denied basic civil registry documentations such as KTPs, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, and approximately 80,000 could not access public services. MOHA reported on November

17 that it received 138,791 requests from individuals who wanted to add *aliran kepercayaan* to their KTPs after the Constitutional Court’s ruling. MOHA stated that members of indigenous religions were entitled to the same access to basic services, regardless of what they did or did not declare as their religion on their KTP, and discrimination against them based on their KTP religion column was a violation of the law.

Minority Muslim groups, including Ahmadis and Shia, also continued to report resistance when they tried to apply for KTPs as Muslims, effectively denying them access to public services if they could not secure KTPs. Minority religious groups, including Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, continued to report discrimination in the administration of public services, such as procuring marriage licenses or receiving healthcare, if they chose to leave the religion column blank on their KTPs. Many local officials reportedly were unaware of the option to leave the religion section blank and refused to issue such KTPs.

Both the central and local governments included elected and appointed officials from minority groups. For example, the Governor of West Kalimantan and the Mayor of Solo were Catholic, and a leading Shia figure held a seat in the House of Representatives, elected from a majority Sunni district in Bandung, West Java. As of December President Widodo’s 34-member cabinet included five members of minority faiths.

Foreign religious workers from many religious groups continued to state they found it relatively easy to obtain visas. Despite laws restricting proselytizing, some foreign religious groups reported little government interference with preaching or religious conversions.

Police provided special protection to some churches in major cities during Sunday services and Christian holidays.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Although the MUI’s fatwas lacked legal standing, “intolerant groups,” including those that mobilized against former Jakarta Governor Ahok, used them to justify actions against religious minorities and other vulnerable groups. Individuals affiliated at the local level with the MUI used rhetoric religious minorities considered intolerant, including fatwas declaring Shia and Ahmadi as deviant sects. Shia and Ahmadi Muslims reported feeling under constant threat from “intolerant groups.” Anti-Shia rhetoric was common in some online media outlets and on social media.

“Intolerant groups” accused of using religion to justify criminal activity and vigilantism, continued to take actions against minority religious groups, including intimidation, extortion, vandalism, and protests that lead to the closure of houses of worship, such as the Ahmadi mosque in Depok, which closed in February. “Intolerant groups” reportedly accept bribes to advance corrupt political and business interests through their protests and actions.

Komnas HAM stated there was a decrease in cases of religiously inspired violence, with 11 cases occurring between January and March, compared to 20 cases occurring during the same period in 2016.

On February 11, an estimated 200,000 people attended a mass prayer at Jakarta's national mosque organized by members of the FPI and other groups who urged Muslims to vote for a Muslim candidate, and not Ahok, in the February 14 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Protests and mass prayers in November and December 2016, organized by the FPI and other groups calling for Ahok's arrest for blasphemy, drew crowds ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 people.

On July 29, a Jakarta-based NGO demanded the demolition of a 100-foot-high statue of Guan Yu, a Chinese general revered by some as a deity, at the Confucian Kwan Sing Bio temple in Tuban, East Java. The NGO objected to the statue's size because it is larger than a Jakarta statue of General Sudirman, a respected Indonesian military commander. Additionally, local media said the temple reportedly did not secure the proper permit for the statue from the local government. The topic spread rapidly on social media, with the statue portrayed as anti-Indonesian and disrespectful to Islam due to its location at the birthplace of one of the nine nationally revered Muslim saints, or Wali Sanga, credited with spreading Islam in Java and throughout the country. As of December there were no plans to demolish the statue, although it remained covered as temple leaders sought to limit further controversy.

Religious minorities in Bali continued to state that the close association of Balinese traditional culture with Balinese Hinduism created problems for Balinese who converted to Christianity, Islam, or another religion. Leaders of religious minorities reported Balinese women could maintain their family and social ties after converting to a new religion under laws articulating the rights of inheritance and custody, but these laws were ignored in practice. Balinese men who converted to a new religion faced social banishment and loss of inheritance rights.

Many individuals in the media, civil society, and the general population were vocal and active in protecting and promoting tolerance and pluralism. The largest and most influential religious groups and NGOs, including the two largest Islamic groups in the country – Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, with some 40 and 30 million members, respectively – officially endorsed and advocated for tolerance, pluralism, and the protection of minority groups. NU, for example, hosted a conference in November attended by the president and vice president, and produced recommendations for the president's administration on how to prevent the politicization of religion. Religious groups cooperated with each other and with other organizations on interfaith conferences and events, advocating for respect and tolerance, and speaking out against violence. Leaders of different religious groups regularly held interfaith meetings with the president to promote tolerance and pluralism. The International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development, Komnas HAM, and the Office of the President held a conference in December that focused on local administrations' roles in preventing intolerance and extremism. NGOs reported large numbers of Christian-to-Muslim and Muslim-to-Christian conversions, particularly in urban centers and the province of West Java, although many people who converted faced discrimination.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, and the Consulate in Medan regularly engaged with all levels of government on specific religious freedom issues, such as actions against religious minorities; closures of places of worship; convictions for blasphemy and defamation of religion; the undue influence of “intolerant groups” and the importance of the rule of law; the application of sharia to non-Muslims; religious registration requirements on KTPs; the importance of education and interfaith dialogue in promoting tolerance; the equal protection of all citizens regardless of their religion; and promotion of tolerance in international forums. During his April visit, the U.S. Vice President met senior government officials, including President Widodo, and called for the equal protection of all people regardless of religious affiliation. The Vice President also met with representatives of the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law to discuss the importance of promoting religious freedom, tolerance, pluralism, and protecting the rights of all.

The Ambassador visited Aceh Province in April and raised issues of religious freedom and tolerance with the governor-elect, the vice mayor, the head of provincial police, and the Wali Nanggroe, a cultural leader of Aceh.

Representatives of the embassy, consulate general, and consulate spoke publicly about the importance of religious tolerance and protecting minorities from acts of violence, including the Ambassador who spoke at Islamic boarding schools. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders, representatives of social organizations, and human rights advocates to discuss religious tolerance, condemn blasphemy laws, and promote respect for religion. Embassy and consulate officials also met with members of minority religious groups who were victims of religious intolerance, including Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, house church congregations, and Gafatar members.

The U.S.-Indonesia Council on Religion and Pluralism regularly convened a diverse group of experts, academics, and religious and civil society leaders to promote interfaith dialogue, pluralism, and tolerance. The council also facilitated public lectures and discussions on religious freedom issues. The United States-Indonesia Society, a nonprofit organization endorsed by the U.S. and Indonesian governments, collaborated with Indonesian and U.S. religious leaders to launch the nongovernmental council in 2016.

The embassy held numerous events at U.S. government-sponsored venues throughout the country that directly and indirectly supported religious freedom. For example, the embassy hosted a discussion with high school students on Religious Freedom Day in January and emphasized every individual has a role in promoting religious tolerance.

Embassy and consulate staff appeared on a number of nationally televised programs to discuss themes related to religious tolerance and diversity. Previous participants in U.S. government-funded student exchange programs appeared with embassy and consulate officials to provide accounts of their experiences in the United States including religious tolerance. Embassy and consulate personnel also led discussions and gave presentations at venues throughout the country, conveying the importance of diversity

and religious tolerance to thousands of high school, Islamic boarding school, and university students. Collectively, these outreach activities carried messages of religious tolerance and religious freedom to tens of millions of viewers.

During Ramadan, embassy and consulate staff held numerous events and outreach activities throughout the country that promoted religious tolerance. Embassy-hosted iftars advocated tolerance and pluralism through remarks and discussions that included a wide cross-section of society, such as political figures, civil society representatives, and students. The Consulate General in Surabaya hosted an event on Islam in the United States, led by an Ahmadi Muslim U.S. Foreign Service Officer, which included discussion about the rights of religious minority communities.

Embassy and consulate staff conducted extensive print, TV, and digital outreach, including a guest appearance by the Ambassador on the highest-rated national soap opera, in which he promoted religious tolerance and understanding; the Ambassador's and Consul General's Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr greeting videos; and other religious pluralism initiatives that reached millions of individuals throughout the country. The embassy continued to promote religious freedom, diversity, and pluralism on its social media platforms, including a regular English language-learning column titled “Miss Understanding.”

The embassy, consulate general, and consulate sponsored professional and academic exchanges and other civil society programs focused on religious pluralism and tolerance, including programs for rising leaders and scholars. Three such projects focused on Muslim life in the United States at local, state, and national levels; religious education and its relationship with various government and private institutions; and cooperation between faith-based organizations, civil society organizations, and government entities. Likewise, the Consulate General in Surabaya sponsored a program for leading professors at one of the largest Islamic universities to travel to the United States to study community-based social services, meet experts in their field, and experience religious diversity and tolerance in America.

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