

Indonesia: “Christianisation” and Intolerance

I. OVERVIEW

Religious tolerance in Indonesia has come under increasing strain in recent years, particularly where hardline Islamists and Christian evangelicals compete for the same ground. Islamists use “Christianisation” – a term that generally refers both to Christian efforts to convert Muslims and the alleged growing influence of Christianity in Muslim-majority Indonesia – as a justification for mass mobilisation and vigilante attacks. The tensions brought about by these clashing fundamentalisms are nowhere clearer than in Bekasi, a suburb of Jakarta, where a series of disputes since 2008 over church construction, alleged mass conversion efforts and affronts to Islam have led in some cases to violence. The Indonesian government needs a strategy to address growing religious intolerance, because without one, mob rule prevails. Local officials address each incident only when it gets out of hand and usually by capitulating to whoever makes the most noise. Every time this happens, the victors are emboldened to raise the stakes for the next confrontation.

Christian-Muslim tensions have increased in Indonesia for several reasons:

- ❑ Failure of the government to prevent or effectively prosecute incitement and intimidation against religious minorities.
- ❑ Growth of Islamic vigilante organisations and various like-minded coalitions that have become a public order menace.
- ❑ Aggressive evangelical Christian proselytising in Muslim strongholds.
- ❑ Effective devolution of power through decentralisation to local authorities, even on issues such as religious affairs which are supposed to be the preserve of the central government.
- ❑ Reluctance to prosecute “hate speech” partly out of confusion over acceptable limits on legitimate free expression.
- ❑ Lack of any serious effort to promote tolerance as a national value.

The incidents in Bekasi exemplify some of the dynamics involved. Islamist organisations like the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII) and Islamic Student Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Islam, GPI) have long been active there, both with a strongly anti-Christian streak. Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) has had a strong presence for the last decade, and recent years have seen the formation of a variety of anti-apostasy coalitions. Bekasi also has a well-entrenched salafī jihadi community, and Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), the organisation established by the radical cleric Abu Bakar Ba’asyir in 2008, held its inaugural ceremony at the dormitory for Mecca-bound pilgrims there.

On the Christian side, several evangelical organisations committed to converting Muslims have also set up shop in Bekasi, some funded internationally, others purely home-grown. Yayasan Mahanaim, one of the wealthiest and most active, is particularly loathed by the Islamist community because of its programs targeting the Muslim poor. Another, Yayasan Bethmidrash Talmiddin, run by a Muslim convert to Christianity, uses Arabic calligraphy on the cover of its booklets, suggesting they are Islamic in content, and requires every student at its school as a graduation requirement to convert five people.

While officials and legislators talk of the need for “religious harmony”, there is a sense that this can be legislated or even imposed, rather than requiring sustained time and effort to understand how tensions have grown and developing programs designed to reduce them. Inter-faith dialogues are not the answer; with a few exceptions, they are often little more than feel-good talk-fests that do not grapple with real problems.

Among the many reasons for developing a strategy to curb communal tensions, one deserves particular attention: the issue of “Christianisation” may be driving non-violent and violent extremists together. Until recently, the attachment of salafī jihadis – the violent extremists – to a more internationalist agenda led them to generally steer clear of local “anti-apostasy” activists. But the loss of other local drivers for recruitment, particularly the end of sectarian violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi, has made “Christianisation” more attractive as a rallying cry. In Palembang, South Sumatra in 2008, a fugitive Singaporean member of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) recruited members of an anti-

apostasy group called FAKTA by first persuading them that murder, rather than non-violent advocacy, was the only way to stop Christian proselytisation. And in September 2010, dozens of Acehnese on trial for taking part in a terrorist training camp cited as one of their motivations concern over "Christianisation" in Aceh.

Terrorist networks in Indonesia have grown substantially weaker and more divided over the last five years, but systematic exploitation of the fear that Christians are making inroads on Islam might bring them new followers, including from among the vigilantes that they have hitherto largely shunned.

II. "CHRISTIANISATION": THE REALITY

Concern over "Christianisation" has been part of Islamist rhetoric in Indonesia going back to the 1960s and exists independently of facts on the ground.¹ Hardliners like to cite a verse from the Quran, "Jews and Christians will not be happy with you unless you follow their religion", as proof that Judaism and Christianity are focused on conversion.² One leading Islamist in Bekasi suggests that it is not so much that Christianity has gained ground but that the growing strength of Islamist groups is finally enabling them to push back.³

In fact, evangelical Protestantism has seen significant growth in recent years. According to the 2000 census, Indonesian Christians officially constitute about 8.8 per cent of the population, of whom 5.8 per cent are Protestant and 3 per cent Catholic. Muslims are 88.2 per cent, Hindus (mostly on Bali) 1.8 per cent, and Buddhists, Confucians and others make up the rest. Many Protestant evangelicals believe the true percentage of Christians is closer to 12 to 15 per cent, and some put the figure even higher, although this is dismissed as wishful thinking by more objective sources.⁴ Some said that converts to Chris-

tianity are often afraid or unwilling to change the religious designation on their identity card, so they are counted as Muslims in the census.⁵ One pastor said the fastest growing segment of converts on Java was the thirteen to eighteen-year-old age group, young people travelling into the cities for work or school and becoming exposed to Christian proselytisation.⁶

The concern about "Christianisation" is such that the national council of Islamic scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) in 2006 set up a Committee to Handle the Danger of Apostasy (Komite Penganggulangan Bahaya Pemurtadan). The name was later changed to the Special Dakwah Committee (Komite Dakwah Khusus, KPK).

A. PROSELYTISATION IN WEST JAVA

Most agree that West Java is one of the fastest growing areas for evangelical Christianity, although no one is quite sure why. One official suggested that the many workers in the region's large industrial estates, uprooted from their traditional social networks, were attracted to groups that offer ready-made communities.⁷ An official at the Indonesian Communion of Churches, a Protestant umbrella organisation, said the big evangelical organisations were deliberately targeting West Java and Banten, the provinces that ring Jakarta, in the hope that a pincer movement of proselytisation would eventually gain them a bigger foothold in the capital.⁸ Others attributed the growth simply to the large amounts of funding available for Christian outreach activities in the wider metropolitan Jakarta area.

While much of the evangelical outreach is aimed at mainstream Christians, not Muslims, some of these organisations have specific projects aimed at conversion.

Uzbekistan. See www.secretbelievers.org.) It should be noted that the growth in Christian evangelicalism probably comes more from Christians switching denominations than from conversions.

¹ For related reporting, see Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°78, *Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree*, 7 July 2008; and N°92, *Indonesia: Radicalisation of the "Palembang Group"*, 20 May 2009.

² The quotation is from Sura al-Baqarah, verse 120.

³ "Murhali Barda Bendung Kristenisasi dengan Keluarga Samara", *Suara Hidayatullah*, 17 June 2010.

⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Jakarta, June 2009. An official at the Ministry of Religious Affairs put the figure at 12 per cent. A source from the Indonesian office of World Harvest, an international organisation based in the U.S., estimated a total of 20 per cent. A website about persecuted Christians gives a figure of 15 to 17 per cent. (Indonesia is one of eight countries where the site maintains a watchlist of harassment of Christian converts; the others are Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Pakistan, Somalia and

⁵ Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, July 2009. The number of people who hide their real religious affiliation may not be statistically significant however. The percentages in the national census data are generally supported by private survey firms.

⁶ Crisis Group interview, National Research Network Alliance (Persekutuan Jaringan Riset Nasional, PJRN), a Christian organisation, Jakarta, 6 August 2009.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, government official, Bekasi city government, 5 November 2010.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, Protestant church official, Jakarta, 10 October 2010. A leading anti-"Christianisation" campaigner, the FPI's Murhali Barda, has made similar statements, that Christians are starting in the suburbs but Jakarta is the real prize. See "Murhali Barda Bendung Kristenisasi Dengan Keluarga Samara", *Suara Hidayatullah*, 17 June 2010.

- The Joshua Project, which defines its mission as "bringing definition to an unfinished task", targets ethnic communities around the world "with the least followers of Christ" and thus presumably most in need of salvation. The Sundanese of West Java are regarded as one of these groups, with less than 2 per cent of the population evangelicals. The project's database of unreached peoples is designed for "mission strategists" anywhere so that they can target their efforts more effectively.⁹
- Lampstand (Beja Kabungahan), started by an American missionary in 1969, focuses on "evangelism and church planting among the Sundanese people of West Java".
- Partners International, based in Spokane, Washington, also targets "unreached populations" by having local partners initiate community development projects and eventually plant "culturally appropriate" churches.¹⁰ It supports Vision Indonesia 1:1:1, which aims to have missionaries plant one church in one village in one generation, working through the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Indonesia (ETSI) and some 30 branches around Indonesia. It is also supports the Sundanese Christian Fellowship of about a dozen groups around West Java.
- Frontiers, an Arizona-based organisation aimed at converting Muslims, has a small operation in West Java.
- The Orlando-based Campus Crusade for Christ has an active Indonesian branch known as Lembaga Pelayanan Mahasiswa Indonesia (LPMI). It caused a furore during a training session in December 2006 in Batu, Malang, East Java, when as part of a prayer meeting, a pastor placed a Quran on the floor and urged participants to gather round and expel the evil within it.¹¹ The pastor and most of the participants were arrested for blasphemy. LPMI is active in West Java.

Islamist groups consider some of the home-grown evangelical organisations even more of an abomination than the internationally-linked ones. A theological school in south Bekasi, Integrated Bible Training School (Sekolah Alkitab Terampil dan Terpadu), is run by Edhie Sapto, a Madurese convert who recruits in Muslim communities by using pamphlets with Arabic titles that look like Islamic tracts but which in fact are Bible teachings.¹² Each student in his school is required to convert ten others before graduating. FAKTA, the Islamic anti-apostasy organisation,

placed Edhie on a list of the most reviled converts in Indonesia; in 2006, one of his students became the target of attempted murder by a group in Palembang linked to the late terrorist leader, Noordin Top.¹³

In Bekasi, the focus of this briefing, municipal statistics show a steady growth of Protestants in relative terms.¹⁴ Part of the increase may be due to the steady in-migration of Protestant Bataks from Sumatra to look for work.

B. YAYASAN MAHANAIM

Conversion efforts aimed at Muslims, however, continue to cause controversy, none more so than Yayasan Mahanaim or the Mahanaim Foundation.¹⁵ It was founded as a social and educational organisation on 1 November 1999 by a pastor named Rachel Indriati Tjipto Purnomo Wenas, better known as Iin Tjipto, and is part of a network of Pentecostal organisations across Java run by a family of ethnic Chinese origin.¹⁶ It focuses on ministering to the poor, particularly street children, and has set up shelters in Makassar and Papua as well as Bekasi. It also runs an orphanage called House of Hope (Rumah Harapan), and a school that gives full scholarships to students from kindergarten through high school. According to one Yayasan

¹³ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Radicalisation of the "Palembang Group"*, op. cit.

¹⁴ In 2000, Bekasi city had a population of 1,668,494 of whom 89 per cent were Muslim, 6.5 per cent were Protestant and 3.2 per cent were Catholic. By 2009, the population had jumped to 2,145,447 of whom 87.3 per cent were Muslim, 8.05 per cent Protestant and 2.98 per cent Catholic. The 2000 figures are from the municipal bureau of statistics. The 2009 figures are from a book published by the municipal religious harmony forum, *Rumah Ibadat di Kota Bekasi*, published in late 2009. The statistics are from July of that year.

¹⁵ The name "Mahanaim" is the place mentioned in the Bible where King David of Israel defeated Absalom. The foundation's website is www.love-mahanaim.or.id.

¹⁶ The patriarch, Iin Tjipto's father, is a pastor, Yusak Tjipto Purnomo, born in 1935 in Jepara. In Bandung, where he now lives, he founded the Doa Ecclesia association. His son, Daniel Cipto, founded a group called Ark of Christ, aimed at preaching among young people. Daniel's younger sister, Nani Susanty, founded a branch of Doa Ecclesia in Cirebon and preaches over a radio station called Suara Gratia. In 2006, the station was attacked by FPI and various anti-apostasy organisations for sponsoring programs to convert Muslims to Christianity. In Semarang, another son of Yusak Tjipto, Petrus Agung Purnomo, founded a group called the Gospel Kingdom (Kerajaan Injil) and built the so-called Holy Stadium with a capacity of tens of thousands for mass revival meetings. Ethnicity is an issue here because Indonesia has been largely free of anti-Chinese violence since the 1998 riots that led to President Soeharto's resignation. The strong representation of ethnic Chinese in the evangelical movement in Indonesia could make them a target in communities with contesting Muslim and Christian fundamentalist movements.

⁹ See www.joshuaproject.net.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, August 2009, and www.partnerintl.org.

¹¹ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Izc2yoeE-hQ.

¹² The school is run by the foundation once known as Kaki Dian Emas and now as Yayasan Bethmidrash Talmiddin.

Mahanaim source, the school serves the poor because no one else takes care of them and therefore they are open to accepting Jesus Christ.¹⁷

In 2007, the foundation claimed to have 15,000 members and reportedly had amassed assets of about Rp.125 billion (\$12.5 million), with average monthly operating expenses of about Rp.1 billion (\$100,000).¹⁸ Its wealth comes from tithing of affluent members; a business division that runs everything from bookstores to air conditioning service and repair; and property. One foundation official was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2006 for his role in a million-dollar embezzlement scheme involving a military housing complex.¹⁹

Friction with Islamic organisations in Bekasi started when Yayasan Mahanaim began holding events before Christmas and Easter such as fairs and food give-aways to the poor that were linked to revival meetings (*kebaktian kebangunan rohani*, KKR). One event took place on 1 December 2007 in the open space around PT Taman Puri Indah, Pekayon, with music, dancing and fireworks. Most of the visitors were Muslim, and Islamic organisations accused Yayasan Mahanaim of trying to trick unsuspecting locals into becoming Christians by this kind of entertainment.

Even more controversial was a festival organised by Yayasan Mahanaim with all the necessary municipal permits in late 2008 called "Bekasi Shares in Happiness" (Bekasi Berbagi Bahagia or B3). Scheduled to run for two weeks, it began on 23 November and featured events in more than 100 different places around the district, offering prizes such as televisions and mobile phones to contestants in various kinds of competitions, with a grand prize per subdistrict of a new car. Yayasan Mahanaim also sponsored a mass wedding during the festival for 153 mostly Muslim couples who could not afford one on their own.

Even before the festival got underway, conservative Muslim organisations, led by a coalition calling itself the Bekasi Anti-Apostasy Front (Front Anti Pemurtadan Bekasi, FAPB), accused Yayasan Mahanaim of luring the poor into apostasy, alleging a public program organised by the foundation on 17 May 2008 concluded with distribution

of Bibles.²⁰ They demanded that the festival be stopped, urged the mayor to be more careful when granting permits and exhorted the Muslim faithful to beware of all conversion efforts. "If we don't receive a meaningful response within a week", the letter concluded, "we will mobilise the masses".²¹

Separately, activists from FAPB, FPI, Forum Umat Islam (FUI) and others began tearing down posters across the city advertising the event.

The protests escalated as soon as the festival began, with FAPB organising a "long march" from the Islamic Centre to the mayor's office to demand Yayasan Mahanaim and its activities be shut down. They said the mass wedding was preceded by a ceremony led by a pastor that involved "hymn-singing and baptism-like activities" and urged that all couples get remarried at the Bekasi Islamic Centre because their Yayasan Mahanaim-sponsored weddings were tainted under Islamic law.²² As proof of Yayasan Mahanaim's misuse of the permit it got from the mayor, FAPB cited one B3 event in the Kota Baru division of West Bekasi subdistrict. In front of the division office, a stage was set up and *dangdut*, a much-loved form of pop music, began playing over loudspeakers. The local B3 committee urged the crowd to sway with the music. Then,

One by one the audience was invited up to a children's swimming pool filled with water. Each person was directed into the pool where his or her face was repeatedly splashed with water. When it was over, the person was given food and drink. Anyone who did this received an envelope from the committee.²³

FAPB documented their claims with photographs and brought them to the municipal government. Faced with mounting protests, the Bekasi city administration cancelled the remaining activities.²⁴

¹⁷ Crisis Group discussion, Pentecostal activist, Jakarta, 8 October 2010.

¹⁸ Internet chat from Imelda Abigail, head of Yayasan Mahanaim's entrepreneurship program, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/terangduniainmail/message/42179>. Crisis Group tried repeatedly to interview Yayasan Mahanaim personnel, requesting meetings by telephone and by email, but no one was willing to meet.

¹⁹ "Setelah Duit Tentara Melayang", *Tempo*, 13 March 2006.

²⁰ "Pernyataan Sikap Front Anti Pemurtadan Bekasi ttg B3", letter signed on 21 November 2008. Posted on <http://fapbekasi.multiply.com/journal/item/1>, 25 November 2008.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Acara Bekasi Berbagi Bahagia, Pemurtadan Terselubung", *Republika*, 6 December 2008.

²³ "Bukti-Bukti Penyalahgunaan Terhadap Surat Rekomendasi Walikota Bekasi", http://fapbekasi.multiply.com/journal/item/2/BUKTI-BUKTI_PEMURTADAN_-_B3, 25 November 2008. The implication is that there was cash in the envelope.

²⁴ The mayor, who signed the original permit, and his deputy were both on the hajj, so it was the municipal secretary who withdrew the permit in face of the protests.

Yayasan Mahanaim activists denied they were engaged in conversion, and a senior Bekasi official said nothing presented by the Islamists constituted proof.²⁵ One high school student wrote:

We use our school and the foundation to hold revival meetings, sometimes with 5,000 people or more. Most of the people who come are Muslims since they're the majority here. Many miracles take place – the sick are cured, the blind can see, all because of our Lord. We continued these programs and many were happy to take part. But then FPI began to get wind of our activities. They didn't try to look for facts, they just started demonstrating saying "Stop Christianisation!" I didn't think too much about it, but then it turned out they were really going after us – when we were only doing God's work. Then we talked with some of the people who had taken part in the program, not one of them said they wanted to become Christian or rejected Islam or any such thing. Instead they said things like "Alhamdulillah, God is truly good, my injuries are cured!" or "Do this again soon" when we distributed cheap food and cooking oil. All the responses were positive.²⁶

The B3 program, however, triggered a renewed determination among Islamist groups to fight "Christianisation", and friction between evangelists and Islamists in Bekasi moved to a new level.²⁷

C. THE FPI AND OTHERS FIGHT BACK

One man who emerged from the protests against the B3 program as an Islamist star and self-styled "dam against Christianisation" was KH Murhali Barda of FPI.²⁸ The so-called "Lion of Bekasi", Murhali is a charismatic 37-year-old ethnic Betawi who sports sunglasses and a Palestinian scarf (*keffiyah*), relishes the limelight and claims to have been fighting "Christianisation" for the last five years.²⁹ He is a graduate of Pondok Modern Gontor, the famous school in East Java that counts among its alumni some of Indonesia's best-known Muslim leaders from

across the political spectrum.³⁰ He was involved in a brawl that drew national attention in June 2008 near Jakarta's national monument (Monas) when a militia involving FPI men attacked demonstrators calling for freedom of religion, including for the Ahmadiyah sect.³¹ He was taken to the police station at the time but quickly released without charge.

FPI, a national organisation that preposterously claims fifteen million sympathisers, seems to be enjoying a resurgence after several years of decline.³² Established with the support of top army and police officers in 1998, FPI was initially seen as a conservative counterweight to the students whose protests had led to the fall of Soeharto.³³ Its leaders promote strict adherence to Islamic law but they are not salafi in any doctrinal sense nor do they seek an Islamic state. The majority of its members are vigilante thugs (*preman*) with little or no religious training, who see Islamic gangs in post-Soeharto Indonesia as where the action is.

As one *preman* convert to the Islamic Defenders' Front candidly explained, "now, in the *reformasi* era, nationalism, 'defending the state' (*bela bangsa*) and all that shit don't cut it anymore. It's the groups that are about jihad and fighting vice (*maksiat*) that are the way to go".³⁴

The thugs, who constitute FPI's militia, are led by a group of more educated and religiously trained activists like Murhali who set policy and procedures, lead religious discussions and determine the group's targets. FPI's central board has an investigation committee which identifies specific locations, usually places of "vice" or unauthor-

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, 15 November 2010.

²⁶ See Facebook page "Berbagai Pengalaman Terhadap tidakan FPI", <http://bs-ba.facebook.com/topic.php?uid+29594608648&topic=16435>.

²⁷ Murhali Barda cites B3 as a turning point in the struggle against "Christianisation" in an interview, "Akan Perjuangan kepada Buah Hati", *Suara Hidayatullah*, November 2010.

²⁸ KH is an abbreviation for Kyai Haji, denoting an Islamic leader who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

²⁹ See interview with Murhali Barda, "Untuk Umat Islam Saya Rela Dipenjara", *Suara Hidayatullah*, November 2010, p. 36. He says he was inspired by the founder of FAKTA, Abu Deedat Syihabuddin.

³⁰ Among Gontor's graduates are the late Nurcholish Majid, one of Indonesia's most respected Muslim intellectuals; Abu Bakar Ba'asyir of Jemaah Islamiyah, MMI and JAT; Hidayat Nurwahid, the leader of the Prosperous Justice Party; and head of the Muhammadiyah organisation, Din Syamsuddin.

³¹ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree*, op. cit.

³² Its leader, Habib Rizieq was arrested in June 2008 and sentenced to eighteen months in prison for the June 2008 attack on the freedom of religion march. The attack caused such public anger that there were calls for FPI's dissolution. One report said the organisation was degenerating into thugs for hire and the central leadership had lost control of its regional offices. See "Islam Defenders mutating into splinter cells for hire", *Jakarta Post*, 16 July 2010. The figure of fifteen million comes from "Pro dan Kontra Aksi Front Pembela Islam (FPI)", Sorot 90, Vivanews, <http://sorot.vivanews.com/news/read/161959-infografik>, 2 July 2010. Since there is no real membership procedure, it is impossible to estimate the number of its followers.

³³ Ian Douglas Wilson, "As Long as It's Halal": Islamic Preman in Jakarta", in Greg Fealy and Sally White (eds.), *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore, 2008), pp. 192-210.

³⁴ Ibid.

ised churches, on the basis of reports from the community. It then files a complaint with the police and takes action if – or more frequently when – the police fail to respond.

While the police rarely act on the FPI's complaints, it does give the police the opportunity to give forewarning to businesses on the FPI hit list, which can pay for police protection, strengthen their own security or make the FPI an offer.³⁵

FPI's popularity in Bekasi may be due both to Murhali Barda's role and the tensions that facilitate mobilisation for action against churches. On 15 February 2010, Murhali led a group of vigilantes from sixteen Islamic organisations to stop construction in the Villa Galaxy complex in South Bekasi of the Galilea Church – which had already secured a building permit from the municipal government, although one required recommendation was missing.³⁶ Murhali accused the church of distributing food and cooking oil to the poor, like Yayasan Mahanaim, to entice them to convert.³⁷ The vigilantes, from Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, MMI) and many others, forced construction to stop.³⁸ To this day it has not resumed, although officials say as soon as the last recommendation comes through, it can go ahead. Murhali is currently in police custody awaiting trial on suspicion of inciting an attack in mid-September 2010 on members of a Protestant congregation – but only because the attack led to the stabbing of a church elder and caused a national outcry.³⁹

In Bekasi, as in the metropolitan Jakarta area more broadly, FPI works closely with Forum Umat Islam (FUI), an Islamist coalition set up in August 2005 and dedicated to fighting pluralism.⁴⁰ FPI thugs act as the security detail for FUI protests and demonstrations. As these groups stepped up anti-"Christianisation" activities in Bekasi, they also supported the establishment of a new coalition,

the FAPB, which counts Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's JAT as a member.⁴¹

III. THE "HUMAN CROSS" AND OTHER CONTROVERSIES

On National Education Day, 2 May 2010, an anti-drug march took place in Bekasi, supposedly sponsored by the Bekasi Narcotics Board but, as it turned out, without its sanction. As the marchers passed the al-Barkah Mosque, a group wearing shirts with the Star of David embroidered in yellow on the back broke off and formed a human cross in front of the mosque.⁴² They unfurled a flag with a lion, a flaming sword, and seven names of God – Adonai, El Shaddai, Jehova Rapha, Jehovah Nissi, Jehovah Shalom, Jehovah Shamah and The Master of Breakthrough – and distributed stickers that said "Yoel generation". They then placed a Christian crown and staff in front of the mosque.

No one is sure what organisation, if any, the marchers were representing, but the stickers were revealing. Evangelicals use the term "Joel generation" to refer to the biblical prophecies of Joel about the army of believers that will defeat the Antichrist when the Lord returns to earth, and it is a popular name for evangelical youth rallies in the U.S.⁴³ In Bekasi, the term is common among Yayasan Mahanaim activists; one in Cirebon, West Java runs a blog called Generasi Yoel (www.generasiyoel.blogspot.com) to which Pastor Iin Tjipto is a frequent contributor.

One Yayasan Mahanaim activist also acknowledged taking part in the action. "We just had another program and again this is called 'Christianisation'", he wrote in a blog. "The purpose of the [cross] formation was to cleanse the area, to ensure that evil spirits did not attack those who were praying [inside the mosque]".⁴⁴

³⁵ Ibid, p. 192.

³⁶ A senior Bekasi official said the permit was issued even though the dossier for the permit was missing a required letter from the municipal Religious Affairs office. At the time this was not seen as an obstacle. Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, 15 November 2010.

³⁷ "16 Ormas Islam Bekasi Menyegele Gereja Galilea", Antara News, 15 February 2010.

³⁸ Ibid. The other organisations involved were Masyarakat Muara Gembong, Bina An Nisa Dewan Da'wah Bekasi, Irene Centre, Forum Silaturahmi Masjid dan Mushala Galaxi, FPI, Forum Remaja Islam Medan Satria, FKUB, Persatuan Islam (PERSIS), Komite Penegak Syariah (KPS), Muhammadiyah, Gerakan Pemuda Islam (GPI), Masyarakat Peduli Syariah (MPS), and Gabungan Remaja Islam (GARIS).

³⁹ For details, see Section IV below.

⁴⁰ For more on FUI, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ Ba'asyir, the former amir of JI, founded JAT in 2008. See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°107, *Indonesia: The Dark Side of Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT)*, 6 July 2010.

⁴² Several Pentecostal groups use the Star of David, in recognition of their belief that the Second Coming will lead to the restoration of Israel and the tabernacle of David.

⁴³ There is a Generation of Joel facebook page in Indonesian in which participants refer to each other as "GOJers": Persekutuan Doa Pemuda Interdenominasi The Generation Of Joel (GOJ). According to a website of an evangelical church in Texas, "The mission of the Joel Generation Conference is to continue our quest for a revolution in our generation. To ignite a burning heart of passion for Jesus and the lost. And to take back what the enemy stole", www.easternheightschurch.org/joelgenabout.htm/.

⁴⁴ See Facebook page "Berbagai Pengalaman Terhadap tindakan FPI", op. cit.

A. THE ISLAMIST REACTION

Not surprisingly, the Islamist community was outraged at what it saw as an act of blasphemy and provocation. FAPB called two religious rallies (*tabligh akbar*), the first on 8 May in South Bekasi, led by hardliner KH Athian Ali, head of the Forum Ulama Ummat Indonesia (FUUI), the second on 9 May at the al-Barkah Mosque, led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and noted preacher Abdul Qadir Djaelani.⁴⁵ The rally brought together conservatives in the Bekasi area across ideological lines, violent and non-violent, salafi and non-salafi. It included representatives from the ulama council; Muslim delegates to the city government's Forum for Religious Harmony (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, FKUB); Islamic non-governmental organisations and mosque leaders. The main topic was the mosque incident, in the context of "Christianisation" more generally; Ba'asyir noted that according to Islamic law, those who insult Islam should be beheaded.⁴⁶

At its conclusion, the FPI's Murhali Barda read an eight-point statement "in the name of residents and Muslims of greater Bekasi", stating that the 40 signatories:

- ❑ Reject the construction of churches that do not fulfil a genuine need, do not follow existing regulations, are not honest or open.
- ❑ Oppose all efforts at "Christianisation" aimed at the Muslim community.
- ❑ Demand that the offence to Islam be avenged.
- ❑ Demand that the city of Bekasi, the police and others act firmly in accordance with the law and impose heavy punishment on those who hurt religious harmony.
- ❑ Agree to take measures on their own in accordance with Islamic law if the authorities fail to act.

⁴⁵ Athian Ali, a respected conservative cleric from Bandung, is probably best-known for issuing a death sentence fatwa against the founder of the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal, JIL), Ulil Abshar Abdalla, in 2002. In 2007, he helped broker a meeting between Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and salafi preacher Ja'far Umar Thalib to try, without success, to end the rift between the two men. Abdul Qadir Djaelani was a leading political activist in the 1980s, was arrested after the 1984 riot in Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, tried and sentenced to eighteen years, and released, after various sentence reductions, in 1993. He served in parliament from 1999 to 2004 as a member of the Islamist Crescent Star Party (Partai Bulan Bintang, PBB).

⁴⁶ "Umat Islam Bekasi Bersatu Hadapi Kristen Radikal", Voice of al-Islam, 15 May 2010, www.voa-islam.com/news/indonesia/2010/05/15/6058/deklarasi-umat-islam-bekasi-tuntut-qishas-bagi-penghina-nabi-muhammad/.

- ❑ Agree to unite, cooperate closely and work out a comprehensive strategy for mutual protection in confronting any threat from another community to upholding the truth of Islam.

A discussion about the issue was aired on 13 May on Radio Dakta 107 FM, an Islamist station close to DDII, and on 14 May, following a mass demonstration of Islamic organisations, a copy of the "Bekasi Declaration" was formally presented to the city government. The alleged organiser of the "human cross" action, Wong Christopher Cahyadi, was declared a blasphemy suspect a few days later, but he was eventually released without charge for lack of evidence.

The tension between the evangelicals and the Islamists in Bekasi did not end there. On 23 June 2010, Yayasan Mahanaim allegedly attempted to carry out what Muslim activists called a baptism by stealth of at least 350 Muslims at an elite housing complex, Perumahan Kemang Pratama Regency. According to an anti-Yayasan Mahanaim website, fourteen minibuses pulled up to the home of Hendry Leonardi Sutanto, one of Yayasan Mahanaim's directors. A few women living nearby, curious about what was happening, asked the complex's security guards who reported that it was a mass baptism. The neighbours informed the local mosque, and a group came shortly afterward to break up the gathering, with a cameraman to videotape the event. The participants, many of them women with headscarves who had been bused in from central Jakarta, seemed confused at what they were attending.⁴⁷ Some said they were there for recreation; the organiser, Andreas Dusly Sanau, a young Yayasan Mahanaim activist from Jakarta, said he was providing instruction in English and mathematics.⁴⁸ The mosque leaders called the police, who escorted Andreas and Hendry to the police station.⁴⁹

The most detailed coverage of Yayasan Mahanaim's activities, from a group disposed to suspect them, is on the website Voice of al-Islam (www.voa-islam.com). The site itself has an interesting history. It was founded by a KOMPAK man, Salman alias Apud, who was detained in Malaysia under its Internal Security Act in 2003 as he was returning from training in Mindanao with another Indonesian, Ahmad Sayid Maulana, a Darul Islam member.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Ratusan Warga Muslim Dibaptis Massal, Yayasan Mahanaim Bekasi Berulah Lagi", <http://answering.wordpress.com/2010/06/25/ratusan-warga-muslim-dibaptis-massal-kristen-mahanaim-bekasi-berulah-lagi/>, 25 June 2010.

⁴⁸ "Mahanaim Bekasi adalah penipu ulang", <http://mahanaimbekasi.blogspot.com/2010/07/mahanaim-bekasi-adalah-penipu-ulung.html>, 25 June 2010.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ KOMPAK, an acronym for Komite Aksi Penanggulangan Akibat Krisis (Action Committee for Crisis Response), was originally a charity set up under DDII auspices in 1998 to assist victims of conflict and natural disasters. After the conflict in

Both were released and returned to Indonesia. Maulana returned almost immediately to jihadi activity; he was killed in a police raid in May 2010 in Cawang, Jakarta. Apud took a different path and set up the website, an online news portal aimed at Southeast Asian Muslims. As the Bekasi events unfolded, he was in a unique position to provide detailed reporting and commentary, as he lives a few houses away from the al-Barkah Mosque and his father is a leading cleric of DDII there.⁵¹ VOA-Islam and Radio Dakta have become key media nodes for the Islamist movement in Bekasi as well as facilitators of the tactical alliance between violent and non-violent extremists.

They have several equivalents on the evangelical side. One was Radio Gratia, run by the Cirebon branch of the family behind Yayasan Mahanaim, but it was forced to close after protests by the Islamists, especially Forum Ukhuwah Islamiyah (a different FUI), which argued that it should not have a general broadcasting license because its message could lead Muslims astray.⁵²

B. THE OFFENSIVE BLOGS

The fury over the "human cross" incident may have been exacerbated by a series of unrelated but highly offensive blog posts involving Bekasi high school students that appeared in April and quickly became the talk of radical Muslim websites. In one of the most egregious, a 21 April posting titled "Wipe Out Islam in Indonesia" was accompanied by a photograph showing the Quran in a toilet and using coarse epithets to define each letter of the word "al-koran". Another posting showed someone stepping on a Quran and using an obscene hand gesture. The blog appeared in the name of the Santo Bellarminus Teaching Foundation, as if to link it to the respected Santo Bellarmi-

Ambon erupted in January 1999, the KOMPAK office in Solo, Central Java, formed and funded a militia called Mujahidin KOMPAK. Together with two factions of Darul Islam, it developed its own links to Mindanao for training, separate from JI. Former militia members with combat experience in Ambon and Poso constitute the loose association known now as KOMPAK. Ahmad Sayid Maulana helped set up a terrorist training camp in Aceh in 2009. After it was discovered in February 2010, he fled to Jakarta where he was tracked down and killed. For more on Maulana, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°92, *Recycled Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing*, 22 February 2005; and N°189, *Jihadi Surprise in Aceh*, 20 April 2010.

⁵¹ Private communication to Crisis Group, 10 October 2010.

⁵² See for example "Demo Siaran Radio Gratia", www.salib.net, 3 May 2006. A very strong argument in favor of keeping Radio Gratia and other religious stations open is made in "Negara Mesti Jamin Segala Bentuk Penyiaran Radio", fahmina.or.id, 11 April 2008. The author argues that rather than succumbing to pressure, the state should take the lead in defending freedom of religion and expression.

nus Catholic School in Pondok Gede, Bekasi. On 4 May, the local ulama council went to the Bekasi police and demanded action; the next evening, 5 May, the school was attacked by a small group of thugs who vandalised a few rooms; no one was arrested.

The photograph of the Quran being stepped on turned out to be the work of a sixteen-year-old student at Bekasi State High School No.5, Abraham Felix Grady, a Protestant. On 11 February he had taken the photograph with his friend's mobile phone for fun and reportedly had no idea of how much anger it would cause.⁵³ He sent the photograph to a friend's phone and from the latter it reached the blogs.

Abraham, who denied posting anything on the internet and begged forgiveness from the people of Bekasi, was arrested on 12 May for blasphemy under Article 156a of the Criminal Code and Article 27(3) of a 2008 law regulating transmittal of electronic information. He was expelled from school after his arrest and no other school would take him. It remains unclear who took the photograph of the Quran in the toilet and who posted the photographs on the blogs.

The prosecutor requested that Abraham be sent to prison for a year because he offended Muslim feelings. On the exculpatory side, he noted that the boy was honest and polite throughout the trial; that he was still a minor; that he had no motive for his actions aside from having fun; that he was already expelled from school; that he deeply regretted his action; and that he was very open to guidance. The judges accepted the prosecutor's request and on 2 September sentenced Abraham to a year in prison, with two years' probation.⁵⁴ On 8 October, Abraham's parents appealed the sentence, which under the circumstances seems harsh.

The prank of an unthinking schoolboy suggests, however, that anti-Muslim feelings may be inculcated at an early age and run as high in some Christian communities as anti-Christian sentiment does in some Muslim ones.

C. THE SCULPTURE SAGA

Another issue arose in May 2010 that engaged and enraged the Islamist community. In 2007, a seventeen metre-tall statue by well-known Balinese sculptor Nyoman Nuarta was erected in front of the elite Kota Harapan Indah housing complex in Bekasi, near the border with East Jakarta, at a cost of Rp.2.5 billion (about \$260,000). Called "Tiga

⁵³ "Mantan Siswa RSBI Itu Menyesal", *Radar Bekasi*, 18 May 2010.

⁵⁴ Kejaksaan Negeri Bekasi, Tuntutan Pidana Reg.Perk.Nomor: PDM-777/II/BKASI/07/2010.

Mojang" or "Three Beauties", it depicted three Sundanese women wearing traditional dress. Sundanese are the dominant ethnic group in West Java, overwhelmingly Muslim, but there was never any hint of religious content in this or any of the sculptor's other work, which often uses cultural themes.⁵⁵

For three years few complained. But beginning in mid-2010 the same groups active in the Yayasan Mahanaim protests, particularly FUI, FPI and FAPB, began to demand the statue's removal on a variety of grounds: initially that the bare-armed women were obscene and then, as the "Christianisation" phobia increased, that the monument was a representation of the Virgin Mary and that the three women symbolised the Trinity.⁵⁶ The deputy head of FUI, a convert to Islam, said he used to be a missionary and he knew exactly what the sculpture's proponents were up to.⁵⁷ Another argument was that the sculpture had been erected on a site important to Islam, in that it was where the Hizbullah militia had fought the Dutch during the Indonesian revolution under an esteemed local religious leader, Noer Alie, and many martyrs had fallen there.⁵⁸

The same 14 May mass demonstration against "Christianisation", organised largely by FPI and FKAB, involved a march from the mayor's office to the "Tiga Mojang" statue. Watched by police, protestors spray-painted the base, climbed the statue and tried to symbolically strap it up with cloth.⁵⁹ On 17 May, five men representing the local ulama council, DDII, FPI and FUI met Bekasi Mayor Mochtar Mohamed in his office with a list of demands, including the removal of the sculpture on the grounds that it lacked a building permit, which was true.⁶⁰

During the "human cross" incident, the mayor, a moderate Muslim elected with the support of Megawati Sukarnoputri's Democratic Struggle Party (Partai Demokrat Indone-

sia Perjuangan, PDIP), was suspected by hardline Muslim leaders of favouring Christians. Under relentless pressure, some felt that he had to make a concession over the statue or face escalating tensions.⁶¹

After meeting the protestors, without prior discussion with the sculptor, the housing complex, or the company that ran it, PT. Dutabumi Adipratama, the mayor ordered the latter to take down the sculpture within a week.⁶² After a week went by without any action, the mayor issued an ultimatum to the company. At 3:30am on 19 June, the gigantic bronze and copper sculpture was dismantled and taken in pieces to Yogyakarta, where it was to be re-erected in front of a luxury hotel.

The victory of the Islamists in this case had immediate ramifications elsewhere. In Singakawang, West Kalimantan, where FPI and other groups have demanded the removal of a golden dragon statue in the middle of the town, calling it offensive to Islam, the efforts of the Bekasi Islamists sparked new calls to dismantle the dragon.

IV. THE HKBP CLASHES

Fear of "Christianisation" also prompted a series of increasingly violent efforts on the part of the Islamists to prevent church construction. In Bekasi, the focus was on the Batak Protestant Parish (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan, HKBP), the largest Protestant denomination in Indonesia – which has an ethnic-based membership, is not an evangelical church and does not seek Muslim converts. Bekasi has a huge immigrant population from elsewhere in Indonesia, with Bataks one of the dominant groups, and some argued that Batak tensions with local ethnic Betawi communities was as much socioeconomic and cultural as it was religious.⁶³ Nevertheless, HKBP's efforts to build churches for its members in the midst of

⁵⁵ Commentary in a local Bekasi newspaper suggested that Bekasi was probably not the right place for the statue, since it was culturally Betawi (a hybrid of Arab, Chinese and Malay), not Sundanese. See "Bekasi, Kota Tak Bermuka", *Radar Bekasi*, 21 May 2010.

⁵⁶ "Tiga Mojang 'Dimutilasi'", *Radar Bekasi*, 29 July 2010.

⁵⁷ "Patung 3 Mojang Simbol Kristenisasi", *Berita Populer*, 19 May 2010, <http://beritapopuler.com/patung-3-mojang-simbol-kristenisasi.html>.

⁵⁸ "Hormati Syuhada: Tugu 'Seronok' Tiga Mojang Diganti Monumen Bambu Runcing", *Voice of al-Islam*, 23 June 2010, www.voa-islam.com/news/indonesia/2010/06/23/7366/hormati-syuhada-tugu-seronok-tiga-mojang-diganti-monumen-bambu-runcing/.

⁵⁹ "Patung Tiga Mojang HI Disegel", *Radar Bekasi*, 15 May 2010.

⁶⁰ So many influential individuals, including some senior police officers, were linked to the company that erected the statue that a permit was apparently considered unnecessary. Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, 15 November 2010.

⁶¹ "KH Sulaiman Zachawerus: Gerombolan Kristen Membuat Kisruh", *Voice of al-Islam*, 24 June 2010, www.voa-islam.com/news/interview/2010/06/24/6120/kh-sulaiman-zachawerus-gerombolan-kristen-membuat-kisruh/. Even though the interview with Zachawerus, a leading hardliner in Bekasi district, took place in June, the reference to suspicions about the mayor refer to the "human cross" incident. A Bekasi official confirmed that the mayor took the decision reluctantly, after a meeting with the local police and military commanders, and only after mainstream Muslim leaders joined the protest.

⁶² The order took the form of mayoral decision No.300/III8-Set/V/2010.

⁶³ One source suggested that the wealthier Betawi traders felt threatened by the Bataks who bought up land and encroached on their patronage networks. Crisis Group interview, Christian leader, Jakarta, 17 November 2010.

Muslim-majority neighbourhoods led Islamists to portray it as the spearhead of "Christianisation".

Church construction in Indonesia has been regulated since 2006 by Joint Regulation 8/9 of the Home Affairs and Religious Affairs Ministries. The regulation stipulates that construction of any houses of worship is to be authorised at the district (*kabupaten/kota*) level and must be based on a "clear need" with at least 90 potential members, with verified names and identity card numbers; support of 60 community members of different religions, whose identity cards have been verified by their village head; and written recommendations from the heads of the district religious affairs office and religious harmony forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, FKUB).⁶⁴

The Forum for Religious Harmony, a body created by this regulation with offices at the provincial and district levels, is entrusted with safeguarding good relations among religious communities. At the district level, it consists of seventeen individuals, with every recognised religion having one representative and the other members reflecting the relative percentage of their adherents. The Bekasi city FKUB has twelve Muslims, one Protestant, one Catholic, one Hindu, one Buddhist and one Confucian.⁶⁵ According to one member, it has never refused a permit to churches that secured the required number of signatures.⁶⁶

More detailed requirements for building a house of worship are set out in implementing regulations at the district or municipal level where the building permit (Izin Mendirikan Bangunan, IMB) is issued.⁶⁷

While many HKBP congregations in and around Jakarta, West Java and Banten have encountered obstacles in

obtaining construction permits, two faced particular difficulties. One was the Filadelfia congregation in Tambun Utara subdistrict in Bekasi district, outside the city; the other was in Pondok Timur Indah, within the city limits.

A. INITIAL LEGAL VICTORY FOR FILADELFIA

The Filadelfia congregation was founded in 2000 by Batak Christians living in four villages of Tambun Utara subdistrict and for several years held services in members' houses.⁶⁸ In 2003, the congregation purchased land and constructed two shophouses (*ruko*) in the Villa Bekasi Indah housing complex to use as a temporary site as they sought community support to build a permanent church.⁶⁹ Local residents and Islamic organisations protested, and HKBP members reverted to home-based services, mostly in the same complex. These encountered protests as well, forcing a search for another solution.⁷⁰

In June 2007, the congregation purchased another plot of land in the village of Jejalan Jaya. By April 2008, they had collected the requisite number of signatures of support from non-Christians in the area, got a recommendation from the village head, and submitted these materials to the district head (*bupati*), district religious affairs office, FKUB Bekasi and the subdistrict head (*camat*) as per the 2006 regulation. They built a temporary structure on the Jejalan Jaya plot while waiting for permission to come through, but it never did. As officials sat on the request, the temporary church – more a shelter from the sun and rain than a building – was attacked several times, and pressure to shut it down increased from FPI and like-minded groups.

On 29 December 2009, the congregation was told it would have to stop holding services at the site, but congregants could worship in Jejalan Jaya village hall while waiting for a permit – which seemed increasingly unlikely to materialise. On 31 December, however the *bupati*, Sa'duddin, issued a decree formalising the ban on services at the shelter, on the grounds that lack of a permit violated the joint ministerial decree and district building laws. Then on 12 January 2010, after protests from various Islamist coalitions including FUI and Forum Komunikasi Umat Islam (FKUI), with local activists reinforced by

⁶⁴ Article 14, "Peraturan Bersama Menteri Agama Dan Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor: 9 Tahun 2006 Dan Nomor: 8 Tahun 2006 Tentang Pedoman Pelaksanaan Tugas Kepala Daerah/Wakil Kepala Daerah Dalam Pemeliharaan Kerukunan Umat Beragama, Pemberdayaan Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, Dan Pendirian Rumah Ibadat", 21 March 2006.

⁶⁵ "Susunan Pengurus FKUB", www.fkubkotabekasi.com/tentang-kami/susunan-pengurus-fkub.html, 2009. Of the Muslims, the head is from DDII; the deputy and two other members are from the mainstream mass organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama. Two more are from another large mainstream organisation, Muhammadiyah. One is from the conservative organisation Persatuan Islam (PERSIS). Two are from the Islamic Centre in Bekasi, and one represents a smaller *dakwah* organisation. Two members died since their selection and have not yet been replaced.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, FKUB member, Bekasi, 5 November 2010.

⁶⁷ In Bekasi, Municipal Regulation No. 16/2006 (Peraturan Walikota Bekasi Nomor 16/2006) spells out in more detail the letters, recommendations, site plans and photographs needed as well as size limitations of buildings relative to number of expected users and the respective roles of local officials.

⁶⁸ The villages are Jejalan Jaya, Mangun Jaya, Satria Jaya and Sumber Jaya.

⁶⁹ Shophouses are usually two- or three-storey buildings with a shop on the ground floor and residential space above.

⁷⁰ "Laporan Khusus HKBP Filadelfia Bekasi: Karena Disegel, Jemaat Beribadah Beratapkan Langit dan Beralaskan Koran", www.SuaraBangsaKu.com, 13 January 2010. On 2 April 2006, in the face of a large demonstration, the head of the congregation was forced to sign a statement that HKBP would cease conducting services in Villa Bekasi Indah.

hundreds of others coming in from Tanjung Priok and Petamburan, Sa'duddin had the entrance to the temporary church sealed off with tape, like that used in protecting crime scenes. The congregation decided to hold services in the street instead; residents complained about the traffic problems caused.

The Islamists may have won that round, but Filadelfia fought back. In March HKBP sued the *bupati* in the West Java administrative court, challenging the legality of the December 2009 decree and in September, the judges ruled in its favour. The court said the decree was in violation of not only the 2006 regulation, because the congregation had gathered the requisite number of signatures, but also the provision on freedom of religion in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.⁷¹ The district government appealed the decision and as of November 2010, Filadelfia had still not secured a building permit.

B. VIOLENCE AGAINST ANOTHER HKBP CONGREGATION

The HKBP congregation in Pondok Timur Indah had similar problems. Since 2007, under the leadership of Pastor Luspita Simanjuntak, it had been meeting in a house owned by the members in Pondok Timur Indah. Perhaps buoyed by their temporary victory in getting the Filadelfia church closed in January, on 7 February 2010, thousands of Muslims surrounded the house during Sunday services and demanded that all further activities be forbidden, on the grounds that they were disturbing the neighbours and that HKBP had no authority to use the house as a church. Pastor Luspita argued that the congregation had been trying to get a permit since 1996 and had collected 221 signatures in the community, but had failed because officials refused to give the necessary recommendations. The city maintains that HKBP never formally submitted the request until August 2010.⁷² On 28 February, Islamists staged a bigger protest. This time it worked. On 1 March, officials of the municipal building

and construction authority (Dinas Penataan dan Pengawasan Bangunan, P2B) sealed off the house.⁷³

HKBP members paid no attention, removed the seals and continued to meet in the house on Sundays, infuriating the Islamists. After a meeting on 13 June, FPI-Bekasi leader Murhali Barda, representing the activists, and Bekasi Mayor Mochtar Mohamad signed a joint statement drafted by the former, saying that the parties agreed that the "Tiga Mojang" sculpture would be removed, the government would ask the police to move against Yayasan Mahanaim, and:

The Bekasi government will immediately issue orders that measures be put in place re the misuse of the Pondok Timur Indah 1 Housing Complex ... and instructing that the house be returned to its original function, as well as having the Bekasi police take firm action against members of the HKBP congregation who removed the seal put in place there.⁷⁴

The statement concluded, "The Bekasi city government will not enact any decision or policy that offends the Muslims of Bekasi".⁷⁵

On 20 June 2010, the city again sealed off the Pondok Timur Indah house, as Muslims called for Bekasi to be declared a "shariah city" (*kota syariah*) – and as national coverage of the case increased. On 8 July, at a meeting between HKBP pastors and the Bekasi military and police commanders, religious affairs office, and other local officials, it was agreed that the congregation would no longer meet at the temporary church but move to a new location in Ciketing, Mustika Jaya subdistrict, where a congregation member had purchased land. The next day, the Bekasi district secretary signed a letter banning services at the temporary church but authorising the congregation to use the new site.⁷⁶ On 11 July, emboldened by the letter, the congregation held services for the first time outdoors in the empty lot in Ciketing, guarded by a cordon of police.⁷⁷

⁷¹"PTUN Bandung Menangkan Gugatan HKBP Bekasi", *Koran Tempo*, 15 September 2010. Indonesia ratified the ICCPR through Law 12/2006. According to the 2006 regulation, in cases where a community wanting to build a house of worship has the requisite number of members but fails to get community support, the district head or mayor is obliged to help find another site (Section IV, Article 14). A permit can still be held up if the FKUB questions the validity of the signatures or believes that going ahead with construction will cause security problems.

⁷²Crisis Group interview, senior Bekasi official, 15 November 2010.

⁷³"Gereja HKBP Pondok Timur Akhirnya Disegel", *Sinar Harapan*, 2 March 2010. The building office left behind a sign saying "This building is closed based on Regulation (PP) No. 36/2005, District Regulations No. 61/1999, No. 74/1999, No. 4/2000, and Mayoral Decree No. 15/1998".

⁷⁴For full text of the statement see "Walikota Setujui Tuntutan Umat Islam, Demo Akbar di Bekasi Dibatalkan", *Voice of al-Islam*, 14 June 2010, www.voa-islam.com/news/indonesia/2010/06/14/7088/walikota-setujui-tuntutan-umat-islamdemo-akbar-di-bekasi-dibatalkan/.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Crisis Group interview, HKBP official, 11 November 2010.

⁷⁷"Dijaga Aparat Ibadah HKBP PTI Tetap Hikmat", *Radar Bekasi*, 12 July 2010. The letter was No. 460/1529.Kessos/VI/2010.

The next Sunday, the land became the new target of Islamist attacks on the grounds that whatever the letter said, the fact remained that the congregation had no permit and had not received the support of the community.⁷⁸ On 8 August, when members arrived for services, they found hundreds of members of FUI, FPI and others blocking their entrance to the site. Some 500 police sent to guard the services made no effort to disperse the protestors and while HKBP claimed some of its members were beaten, police denied there was any real violence, only mutual pushing and shoving.⁷⁹ "It is not true there was an attack", a spokesman said. "What is true is that residents of Ciketing oppose HKBP holding services here".⁸⁰ HKBP members say police in effect facilitated the protestors.⁸¹

On 14 August, the Bekasi mayor's office asked the congregation to move to a youth activities building in East Bekasi to avoid further conflict. Church leaders refused on the grounds that it was their constitutional right to worship wherever they pleased and continued to meet in the empty lot. A month later on 12 September, real violence erupted when the Islamist protestors, led by FPI, attacked the congregation, beating Pastor Luspita and stabbing Asia Sihombing, a church elder. Ten people were initially arrested and charged with incitement, nine young men and Murhali Barda, who acknowledged mobilising his followers via text messages to assemble in Ciketing.⁸² Two others, including the man who actually carried out the stabbing, were arrested on 7 October.⁸³

The violence shocked the nation and generated much commentary in the mainstream media about increasing intolerance and narrowing space for freedom of religion. It also put pressure on security officials at the highest levels to come up with a solution, at least for Bekasi if not for the country at large. On 16 September, the Bekasi city government offered two plots of land on which the congregation could build its church, while reiterating that it could meet in the building in East Bekasi with full police protection. On 17 September, the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Security and Legal Affairs brought all parties together and pressed HKBP to accept the city's offer.

On 24 September, the congregation chose one of the plots, and the crisis seemed to ease but without real resolution.⁸⁴ HKBP wanted a letter of guarantee that a permanent church, with full permit, could be erected on the plot within six months. Not only has there been no guarantee, but the congregation as of this writing had not been able to meet the mayor to discuss it.⁸⁵

The Islamists, however, were furious. This was not an attack but a clash in which two sides were involved, national FPI leader Habib Rizieq maintained, yet only one side was penalised.

Why were two priests who carried pistols and fired them at residents on 8 August not arrested? Why were two members of the congregation, Purba and Sinaga, who brought knives on 12 September, arrested but then let go? Why were HKBP members who beat up and stabbed nine of our brothers not arrested?⁸⁶

Islamists continue to see the construction of churches without permits as proof of advancing "Christianisation" and believe the Bekasi government's capitulation in offering new space when the HKBP congregation could not secure local support was a misguided measure that will only encourage resistance to the 2006 regulation.⁸⁷

C. DEBATE OVER THE JOINT MINISTERIAL REGULATION

The refusal of local residents to support the congregation led many in HKBP, rights groups and others to say that the 2006 joint ministerial regulation was discriminatory, violated the right to religious freedom and should be revoked.⁸⁸ Believers should be able to worship where they pleased, they argued, and proportional representation on

⁷⁸ "Bentrok Ciketing Betot Perhatian Gubernur", *Radar Bekasi*, 11 August 2010.

⁷⁹ "Ada Upaya Sistematis Merusak Toleransi Beragama?", *Radar Bekasi*, 9 August 2010.

⁸⁰ "Selompok Orang Serang Jemaat HKBP Bekasi", www.tempointeraktif.com, 8 August 2010.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, HKBP official, 11 November 2010.

⁸² "Untuk Umat Islam Saya Rela Dipenjara", op. cit., p. 36.

⁸³ "Polisi Ringkus Dua Pelaku Utama Kasus HKBP", *Radar Bekasi*, 9 October 2010. They were Adji Ahmad Faisal, 28, of Rawalumbu, Bekasi and Supriyanto, 25, of Cililitan, Jakarta Timur.

⁸⁴ "Saor: HKBP Tulus Terima Opsi Pemkot", *Kompas*, 24 September 2010. The plot chosen was owned by PT Timah in Mustika Sari, Bekasi.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, HKBP official, 11 November 2010. By this time the mayor was facing corruption charges which weakened him politically but also may have made him more susceptible to outside pressure.

⁸⁶ "Selalu Bikin Ulah, HKBP Harus Angkat Kaki dari Ciketing", *Voice of al-Islam*, 24 September 2010, www.voaislam.com/news/indonesia/2010/09/16/10103/selalu-bikin-ulahhkbp-harus-angkat-kaki-dari-ciketing/. There is no evidence that any guns were fired or anyone stabbed other than the church elder.

⁸⁷ "Indonesia Ingin Dijadikan Negara Kristen", *Voice of al-Islam*, 25 October 2010, www.voaislam.com/lintasberita/suaraislam/2010/09/29/10475/indonesia-ingin-dijadikan-negara-kristen/.

⁸⁸ For an analysis of the discriminatory content, see "Mengenali Lokus Diskriminasi dalam PBM Dua Menteri", *Setara Institute [a human rights organisation]*, 23 September 2010.

the religious harmony forums ensured that the majority could always block minorities. Islamist groups interpreted these calls as proof that Christians were aiming to get the regulation revoked so they could engage in an unbridled church-building spree.⁸⁹

Some Christian leaders warned against hasty action, saying in the current climate, a discriminatory regulation might be better than none at all, because at least there were clear requirements. If local officials blocked permits, the churches could take legal action and have a chance of success. If there were no regulation, communities where hardliners were active could simply block church construction with no further recourse available.⁹⁰ The 2006 regulation, while flawed, was better than the one it replaced; what was needed was more transparent and consistent enforcement.⁹¹

It is also worth noting that several non-Muslim communities worried about the influx of Muslim migrants backed the requirement that houses of worship have strong community support. A Catholic involved in consultations between religious leaders and the two ministries as the 2006 regulation was being drafted said that initially the number of signatures was going to be much lower than what emerged in the final version. Balinese Hindus and Protestant Papuans were among the most adamant in support of a higher figure.⁹²

In the aftermath of the HKBP violence, several members of parliament suggested perhaps it would be better to re-examine a religious harmony bill (RUU Kerukunan Hidup Beragama) that was quietly shelved in 2005 after several years' discussion. An early version of the controversial bill came close to banning interfaith marriages and prohibited adherents of one religion from taking part in worship activities of another. "We don't need the religious harmony law", one Christian leader said. "What we need is a freedom of religion law that reinforces our constitutional rights".⁹³ A new version of the former, however, is reported to be on the Indonesian parliament's legislative agenda for 2011.

⁸⁹ "Untuk Umat Islam Saya Rela Dipenjara", op. cit., p. 37.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI) official, Jakarta, 17 September 2010.

⁹¹ The 2006 regulation replaced Joint Ministerial Decree No. 1/1969 on Government Implementation to Guarantee the Smooth and Orderly Development of Religions and Religious Worship by Their Adherents (*Pelaksanaan Tugas Aparatur Pemerintahan dalam Menjamin Ketertiban dan Kelancaran Pelaksanaan Pengembangan dan Ibadat Agama oleh Pemeluk-Pemeluknya*, SKB No. 1/1969), 13 September 1969.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, 15 November 2010.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, PGI official, Jakarta, 17 September 2010.

V. THE BEKASI ISLAMISTS

As in many other areas of Indonesia, hardline Islamic organisations in Bekasi claim to speak for all Muslims when in fact they do not. One test is whether Indonesia's two largest mass Islamic organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, are willing to go along with their declarations and rallies and generally they are not.⁹⁴ The Bekasi mayor noted that the Islamists' "Bekasi Muslim Congress" on 20 June drew a few hundred people, while an NU-led prayer rally in November in support of the victims of a volcanic eruption drew some 20,000 to a local stadium.⁹⁵

Bekasi's Islamists seem to have a strong popular base, however. They differ on a range of issues but fighting "Christianisation" is something all can agree on – and nothing can unite them faster than a perceived insult to or attack on Islam, hence the danger of a group like Yayasan Mahanaim. The core group of Islamists – those involved in the 9 May *tabligh akbar*; the 14 May demonstration; various meetings with the mayor and deputy mayor over Mahanaim, the "Tiga Mojang" statue and HKBP; and a 20 June meeting of the self-styled "Kongres Umat Islam Bekasi" – includes the following:

- Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII). One of the most influential organisations in Bekasi and a driving force behind much of the anti-Christian rhetoric, it is led in Bekasi by KH Ahmad Salimin Dani. Founded in 1967 by the deeply respected scholar, politician and former prime minister Mohammad Natsir, the organisation traditionally has had close ties to Saudi Arabia. Some but not all of its members are salafi and a few are inclined toward salafi jihadism.⁹⁶ The head of the municipal religious harmony forum, Badruzzaman Bustairi, is a former DDII official.
- KOMPAK. The area of Pakayon, Bekasi has been a KOMPAK stronghold since 1999-2000, in part because many DDII leaders who could provide guidance to young KOMPAK activists lived there. Two such figures were Mohammed Dahlan, a leader of Natsir's generation and a wealthy donor to DDII, and Firdaus alias Nyong Ali, a Darul Islam veteran of Afghanistan. The KOMPAK activists they worked with included Dahlan's son, Salman alias Apud, who runs VOA-Islam and whose house in Bekasi has become a gathering place for ex-KOMPAK radicals.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, NU leader, Bekasi, 5 November 2010.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Mochtar Mohamad, Jakarta, 15 November 2010.

⁹⁶ DDII is the parent organisation of KOMPAK, whose members have been sometimes involved in terrorist activities.

- Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT). JAT leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir frequently came to Bekasi before his August 2010 arrest; the organisation was formally inaugurated in Bekasi on 17 September 2008 and has an extensive presence there. Its *mudiriyah* or regional office in Bekasi came under scrutiny when Haryadi Usman, a member, was arrested on terrorism charges on suspicions of helping finance the Aceh training camp discovered in February 2010.
- Forum Umat Islam (FUI). A coalition that was once close to Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, it is led by Muhammad Al-Khaththah who was expelled from Hizb ut-Tahrir in late 2008. FUI has become one of the country's most effective conservative advocacy organisations.⁹⁷ Al-Khaththah is also the founder of Hizbut Dakwah Indonesia, a splinter of Hizb ut-Tahrir, that like the latter works for the restoration of the caliphate. The deputy head of FUI Bekasi and member of the executive council of Hizbut Dakwah is Bernard Abdul Jabbar, a convert from Christianity and one of the most vocal alarmists about the perils of "Christianisation".
- Front Pembela Islam (FPI), led in Bekasi by KH Murhali Barda. After his arrest for involvement in the 12 September violence against HKBP, Murhali was temporarily suspended by FPI, pending the outcome of his trial. He claims to be preaching among criminals in Jakarta police detention.⁹⁸ His energetic young troops are frequently joined in operations by fellow FPI members from outside the city. Before his arrest, Murhali was a regular commentator on Islamic lifestyle issues on Radio Dakta. He flirted with JAT, perhaps even briefly becoming a member, but reportedly preferred the higher profile actions of FPI.
- Front Anti-Pemurtadan Bekasi (FAPB). This coalition, led by Cairo-trained Ust. Abu al-'Izz, includes FUI and FPI. Together with its student wing, Gerakan Pelajar Anti-Pemurtadan, it has collaborated with JAT Bekasi on various programs.⁹⁹
- Gerakan Pemuda Islam (GPI), a militant youth organisation, prides itself on having given rise to the Hizbullah militia during the Indonesian revolution, some of whose battles were fought in the Bekasi area. The grand old man of GPI today is Abdul Qadir Djaelani. He frequently appeared as a speaker in Bekasi in 2010, sometimes on the same stage with Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.
- Garda Umat Islam Bekasi (GAMIS), a coalition formed in 2007 to support one of the candidates for Bekasi mayor, who lost. GAMIS's commander (*pan-glima*), KH Sulaiman Zachawerus, heads the religious harmony forum for Bekasi district, is a member of the Bekasi ulama council, and like Murhali Barda, appears regularly on Radio Dakta. Sulaiman, who was an active fundraiser during the Ambon conflict (1999-2002) founded Brigade Ababil, an anti-Christian militia, in 2002 to defend Islam against apostates like the convert Edhie Sapto. His Ababil troops were accused of attacking Edhie Sapto's house and the office of Yayasan Kaki Dian Emas in 2002.¹⁰⁰
- Kongres Umat Islam Bekasi. H. Shalih Mangara Sitompul, the secretary-general, is head of the Bar Association (PERADI) of Bekasi and a member of the Muslim Defenders Team (Tim Pembela Muslim), which provides legal counselling to those arrested for crimes carried out in the name of Islam, including terrorism.
- Persatuan Islam (PERSIS). A West Java-based organisation dating back to the 1920s, its members are largely salafi, and while the organisation as a whole is completely respectable, a few of its members have flirted with terrorism. Imam Samudra, the Bali bomber, came from a PERSIS background.
- Khilafatul Muslimin. Bekasi until recently was a stronghold of this pro-caliphate organisation founded by Abdul Qadir Baraja, a long-term associate of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. A non-violent group, it attracted a number of former JI members disillusioned with their own organisation or anxious to distance themselves from it after the 2002 Bali bombs. Founded in 1997 in Lampung, activities in Bekasi were led by Ustad H. Majelis until his death a few years ago.¹⁰¹
- Islamic Centre Al-Islam in Kampung Sawah, Pondok Melati, Bekasi.¹⁰² The Al-Islam Centre, run by Farid Ukbah, a salafi cleric and Afghan veteran who once had close ties to JI, frequently hosts radical clerics including Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, before his arrest, and Abu Jibriel of the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, who lives nearby. Farid Ukbah has become a leading voice on the dangers of Shiism, Christianity and various "deviant" sects.

⁹⁷ Al-Khaththah is secretary-general, not head of FUI but he is a founder and the driving force behind it.

⁹⁸ "Untuk Umat Islam Saya Rela Dipenjara", op. cit., p. 37.

⁹⁹ On 10 October 2010, for example, they organised a joint program at the al-Hikmah mosque with al-'Izz as the speaker on "Principles of Practicing Islam". The program was advertised on Radio Dakta.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Muslim activist, Jakarta, 12 November 2010.

¹⁰¹ For their founding statement see <http://khilafatulmusliminbekasi.wordpress.com/2008/06/17/maklumat/>.

¹⁰² Not to be confused with the mainstream Islamic Centre on Jl. Ahmad Yani, Bekasi, a place that serves the broader Bekasi community.

Other Islamist groups include Gabungan Remaja Islam (GARIS), led by Maulana al-Hamdani and Harakah Suniyah untuk Masyarakat Islami (HASMI), a salafi group.

As Crisis Group has noted elsewhere, several of these groups, particularly FUI, have become adept at using civil society advocacy techniques to advance a policy agenda.¹⁰³ Advocacy against "Christianisation" in particular is helping paper over some of the longstanding fault lines among hardliners.

A. DIFFERENCES AMONG THE HARDLINERS

Despite some efforts to tar all Islamists with the same brush, there have always been major differences of ideology and tactics among them. The FPI and other extreme moralists, for example, reject terrorism and have never used firearms or bombs; their weapons of choice are sticks and clubs, better for intimidation and bashing up property than for inflicting serious injury. The FPI's traditionally close relationship with the security forces has led the jihadis to view them askance, and there have only been a few instances of overt cooperation.¹⁰⁴

A major feud is underway at present, as Sofyan Tsauri, the ex-police officer who played a key role in selecting Aceh as the base for the alliance that became known as al-Qaeda in Aceh and securing guns for training, accused Yusuf Qardhawi, the Acehese FPI leader, of falsely saying he worked for intelligence. He challenged Yusuf to a *mubalahah*, a debate where the loser is expected to be struck down by Allah. Yusuf reportedly accepted the challenge but the confrontation has not taken place.¹⁰⁵ In Bekasi, however, at least two jihadi organisations, KOMPAK and JAT, have had relatively smooth relations with their FPI counterparts.

Another longstanding division has been between salafis, many of them Saudi-influenced or funded, and salafi jihadis.¹⁰⁶ While both are ultra-puritan and try to emulate

the practices of the Prophet and his companions in the seventh century, the former believe that jihadis have deviated from that path by introducing new forms of political organisation and advocating overthrow of Muslim rulers. Loyal to Saudi government-sanctioned ulama, they see Osama bin Laden, hero of the jihadis, as a heretic. In Indonesia, some of the harshest diatribes against the jihadis have been written by salafis.

In Bekasi, however, the drive for unity to fight "Christianisation" has brought leading salafi and salafi jihadi scholars to the same platform, as in the 9 May *tabligh akbar*. This leads to the question: can the fear, real or exploited, of "Christianisation" become a new driver for jihadi recruitment among hitherto non-jihadi activists?

B. "CHRISTIANISATION" AS A RECRUITMENT THEME

The answer is probably yes. The issue resonates with potential recruits far more immediately than the sufferings of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine. At the same time, jihadis can put "Christianisation" in the framework of a global Christian-Zionist plot to weaken Islam: "All oppression suffered by Muslims in Indonesia and the rest of the world is the fruit of a conspiracy of Western Christian colonialists and their local puppets".¹⁰⁷ The longstanding hardline claim that Detachment 88, the counter-terror unit of the Indonesian police, is dominated by Christians means that a stepped-up jihadi campaign against the police can also fit into this framework.

In late 2009, some of the participants in a terrorist training camp in Aceh were persuaded to join and support attacks on foreign aid workers because the latter were perceived to be trying to convert Acehese:

The goal of the training camp was to have each participant be physically fit, understand the strategy of war and be able to use firearms, so as to be able to attack infidels or non-Muslims who were engaged in "Christianisation" or bringing liberal thinking to the Muslim community in Aceh, and to destroy churches in Aceh and obstruct plans to increase construction of churches there.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Implications of the Ahmadiyah Decree*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ One was in 2005, when Said Sungkar, the head of the religious advisory council of FPI Pekalongan in Central Java, persuaded two colleagues to help hide fugitive bomber Noordin M Top. Another was when ex-JI member Dulmatin and others involved in the Aceh training camp recruited FPI members from Aceh, initially on the pretext of training them to go to Palestine.

¹⁰⁵ Yusuf did, however, make a tense visit to Sofyan Tsauri in prison in early October. See "FPI Siap Hadapi Sofyan Tsauri", www.annah.com, 6 October 2010.

¹⁰⁶ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°83, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Do Not Mix*, 13 September 2004.

¹⁰⁷ "Akar 'Terorisme' dan Konspirasi Kristen di Indonesia", *An-Najah*, 30 September 2010 (The original reads "Semua kezhaliman yang menimpa umat Islam di Indonesia dan seluruh dunia merupakan buah konspirasi penjajah Barat yang Kristen dengan boneka lokalnya".)

¹⁰⁸ Surat Dakwaan No. REG.PERK:PDM-1363/JKT/BRT/07/2010 atas Nama Terdakwa: 1) Syailendra Adi Sapta als. Ismet Hakiki als. Abu Jais als. Abu Mujahid bin Muhammad Robert Bakrie; 2) Zainal Mutaqim als. Zaki Rahmatullah als. Abu Zaid

A case involving Edhie Sapto is more evidence that "Christianisation" works as an incentive for recruitment. As noted above, Edhie is the Muslim convert who uses techniques learned in a *pesantren* to attract Muslims. His organisation, formerly Yayasan Kaki Dian now Yayasan Bethmidrash Talmiddin, has been run since its founding from his home in the Galaxi housing complex in south Bekasi. On 3 May 2002, a young Muslim reportedly escaped from the house where he said he was being held against his will. In response, the house was raided by a team consisting of Front Bersama Umat Islam (FBUI), a short-lived coalition; the Indonesian Ulama Council; FAKTA, the anti-apostasy organisation; Brigade Ababil, led by Bekasi leader KH Sulaiman Zachawerus and the police. Edhie was brought to the Bekasi police station and reprimanded but not charged.

About a year later, Edhie succeeded in converting Yosua Adhie (Yosua Winadi), a Muslim from Lamongan, East Java. Yosua eventually became head of the Integrated Bible Training School and editor of the organisation's magazine, *Midrash Talmiddim*, which recounts successful conversions.¹⁰⁹

In 2006 when several members of the FAKTA branch in Palembang, who had joined a religious study group led by a JI fugitive, agreed on a project to murder a few men they saw as responsible for "Christianisation", Yosua was high on the list. It was probably not a coincidence that the man who volunteered to lead the death squad, Sulton Qolbi alias Arsyad, a Madura-born KOMPAK leader, had lived for a few years in Bekasi. While the attempted murder of Yosua was unsuccessful, the important point is that the group went on to ally with the now dead terrorist, Noordin Top.¹¹⁰ The lesson is clear: violent and non-violent radicals can find common ground in anti-apostasy activities.

The murder attempt generated much sympathy for Sultan Qolbi in Bekasi. According to Sulaiman Zachawerus, now head of the Bekasi district FKUB: "In terms of positive law, what Arsyad did is an anarchic activity that cannot be approved. But in the eyes of Islam, it cannot be faulted".¹¹¹

In 2007 and 2008, members of a militant Darul Islam faction were regularly meeting in Bekasi to deepen their religious knowledge by studying with Farid Ukbah at the al-Islam Mosque, and some of their members are probably still active.¹¹² This group, like KOMPAK, thrived on the conflicts in Ambon and Poso and sought training in Mindanao in order to be able to send top fighters there. It was communal conflict that drew these groups into a broader commitment to jihad.

Bekasi has no shortage of salafi jihadis and mobilisation of Islamists around the issue of "Christianisation" has created a potentially large recruiting pool of youths in non-violent advocacy organisations. The jihadi movement may be weak and divided in Indonesia these days, but unless there is more systemic attention to reducing Christian-Muslim tensions, it could be given a new lease on life.

One task for the prevention and counter-radicalisation division of Indonesia's new anti-terror agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, BNPT) might be to encourage reporting from regions on areas of serious communal tensions; have a local academic team map the key players and document the recent history of extremist activity in the area; then work with community leaders to design projects to ease the tension and marginalise the radicals. Easier said than done, but Bekasi would be a good place for a pilot project.

VI. A NEW STRATEGY TO STRENGTHEN RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The policy choices are never easy when religion is involved, but absence of a policy can be worse. Credible public opinion surveys indicate that religious tolerance in Indonesia is slowly decreasing, as measured by the unwillingness of Muslims to have churches built in their neighbourhoods or their children taught by non-Muslim teachers.¹¹³ Hostility of Christians in Christian-majority areas of eastern Indonesia such as Papua towards mosque

als. Fandi Ahmad bin Mahfud; 3) Sunakim als Afif als. Nakim bin Jenab; 3) Herul Lianto als. Abu Zahroh bin Kaman, Jakarta, 1 July 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Yosua personally claimed 50 in 2004 alone. *Midrash Talmiddim*, March 2006, p. 15, quoted in "Edhie Sapto Weda, Pendeta Radikal Mantan Pembunuh", <http://muslimcreative.wordpress.com>, 18 August 2008.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group Briefing, *Indonesia: Radicalisation of the "Palembang Group"*, op. cit.

¹¹¹ "Edhie Sapto Weda, Pendeta Radikal Mantan Pembunuh", op. cit.

¹¹² These included Rusli Mardani alias Uci, now imprisoned in Ambon for illegal gun possession. See interrogation deposition of Uci, 24 October 2008.

¹¹³ Between 2008 and 2010, the percentage of Muslims unwilling to have a church built in their neighbourhood rose from 51.4 to 57.8 per cent; the share of those unwilling to have a non-Muslim teach their children rose from 21.4 to 27.6 per cent. These figures have steadily increased since polling began in 2000 by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society at the State Islamic University in Jakarta. See "Toleransi Beragama Kian Rendah", *Media Indonesia*, 29 September 2010.

construction would probably be similar. Attacks on churches have also increased.¹¹⁴

Under such circumstances, the government's first recourse should be the law, but not only its letter – its spirit as well. The preamble to the 2006 regulation reaffirms that, among other things:

- ❑ the right to follow a religion is a basic human right that cannot be diluted under any circumstance;
- ❑ everyone is free to choose a religion and worship according to its tenets;
- ❑ the state guarantees freedom of every resident to practice his or her religion and to worship accordingly;
- ❑ the government has an obligation to protect efforts by its people to implement religious teachings as long as they are not in conflict with existing regulations and laws, do not abuse or slander religion and do not disturb security and public order; and
- ❑ the government has the duty to provide guidance to ensure that the implementation of religious teachings proceeds harmoniously, smoothly and in an orderly fashion.¹¹⁵

Article 1 defines religious harmony as "communication among religions based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, valuing equality in the practice of religious teachings and cooperation in the life of the people, nation and state within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the Indonesian Constitution of 1945".¹¹⁶

Tolerance and mutual respect are the values that seem to be in decline, and the provision about not disturbing public order is routinely violated by religious vigilantes like FPI. Governments at the national and local levels need to take a more pro-active role toward promoting tolerance, perhaps working with the National Broadcasting Commission to encourage religious radio stations like Radio Dakta not only to not preach hatred but to actively promote respect for other religions. The same should be done for elementary school textbooks, and it should be a requirement for any school receiving government assistance to ensure that a module on respect for all religions is built into the curriculum.

The government also needs to develop clear guidelines for what constitutes a "disturbance of public order". Surely any acts to forcibly prevent meetings or worship should count, even more so when violence is threatened, let alone used. At the moment, the tendency is to blame the religious group that attracts mob action – the beleaguered Ahmadiyah sect has been particularly cast as the troublemaker: if it did not have deviant views, according to the religious affairs minister, it would not come under attack.¹¹⁷

At the same time, officials at all levels should avoid appearing to endorse religious vigilantism, exemplified by the FPI. Yet not only have the governor of Jakarta, the newly appointed national police commander and the religious affairs minister all appeared at FPI events, but the new police chief appeared to welcome FPI as a partner in maintaining law and order in Jakarta.¹¹⁸ Taking on allies known for their intolerance is not the way to inculcate religious harmony.

Governments at all levels also need to have a common understanding of what constitutes "incitement", in a way that does not unduly restrict freedom of expression but penalises potentially dangerous actions, including through mobile phone texting. It would be helpful to have human rights lawyers sit down with religious leaders, police and officials from the ministries of religion and justice and try to hammer out when hate speech crosses the line into incitement to crime.

The 2006 regulation has a problematic provision, reinforced strongly in the Bekasi implementing decree, that one role of the religious harmony forums should be to "take on the aspirations of mass religious organisations". The wording is ambiguous: "take on" (*menampung*) can mean "consider" or "try to satisfy". The problem arises when Islamist groups, claiming to represent the masses, demand actions that run counter to promoting tolerance and mutual respect. It is important for government to encourage responsiveness to civil society, but when civil society groups themselves try to impose a single view of religious truth, responding positively can create new problems.

The government should decide whether to enforce the 1978 Guidelines on Disseminating Religion, a decree from the Ministry of Religion which states that proselytisation or other forms of religious outreach can only take place among individuals who are already members of that

¹¹⁴ See statistics in "Where is Our Place of Worship?", Setara Institute, 26 July 2010.

¹¹⁵ First five of eleven preambular articles of Joint Regulation of Ministries of Religious Affairs and Home Affairs in Pedoman Kerukunan Hidup Beragama, published by the Forum for Religious Harmony, Bekasi city, December 2009.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, interview with Minister of Religious Affairs Suryadharma Ali, "Mengatur Indonesia Tidak Perlu Menanggalkan Islam", *Suara Islam*, 19 November 2010.

¹¹⁸ "Sole candidate wants to 'embrace' FPI", *Jakarta Post*, 7 October 2010; and "Fauzi, police chief hobnob with FPI", *Jakarta Post*, 8 August 2010.

religion. That would seem to ban efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity or Christians to Islam (conversion itself is perfectly legal as an individual decision), but the guidelines merely say that any action not in line with the decree that disrupts religious harmony will be dealt with according to existing law. In practice, the decree has been largely ignored by both Christians and Muslims. Groups like Yayasan Mahanaim proselytise in Muslim communities, outraging many local Muslims, but Middle Eastern-funded Islamic groups like the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (known in Indonesia as at-Turots) make a point of undertaking *dakwah* in Christian-majority areas of Indonesia, including Nusa Tenggara Timur and North Sulawesi. There are also active *dakwah* programs in the central highlands of Papua. If the government decides to clamp down, it will have to be even-handed.

All of this suggests that Indonesia badly needs a strategy on religious tolerance, and if the executive branch cannot produce one, it should consider setting up a national agency or taskforce that would both underscore the government's commitment to uphold an important national value and work out policies on the issues described above. The problem is that if setting national policy on these issues is left to any of the existing ministries, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs or the Ministry of Education, entrenched bureaucratic interests are likely to take over. Left to an NGO or NGO coalition, however expert, influence over policy-making will be minimal. An independent body set up with presidential and parliamentary support and given a robust mandate and adequate resources would have a better chance of having its ideas accepted.

The government should not simply dig out the discarded religious harmony bill from a few years ago and tack on a few new provisions. Protecting religious freedom and teaching tolerance require serious thought from committed scholars and practitioners and a set of policies that can be implemented fairly and equitably across the country. Religious intolerance is one problem that cannot be allowed to fester.

Jakarta/Brussels, 24 November 2010

APPENDIX A

MAP OF INDONESIA

