

Pray for the Suffering Church

TBC Today

Thursday, December 08, 2005 7:28 AM

October 22, 2005

CHURCHES OF INDONESIA SEND SOS

Churches of Indonesia, facing continued forced closings, are sending an SOS for prayer to Christian churches around the world.

Lindner, Special to ASSIST News Service [Excerpts]

PERTH, AUSTRALIA (ANS) -- In recent months, Christians in Indonesia have faced a severe escalation of terrorism, intimidation and persecution.

"This escalation is part of the process to implement Islamic Sharia Law," Pastor [Johan] Bandi said.

He pointed out that some of the radical Islamic groups that are publicly known, such as the Defense of Islam (FPI) and the Alliance Against Apostasy (AGAP), have broken into churches in the middle of services, demanded the pastor stop preaching, ordered him and the congregation out of the church, and forced him to sign a statement that the building would no longer be used for church services. Many times they carried out their intimidation and terror with letters of authorization from the mayor and chief of police in their hands, and accompanied by government officials and police, who stood by doing nothing.

"This is not just a West Java problem," Bandi said. "This is a national problem facing every church group throughout the country."

Dr. Jeff Hammond of Jakarta-based 'Bless Indonesia Today', said three churches; Lutheran, Presbyterian and Pentecostal, were closed five weeks ago by the mayor, accompanied by members of AGAP. See the October 20 report "Indonesian Christians Attacked as they Worship in the Street" for details.

Then on Sunday, October 16, three more churches in East Bekasi (West Java, about 45 minutes drive from Jakarta) were closed.

On that same day about 150 people marched on a house church in South Sulawesi and forced it to close. The Jakarta Post reported that Muslims for at least six months had been objecting to its functioning without a permit.

Pastor Bandi stated furthermore that the mayors of Bekasi, Bandung and Sukabumi in West Java have issued a decree closing down three more churches. At least 35 churches in Bandung have been closed in the last 12 months, and the mayor of Sukabumi has also called for the closing down of all churches without permits in his town.

It is reported that 24 churches in the city of Malang, East Java, are under threat, while some have been closed in the last two weeks as well. And 18 churches in North Jakarta are wondering when their turn will come, after police collected data on their services during the last few weeks.

The Indonesia media has reported that over 150 churches have been destroyed or closed down in Jakarta and throughout the island of Java in recent years. In the last two months 60 churches, mainly in West Java, were closed.

Bandi said the basis for most of these closures is the Combined Ministerial Edict No.1 of 1969, which regulates building permits for religious buildings (read churches), use of homes for religious meetings (read house churches), the control of propagation of religious beliefs (read Christian evangelism), and the flow of international funds to religious institutions (read churches). So almost all churches formed in the last 36 years do not have permits to function officially.

Reading "churches" into the above statement is justified since mosques apparently can be built in almost any neighborhood without a permit, and not one mosque existing without a permit is known to have been closed. Even though Indonesia's constitution states freedom for all religions, the decision whether or not a church building can be built, according to Edict No. 1, is determined by prevailing community opinion are 90% Muslim.

Meanwhile, Pastor Bandi said there were two important things that should be done immediately.

First of all, Christians "should pray earnestly for our fellow persecuted brothers and sisters in Indonesia."

Secondly, Christians worldwide should express their concerns in concert to their government leaders to move them to exert pressure on the Indonesian government "to sincerely implement their commitment to uphold its constitution which guarantees the freedom of religion."

To that end, Christians in Indonesia and Australia have urged this matter be made known to the highest levels of government in free nations (<http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/s05100119.htm>).