

Jun 12 2017

The Indonesian Ahmadis: No Place for Praying

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Religious freedom has been considered one of the most crucial and serious issues in contemporary Indonesia, as religious minority groups frequently experience attacks due to their beliefs. This article will focus on the status of Ahmadis in Indonesian society, who provide a clear example of attacks against certain religious minorities in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the Ahmadiyya—founded by [Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in India in 1890 – arrived for the first time in the 1920s](#). While they recognize themselves as part of Islam, some other Islamic groups do not. Their presence as a ‘minority’ within the hegemonic ‘Muslim majority’ influences the prospect of them enjoying rights to religious freedom.

On February 25th 2017 the [Al-Hidayah Mosque, an Ahmadis’ mosque](#), located in West Java Province was shut down by the Bekasi administration. This event continued a trend of oppression created by mobs and radical groups, [such as the Islam Defender Front \(FPI\)](#), alongside other [discriminatory policies and practices](#) against the Ahmadis.

Two Types of Justification for Discrimination

[An opinion stated by Rafendi Djamin](#) echoed many other sources about the problem faced by the Ahmadis and attempts to analyze the ‘two types of discrimination’. These types of discrimination are based on decrees declared by the Islamic majority and the state. The first type relates to religion, in 2005 the Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholar (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) declared that the Ahmadiyya is a “non-Muslim...heretical, and deviant” group. Since that time, the Ahmadiyya have officially been stated as ‘a non-Islamic’ group, and are not recognized as part of official Islam in Indonesia.

The second type of discrimination is the government’s treatment of the Ahmadis. The MUI and radical groups have continuously demanded the Indonesian government to take a direct step towards ‘freezing’ the Ahmadis’ activities. Under the pressure of the MUI declaration, on June 8 2008, the Minister of religious affairs, the Home Minister and the Attorney General signed a special decree that was called the [‘Joint Decree’](#).

This Decree bans the Ahmadis’ activities and prohibits them from expressing their beliefs. Following the ‘Joint Decree’, Ahmadis’ mosques in several locations were attacked, burnt down or closed. The Joint Decree has been used as a tool and justification by the radical groups to violate the Ahmadis’ rights to religious freedom.

Along with the Joint Decree, the Indonesian Ahmadiyya Jamaah, the national representative of the group, reported that five provinces and 22 Mayors and Regents issued anti-Ahmadiyya regulations as a follow-up of the 2008 Decree. For instance, on March 3rd 2011, [Ahmad Heryawan, a governor of the West Java province, also prohibited the activities of the Ahmadis](#).

It is widely agreed that these two decrees have justified discrimination against the Ahmadis and this discrimination, both religious and political, has caused the Ahmadis to become socially excluded. In view of this it is my assertion that the attitude shown by Indonesia’s Muslim majority towards the Ahmadis and the political inability to provide protection, has directly led to [attacks against the Ahmadis](#). At this point, the Ahmadis are excluded and restricted from claiming and enjoying their basic rights.

The Right to Religious Freedom

The destruction of Ahmadi places of worship is a common and all too frequent occurrence. Having a [place of worship and the ability to pray](#), privately and publicly, are some of the most important indicators in measuring whether or not certain religious minority groups enjoy the right to freedom of religion. A house of worship and the ability to pray are basic necessities in the daily exercise of religious freedoms.

From 2000 to 2006, large-scale attacks and widespread discrimination against the Ahmadis has occurred in the Kuningan regency, West Java Province. During September 2014, whilst I was in the Kuningan district, I found that the Ahmadis had refused to renovate a mosque that had been destroyed as they wanted to show it as a symbol of the continuous discrimination.

Slicing Up Uncertainties

The accumulation of attacks faced by the Ahmadis and other religious minorities requires the state to provide a strong protection framework. The state needs to demonstrate a strong [political commitment to implement its constitutional stance of](#)

[protecting minorities](#) who are living in socially and politically uncertain environments. Indonesia should move from 'the inter-faith clash to inter-communal peace'. The Indonesian public must hope that the new political regime under President Jokowi can provide effective protections for the Ahmadis and other religious minority groups.

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