

# INDONESIA 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and the right to worship according to one's own beliefs, but states that citizens must accept restrictions established by law to protect the rights of others and to satisfy "just demands based upon considerations of morality, religious values, security and public order in a democratic society." The law restricts citizens from exercising these rights in a way that impinges on the rights of others, or jeopardizes security or public order. There were arrests and convictions for blasphemy and insulting religion. The government did not resolve longstanding religious disputes. There were instances where local governments and police gave in to the demands of groups labeled locally as "intolerant groups" to close houses of worship for permit violations, or otherwise restrict the rights of minority religious groups. The government at both the national and local levels at times reportedly failed to prevent or appropriately address intimidation and discrimination against individuals based on their religious belief. Both the central government and local governments featured elected and appointed officials from minority religious groups, and elected politicians from religious minorities served in majority Muslim districts. Certain local governments imposed local laws and regulations that restricted the religious freedom of minority and majority religious groups.

Much of civil society, including religious organizations from all faiths, worked to counter intolerant messages and ideologies and promote tolerance of minority religious groups and pluralism. Intolerant religious groups, however, illegally closed houses of worship and widely disseminated materials promoting intolerance.

The U.S. government advocated for religious freedom at the highest levels, with both government and civil society leaders, and spoke out publicly against discrimination and religious violence. Embassy and consulate officials engaged on specific issues, including actions against Ahmadi and Shia Muslims and other religious minorities; concern over closures of places of worship and access for foreign religious organizations; arrests for blasphemy and defamation of religion; the influence of intolerant groups and the importance of the rule of law; the application of sharia to non-Muslims; and religious identification requirements on national identification cards. Through outreach efforts, including events, media interviews, digital and public speaking engagements, youth exchanges, and educational programs, the embassy and consulates carried the message of respect

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for diversity and religious tolerance to hundreds of millions of people throughout the country.

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 255.9 million (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2010 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Muslim, 7 percent Protestant, 3 percent Roman Catholic, and 1.5 percent Hindu. Those identifying with other religious groups, including Buddhism, traditional indigenous religions, Confucianism, and other Christian denominations, and those who did not respond to the census question comprise approximately 1.3 percent of the population.

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

An estimated 20 million people, primarily in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua, practice various traditional belief systems, often referred to collectively as *aliran kepercayaan*. There are approximately 400 different *aliran kepercayaan* communities throughout the archipelago.

The country has a small Sikh population, estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000, residing primarily in Medan and Jakarta. There are very small Jewish communities in Jakarta, Manado, Surabaya, and elsewhere. The Bahai community reports thousands of members, but no independent estimates are available. Falun Dafa (or Falun Gong) states it has several thousand followers, but specific numbers are unavailable. The number of atheists is also unknown, but the group Indonesian Atheists states it has more than 500 members.

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

### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

#### Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees the right to choose and to practice the religion of one's choice and specifies that freedom of religion is a human right that cannot be

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limited. The constitution states “the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God,” but guarantees all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief. The law restricts citizens from exercising these rights in a way that impinges on the rights of others, oversteps common moral standards and religious values, or jeopardizes security or public order.

The law prohibits deliberate public statements or activities that insult or defame a religion adhered to in the country, or have the intent of preventing an individual from adhering to a recognized religion. The law also forbids the dissemination of information designed to spread hatred or dissension among individuals and/or certain community groups on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or race. Individuals can be prosecuted for blasphemous, atheistic, or heretical statements under either of these provisions or under the laws against defamation, and can face a maximum jail sentence of five years. The internet law forbids the electronic dissemination of the same types of information, with violations carrying a maximum six-year sentence.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) extends official status to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Members of unofficial groups, however, have the right to establish a place of worship, register marriages and births, and obtain national identity cards. Laws allow followers of beliefs outside the six recognized religions to leave the religion section blank on their identity cards.

Religious organizations are not required to obtain a legal charter if they are established under a notary act and obtain approval from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Other religious organizations must obtain a legal charter as a civil society organization from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Both ministries consult with the MRA before granting legal status to religious organizations. Under the law, civil society organizations are required to uphold the national ideology of *Pancasila*, which encompasses the principles of belief in one God, justice, unity, democracy, and social justice, and they are prohibited from committing blasphemous acts or spreading hatred of other religions. Violations of the law could result in a loss of legal status, dissolution of the organization, and arrest of members under the blasphemy law or other applicable laws. Unrecognized religious groups may also register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as cultural belief systems (*aliran kepercayaan*) rather than as religious organizations.

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A joint ministerial decree bans both proselytizing by the Ahmadiyya community and vigilantism against the group. Violation of the proselytizing ban carries a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy. No Ahmadis have ever been charged with blasphemy, but provincial and local regulations based on this decree place tighter restrictions on Ahmadis. The proselytizing ban does not prohibit Ahmadi Muslims from worshipping or continuing to practice within their community. Some local regulations, however, require Ahmadis to sign a form renouncing their faith in order to get married or go on the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).

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

According to a joint ministerial decree, religious groups wanting to build a house of worship are required to obtain the signatures of at least 90 members of the group and 60 persons of other religious groups in the community stating they support the construction. Local governments are in charge of implementing the decree, and local regulations, implementation, and enforcement vary widely. The decree also requires approval from the local interfaith council, the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB). Government-established FKUBs exist at the city or district level and comprise religious leaders from the six recognized religious groups. They are responsible for mediating interreligious conflicts.

The law requires religious instruction in public schools. Students have the right to request religious instruction in any one of the six official religions. Individuals are not allowed to opt out of religious education requirements.

Under the terms of a 2005 peace agreement that ended a separatist conflict, Aceh Province has unique special authority to implement sharia regulations. The law allows for provincial implementation and regulation of sharia, and extends the jurisdiction of religious courts to economic transactions and criminal cases. Provincial sharia criminalizes homosexuality, adultery, gambling, consumption of alcohol, and proximity to members of the opposite sex outside of marriage. An Aceh governor's decree forbids women from working in or visiting restaurants unaccompanied after 9:00 p.m. A Banda Aceh mayoral decree forbids women from working in coffee shops, internet cafes, or sports venues after 10:00 p.m.

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The maximum penalties for violations of sharia include imprisonment and public caning. There are also regulations limiting the amount of force that may be applied during a caning.

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

The marriage law does not expressly forbid interfaith marriage, but it contains an article stipulating that a marriage must be performed according to the rituals of a religion that is shared by both the bride and groom.

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

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

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

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

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### Government Practices

There were arrests and convictions for blasphemy and insulting religion, and public canings in Aceh for sharia violations. The government did not resolve longstanding religious disputes. There were instances where local governments and police gave in to the demands of groups labeled locally as “intolerant groups” to close houses of worship for permit violations, or otherwise restrict the rights of minority religious groups. The government at both the national and local levels at times reportedly failed to prevent or appropriately address intimidation and discrimination against individuals based on their religious belief.

Observers stated that the central government made efforts to reaffirm constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, promote tolerance, and prevent religiously motivated violence. They also stated that the central government did little to intervene at the local level or solve past religious conflicts through its mandate to enforce court rulings, override unconstitutional local regulations, or otherwise uphold the constitutional and legal protections afforded to minority religious groups. Local governments selectively enforced blasphemy laws, permitting regulations, and other local regulations in ways that affected various religious groups. Officials at the local level reportedly sometimes gave in to the demands of groups described locally as “intolerant groups” and criminal gangs (including those with religious affiliation) to close houses of worship for permitting violations. Government officials and police sometimes failed to prevent intolerant groups from infringing on others’ religious freedoms and committing other acts of intimidation. Police also did not always actively investigate and prosecute crimes by members of intolerant sectarian groups, or punished certain individuals but declined to hold the groups themselves responsible.

On September 19, sharia authorities in two cities in Aceh carried out public canings against 34 individuals convicted of violating sharia. Most of the suspects were convicted of gambling, but four women were also caned for close contact with men who were not their husbands. On September 28, sharia police in Banda Aceh arrested two women for hugging in a public place on suspicion they were lesbians. The two were eventually transferred into a rehabilitation center and then released. The criminal code criminalizing homosexuality was signed into effect by the governor on October 23. In a December meeting, Acehese officials stated that sharia in Aceh would not apply to non-Muslims, foreigners, or Muslim residents of other provinces, and the provincial government subsequently issued a public statement to this effect.

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On June 15, a state court in Banda Aceh convicted six members of Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (GAFATAR) for blasphemy and sentenced them to prison terms ranging from three to four years. GAFATAR members stated the organization was a social movement based on the national ideology of *Pancasila* and focused on food security, ecology, and organic farming. Judges in this case held that GAFATAR was a religious movement spreading the teachings of the banned Abraham's Militia Movement. Judges found that the defendants had committed blasphemy by holding that their spiritual leader, Ahmad Musadeq, is a prophet, and by spreading teachings contrary to Islam. GAFATAR members, and members of other small religious movements, also faced legal discrimination in other parts of the country. In June the regent of Lebak, Banten Province, called for GAFATAR and several other groups to be dissolved in the regency.

On August 28, Sukabumi resort police in Sukabumi, West Java, arrested a man on blasphemy charges after he allegedly claimed to be God, burned a Quran, and advocated sun worship and the denial of Islam. The man was arrested after being reported to police by local residents.

On October 1, acting on a complaint filed by local Hindu organizations, Bali police said an Indonesian Four Seasons hotel employee was a blasphemy suspect for selling a vacation package to a gay couple who held a marriage blessing ceremony at the hotel. Police also opened an investigation into the expatriate general manager of the hotel. A Hindu priest who officiated at the ceremony stated publicly that the ceremony included religious symbols, which was reported in the press.

The MRA maintained its authority to conduct “development” of religious groups and believers in Indonesia, including efforts to convert minority religious groups to Sunni Islam. In several West Java regencies, local governments continued efforts to force or encourage conversion of Ahmadis with a requirement that Ahmadis sign forms renouncing their beliefs in order to register their marriages or participate in the Hajj. In Tasikmalaya, this policy, established by municipal regulation, was openly advertised on signage produced by the local MRA.

The Setara Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in the country that conducts advocacy and research on religious and political freedom, reported 70 cases of government abuses of religious freedom between January and August, similar to the previous year over the same period. Abuses cited included blocking

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construction of the Christian Protestant Church in Indonesia (GKPI) church in Jatinegara in July, and shutting down the Asy-Syuhada Mosque in Bitung City in April. Civil rights activists said sharia-based regulations violated the constitution and called on the government to exercise its constitutional jurisdiction to revoke or review these regulations. A 2014 law reaffirmed the Ministry of Home Affairs' authority to revoke local regulations about religious matters that violate the constitution or national law, but there were no reports the home ministry had exercised this authority.

Shia and other minority religious groups stated that insulting speech, including speech that advocated violence, was widespread but never prosecuted under existing hate speech laws. On October 8, National Police Chief Badrodin Haiti released a circular letter instructing police to enforce the hate speech provisions in the criminal code. On October 25, the National Anti-Shia Movement (ANNAS) held an anti-Shia demonstration in Jakarta and the Shia group Organization of Ahlulbayt for Social Support and Education (OASE) filed a hate speech complaint with the police against ANNAS. On November 10, the Regent of Purwakarta, Dedi Mulyadi, issued a public letter guaranteeing all Purwakarta residents protection to hold religious observances according to their own beliefs. Observers said this was a preemptive effort intended to counter the anticipated ANNAS event of November 15 in Purwakarta, where ANNAS declared Shia to be a "deviant sect."

On October 22, the Mayor of Bogor, Bima Arya, published a local regulation banning the Shia observance of Ashura in the city. Many civil society groups criticized the decree as unconstitutional, and a senior leader from the mayor's political party wrote an open letter criticizing the mayor. OASE said it would file a challenge to the law on constitutional grounds. The NGO Satu Keadilan (One Justice) filed suit against the mayor, demanding he withdraw the decree. In nearby Bandung, West Java, police protected an Ashura observance being held at a local stadium from hardline protesters. The mayor of Bandung, Ridwan Kamil, however, later said allowing the Ashura celebration was "a mistake."

In July the Evangelical Church of Indonesia (GIDI) in Tolikara, Papua, circulated a letter forbidding members of other faiths and Christian congregations from carrying out public ceremonies during GIDI's planned conference. On July 17, when local Muslims gathered at a prayer building (*musholla*) to celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday, they were met with demonstrators apparently affiliated with the church, who reportedly threw stones at worshippers. Witnesses report police fired

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warning shots into the air and a riot broke out during which demonstrators burned down the *musholla* and several shops owned by Muslims, and police shot and killed one demonstrator. Members of the National Intelligence Agency and national legislature called for an investigation into the involvement of “foreign actors,” amplifying statements made by groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia that the United States and Israel were involved. Several government officials, including the president’s chief of staff, immediately called for calm. On July 21, three government ministers, including Women’s Empowerment Minister Yohana Yembise, an ethnic Papuan, visited the site of the incident to calm tensions. President Joko Widodo (known as “Jokowi”) released a three-point plan to restore peace by launching a police investigation, rebuilding the damaged buildings, and hosting a meeting with Papuan religious and civil society leaders to address the situation going forward. Police provided increased protection to churches, which were threatened by retaliatory violence.

On March 25, the National Police Chief signed a decree allowing female police officers to wear the hijab while on duty, overturning a prior ban for officers in every province but Aceh. A state elementary school in South Sumatra introduced a ban on Muslim students wearing the hijab on the grounds that it was not in line with the school’s uniform. Lambung Mangkurat University (a state-funded institution) in South Kalimantan enforced a ban on Muslim students wearing a full face veil (*niqab*) on the grounds that it made it hard to identify students.

On October 6, protesters from the Concerned Islamic Youth (PPI) marched on the Singkil Aceh regent’s office demanding immediate closure of 19 churches that have long been the subject of protest from intolerant groups on the grounds that they did not have permits. Protesters demanded the churches be demolished within one week or they would do it themselves. On October 12, the regent signed an agreement to demolish 10 of the churches starting on October 19, and gave the other nine six months to process permit applications. On October 13, PPI protestors returned, many armed with bamboo spears and other weapons, and burned down one of the churches in Suka Makmur village. The protestors proceeded towards another village in order to burn a church there, but were stopped by armed security forces and villagers. One PPI protester was killed in the confrontation, and media reports indicated that as many as 4,400 local residents temporarily fled to North Sumatra in the wake of the violence. President Jokowi publicly condemned the violence and ordered his administration and police to take immediate action to prevent the violence from spreading. The major Islamic groups, including the Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU),

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and Muhammadiyah, joined with church groups and other civil society leaders in condemning the attacks and calling for calm. On October 17, the Singkil government used trucks to return most of the displaced residents. On October 19, local authorities proceeded to demolish two of the churches as per the October 12 agreement. Civil society groups from all faiths and national government figures condemned the move, and the minister of home affairs and the minister of religious affairs called for reform of the national house of worship permitting regulation, and more uniform enforcement of the regulation at the local level. As of the end of the year, local Singkil authorities had demolished 10 of the targeted churches.

On November 10, unknown parties burned down a temple under construction by followers of Sapta Darma, an indigenous religious group, in Plawangan Village, Rembang, Central Java. Sapta Dharma congregants said they had received threats from a local branch of Islamic People's Forum (FUI), although police said that FUI had denied involvement and the arson was perpetrated by "locals from the area." The regency government and police held a meeting with Sapta Dharma officials in the wake of the burning and agreed to facilitate construction of the temple at a different location.

On February 11, a group of Shia Muslims marched on the Muammar Qaddafi Mosque in Bogor, West Java, tore down several anti-Shia banners hung on the site, and got into an altercation with security guards. Police arrested 34 of the Shia protesters on assault charges. NGOs reported that while in custody, police forced the Shia detainees to repent and renounce their faith.

During Ramadan many police and government officials warned Islamic groups not to conduct "sweeps" of restaurants serving alcohol or food during fasting hours. West Java Provincial Police Chief Moechgiyanto said he was instructing police under his control to protect religious minorities such as Ahmadis and Shia, and not to participate in closing down houses of worship in the province. He said it is "not the authority of the police" to enforce such closures but rather the responsibility of local government administrations.

On July 12, members of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) blocked the entrance of an Ahmadiyya headquarters building and mosque in Bukit Duri, Tebet, South Jakarta. Ahmadis proceeded to hold their Friday service outside the mosque, leading to a heated verbal confrontation and damage to a fence around the property. As the protest continued throughout the week, Ahmadis asked the police to negotiate a truce, and Jakarta Provincial Police Chief Tito Karnavian publicly

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agreed to conduct mediation while also protecting all citizens, including minorities. On June 19, more than 50 plainclothes police stood guard as Ahmadis held Friday prayers at the building. On July 8, however, a Civil Service Police Unit – an unarmed local security element under the command of the municipal government and charged with enforcing local ordinances and regulations – sealed the Bukit Duri mosque for permit violations, saying it was zoned as a private residence, not a house of worship. On July 15, Jakarta Governor Basuki “Ahok” Purnama announced a special exemption for Ahmadi Muslims to hold prayer services in their homes and police promised to provide protection. As of the end of the year, however, the mosque remained officially sealed by the local government. Ahmadis said legal uncertainty among local officials and police, anonymous threats of violence, and insufficient police protection were the barriers to reopening the building.

On July 1, the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI) broke up a planned retreat organized by the Surakarta Advent Church for Christian students in Sleman, Yogyakarta. Approximately 50 members of FPI blocked the entrance to a campground and tore down banners promoting the event, stating the event did not have a permit and was promoting Christianity during Ramadan. Reports indicated that several police officers assisted FPI in breaking up the retreat. On July 9, the Yogyakarta FUI threatened to forcibly close the Cave of Mary Catholic shrine in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta, if authorities refused to shut the shrine down. On July 14, approximately 30 FJI members, some armed with pipes, marched on the Saman Indonesian Baptist Church in Bantul, Yogyakarta, demanding its closure for permit violations. Bantul police prevented the demonstrators from approaching the church.

In other cases, local governments, sometimes with the backing of police, closed houses of worship for permit violations, often after protests from local intolerant groups. According to the MRA, there were 289,951 mosques, 69,703 Christian churches, 24,801 Hindu temples, 3,342 Buddhist Monasteries, and 651 Confucian temples in Indonesia, the vast majority of which operated openly and freely, according to observers. NGOs estimated, however, that as many as 85 percent of houses of worship, the majority of them mosques, were operating without a permit. On October 29, as many as 2000 Christian demonstrators protested the construction of a mosque in Manokwari, Papua, and on November 1, the Manokwari regent issued a letter officially forbidding further construction.

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Many houses of worship operated without permits in office buildings, malls, private homes, and shop houses. Houses of worship that were established well before the ministerial decree came into effect were still obligated to meet the requirements or face closure in some localities. In August Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama intervened to prevent temporarily the planned demolition of an Indonesian Protestant Christian church in Jatinegara, East Jakarta, after the East Jakarta governor, who is under the authority of the Jakarta governor, announced his intention to demolish the church due to lack of a permit, following protest from “intolerant groups.” The church had been operating since the 1980s.

According to minority religious groups, meeting the requirements of the permitting regulation after the fact and under protest from intolerant groups was nearly impossible. Even when permits were attained, some houses of worship were forced to close or halt construction after facing legal challenges and public protest. Churches also reported that intolerant groups forced them to pay protection money to continue operation if they did not have a permit. In August Bekasi Mayor Rahmat Effendi agreed to halt temporarily construction of the Santa Clara Church in order to conduct a re-examination of the permit process after persistent protests from intolerant groups. In agreeing to the re-examination, the mayor noted, “I will not revoke the building permit. Non-Muslim residents have a right to a place of worship.” In September construction finally resumed on the Nur Musafir Mosque in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. Construction was halted in 2011 after protest from Christian groups. On September 27, congregants of the Indonesian Christian Church in Yasmin, Bogor, whose church was sealed by local authorities in 2010, held their 100th Sunday service in protest in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta. The national ombudsman tried unsuccessfully to convince Bogor Mayor Bima Arya to uphold a Supreme Court ruling in favor of the congregation in its dispute with the local government over a building permit.

The Constitutional Court in June struck down a challenge to an article of the marriage law that requires marriages to be performed according to the rituals of a religion that is shared by both the bride and groom. While the law does not ban interfaith marriage, the petitioners said it effectively prevented it by not allowing the option of a civil ceremony, by deferring to religious laws on whether interfaith couples can be married, and by creating difficulties for civil registration of interfaith marriages after a ceremony has taken place.

Despite dialogues, official government visits, and reconciliation attempts, 162 Shia internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were forced from their homes after violent

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attacks in 2012 remained housed outside of Surabaya, East Java, after residents from their home city of Sampang refused to agree to their peaceful return, according to multiple sources. A group of displaced Ahmadis in Mataram, Lombok also were unable to return to their homes.

On September 19, the Mayor of Banda Aceh dismissed the local head of the Culture and Tourism Agency for allowing an Indian traditional dance performance as part of a cultural festival, stating that the performance was “erotic” and violated sharia.

Although the government generally allowed citizens to leave the religion column blank on their national identification cards, (KTPs), some reported difficulties accessing government services and other discrimination if they exercised this right. Several NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the government to delete the religion field from the cards.

Minority Islamic groups also continued to report resistance when they tried to apply for KTPs as Muslims. Although Ahmadis in Mataram, Tasikmalaya, and most other areas across the country were recently able to acquire KTPs listing their religion as Islam, the local government of Kuningan Regency, West Java, continued to refuse to distribute KTPs to local Ahmadis in Manislor village, stating they need a letter from the MRA recognizing the Ahmadiyya community as part of Islam or should apply with a blank religion column. Ahmadis in Kuningan remained unable to access many government services because they did not have KTPs.

Both the central government and local governments included elected and appointed officials from minority groups. For example, the governor of Jakarta was a Christian, the Mayor of Solo was a Catholic, and a leading Shia figure held a seat in the DPR, elected from a majority Sunni district in Bandung, West Java. President Jokowi’s 34-member cabinet included six members of minority faiths.

Foreign religious workers stated they found it relatively easy to obtain visas. Despite laws restricting proselytizing, foreign religious groups reported little government interference with preaching or religious conversions. Police provided special protection to some churches in major cities during Sunday services and Christian holidays.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

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In January a lecturer at the State Islamic University in Aceh went into hiding due to online threats from intolerant groups and the general public after pictures appeared online of a class trip to a church she had arranged for students. The rector placed her on administrative leave, stating she had failed to get permission for the trip.

NGOs warned of rising anti-Shia sentiments in East Java, heartland of the traditionally tolerant NU Muslim organization. According to reports, NU-affiliated imams were influential in preventing Shia IDPs from Madura from returning to their homes.

Anti-Shia rhetoric was common in some media outlets online and on social media. An unknown group hung anti-Shia banners in many communities across the country. A traveling group supporting the book *Zionists and Shia Unite to Destroy Islam* continued to hold events across the country; organizers stated they collected one million signatures rejecting Shia Islam ahead of an event held by the group in Pekanbaru, Riau.

ANNAS, founded at a 2014 event in Bandung, held a “Declaration and Inauguration Conference” in the Tasikmalaya Great Mosque in Tasikmalaya, West Java, on March 22, and held a large anti-Shia rally in Jakarta on October 25. Both events were attended by thousands of people, and speakers included prominent imams and representatives from MUI. In November the Shia group OASE filed a hate speech complaint against ANNAS with police, and soon after received threats, including calls for “jihad” against OASE and its leaders, which were posted on multiple websites.

Ahmadis reported discrimination in education and administration of public services and feeling under constant threat from militant groups.

Many in the media, civil society, and the general population were vocal and active in protecting and promoting tolerance and pluralism. NGOs reported large numbers of Christian-to-Muslim and Muslim-to-Christian conversions, particularly in urban centers and the province of West Java. The largest and most influential religious groups and NGOs, including the two largest Islamic groups in Indonesia, endorsed and advocated for tolerance, pluralism, and the protection of minority groups. Organized “intolerant groups” that were accused of using religion to justify criminal activity and vigilantism, however, continued take actions against

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minority religious groups, including intimidation, extortion, vandalism, and protest. Such groups were often accused of acting as “rent-a-mobs,” working for corrupt political and business interests.

The two largest Islamic organizations –NU and Muhammadiyah, with some 40 and 30 million members, respectively – officially endorsed tolerance, and reinforced these concepts at their respective five-year leadership conferences in August. Both events included speeches by President Jokowi and religious leaders on Islam's traditional tolerance in the country. Newly-elected Muhammadiyah head Haedar Nashir told the press, “The reality is that we all live in a pluralist nation; the majority should protect minorities.” The semi-governmental Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) held its leadership conference in September and explicitly rejected Islamic radicalism. Shortly after his election as head of MUI, Ma’ruf Amin – who was also elected to a senior position in NU and was criticized for anti-Shia and anti-Ahmadiyya sentiments in the past – said the MUI would not tolerate persecution of minorities and would try to prohibit and prevent persecution. People affiliated with MUI at the local level continued to voice sectarian and intolerant rhetoric and associate with intolerant groups.

These Islamic groups and others cooperated with organizations representing diverse faiths on interfaith conferences and events, advocating for respect and tolerance, and speaking out against violence. For instance, after an Islamic prayer building was burned in Tolikara, Papua, leaders from NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI called for calm alongside leaders from Christian groups, who expressed regret on behalf of the Christian community.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. embassy, the consulate general in Surabaya, and the consulate in Medan regularly engaged with all levels of the government on specific religious freedom issues, such as actions against the Ahmadis, Shia, and other religious minorities; concern over closures of places of worship; arrests for blasphemy and defamation of religion; the undue influence of “intolerant groups” and the importance of the rule of law; the application of sharia to non-Muslims; religious registration requirements on KTPs; the importance of education and interfaith dialogue in promoting tolerance; and promotion of tolerance in international forums.

Representatives of the embassy, consulate general, and consulate also spoke publicly about the importance of religious tolerance and protecting minorities from

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acts of violence. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders, representatives of social organizations, and human rights advocates to clarify U.S. policy in support of religious freedom, discuss religious tolerance, and promote respect for religion. Embassy and consulate officials also met with members of minority religious groups who were victims of religious intolerance.

In April the Department of State Special Representative to Muslim Communities and a delegation of prominent American Muslims held high-level government meetings and conducted outreach with Islamic groups; there was significant media coverage. In all meetings and press appearances, the delegation reiterated the importance of religious tolerance and countering violent extremism.

The embassy held numerous events at its cultural center venue that directly or indirectly supported religious freedom. For example, an August event featured three prominent imams (Shamsi Ali, Aa Gym, and Yusuf Mansur) with millions of combined followers, discussing their experience as Muslims while traveling in the United States. This event was simulcast at the consulate in Surabaya, had more than 450 combined attendees, and received significant press coverage.

Embassy and consulate staff appeared on a number of nationally televised programs to discuss themes related to religious tolerance and diversity. Previous participants of U.S. government-funded student exchange programs often appeared with embassy and consulate officials to provide accounts of their experiences in the United States. Embassy and consulate officials spoke at Islamic boarding schools throughout the country on topics related to religious pluralism. These outreach activities carried messages of religious tolerance to tens of millions of viewers.

During Ramadan, embassy and consulate staff held numerous events and outreach activities that promoted religious tolerance. The embassy sponsored a team of reporters on a visit to the United States to create news and documentary stories about topics that included U.S. religious life. The stories were featured as part of the *Muslim Travelers* reality show during Ramadan and received an award from the Indonesian Broadcasters Association for the Best Ramadan Program of 2015. The embassy used iftars to advocate for tolerance and pluralism. For instance, at a June 24 event, the Ambassador delivered remarks advocating tolerance and welcomed guests from the Ahmadi Muslim community, who attended along with senior Sunni Muslim leaders and imams.

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Embassy and consulate staff also conducted extensive print, TV, and digital outreach, including the Ambassador's Ramadan and Eid greeting videos – which carried themes of tolerance and reached approximately 98 million people – and other religious pluralism initiatives that reached millions of individuals throughout the country. On June 25, the embassy facilitated a Twitter question and answer session with the Special Representative to Muslim Communities on Islam in America that reached nearly 4.7 million individuals. For the second year in a row, the Ambassador appeared on an episode of a popular television soap opera to promote religious tolerance; his appearance was seen by approximately 39 million people nationwide. Embassy and consulate personnel also led discussions and gave presentations at venues throughout the country, conveying the importance of diversity and religious tolerance to thousands of high school and university students.

On July 11, the Ambassador publicly supported via Twitter Jakarta Governor Basuki's efforts to reopen the Bukit Duri Ahmadi mosque.

As part of a September festival celebrating the 440th anniversary of the founding of Ambon, Maluku Province, the Ambassador gave remarks at a Protestant church calling for tolerance and rejection of religiously-motivated violence. Ambon was the center of a regional religious conflict that claimed thousands of lives between 1999 and 2002 and has seen occasional flare-ups of tensions since.

On May 21, the Principal Officer from the consulate in Medan made a statement to the press calling for the Aceh government to clarify whether the new sharia criminal code applied to non-Muslims.

The embassy, consulate general, and consulate also sponsored study exchanges and other civil society programs focusing on religious pluralism and tolerance, including programs for rising leaders and scholars. In January the embassy and consulate general in Surabaya sponsored the participation of four young students from the eastern part of the country in a five-week U.S. government exchange program on religious pluralism. The participants of this program subsequently hosted workshops and conferences on religious tolerance around the country. In September the embassy and consulates sponsored the participation of 13 Muslim educators in a U.S. government program on tolerance and diversity in education. Points of emphasis included the separation of religious groups and the state in U.S. public education.

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In December the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights of the Department of State met with high-level government officials, civil society groups, and the media, encouraging pluralism and the protection of religious minorities. The Under Secretary's public remarks in honor of International Anti-Corruption Day included the importance of upholding the rights of religious minority groups. Speaking at the 8th Bali Democracy Forum, she highlighted the importance of protecting religious freedom and minority rights and the principle of equality of all. The Under Secretary and the Ambassador engaged with key religious figures at Bali's Interfaith Forum and encouraged these leaders to share Bali's values on harmony with other parts of the country. The Under Secretary also encouraged leaders in Aceh to protect religious and other minorities and ensure that sharia legislation does not infringe on religious freedom.