



**CHRISTIAN
SOLIDARITY
WORLDWIDE**
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

CSW is a Christian organisation working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice.

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President Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr President,

We are writing ahead of your forthcoming visit to Indonesia for the APEC Summit, to bring to your attention serious concerns regarding widespread and grave violations of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (abbreviated to 'freedom of religion or belief') in the region, particularly in Indonesia and Burma, and to urge you to raise these concerns at every opportunity.

Indonesia is rightly respected and celebrated for its tradition of religious pluralism and harmony, encapsulated in its guiding philosophy, the 'Pancasila', and for its remarkable transition from dictatorship to democracy. It is often regarded as a role model of a Muslim-majority nation in which the rights of religious minorities are protected and democracy, a free press and civil society flourish.

However, these achievements are increasingly under threat by extremism and religious intolerance, and Indonesia's tradition of religious pluralism is in peril. In the past decade incidents of violence against religious communities have increased, affecting all minorities, including Christians, Buddhists and Ahmadiyya, Shia and Sufi Muslims, as well as indigenous traditional believers. Discriminatory laws have been introduced to restrict the activities of the Ahmadiyya community and the construction of churches. In several cases, churches which were legally licensed and fully authorised have been forced by local authorities to close, and even when the courts have ruled in favour of the churches, local Mayors have defied court rulings, undermining the rule of law. An atheist, Alexander Aan, has been jailed because he publicly declared his lack of religious belief, and a Shia cleric, Tajul Muluk, is imprisoned under the blasphemy law. Hundreds of Shia in East Java and hundreds of Ahmadis in Lombok have been displaced as a result of violent attacks by Sunni extremists, and the government has made little or no attempt to find a just and durable solution to their plight. The Front Pembela Islam (FPI) continues its vigilante harassment of Christians and Ahmadis, and the perpetrators of acts of violence have seldom been brought to justice.

Religious intolerance in Indonesia has spread across the nation, and increased over recent years. We therefore hope that in your discussions with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, you will address these issues, and urge him to take clear action to protect vulnerable religious minorities, ensure that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice, and uphold the right of churches and other places of worship to open, ensure that court rulings in such cases are upheld and implemented. It is in Indonesia's own interests to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief, and defend its tradition of religious pluralism.

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We would also like to highlight serious concerns regarding violations of freedom of religion or belief in Burma, following the outbreak of anti-Muslim violence in the country over the past year. We hope that in your discussions with the President of Burma and other regional leaders, you will address the rising religious intolerance in Burma, and highlight the need for the security forces in Burma to act to prevent further violence, stop violence when it breaks out, protect religious minorities, counter hate speech and incitement to violence, and promote inter-religious dialogue at the national and grassroots levels. Furthermore, we appeal to you to address the specific plight of the Rohingya people, who are rendered stateless under Burma's 1982 Citizenship Act and were victims of two campaigns of violence in 2012 which Human Rights Watch claims could amount to 'ethnic cleansing'. If these issues are not addressed as a matter of urgency, religious intolerance in Burma threatens to undermine the country's transition to democracy and has ramifications for regional peace, security and stability.

We believe both Indonesia and Burma are at a crossroads and if these concerns regarding religious freedom are not addressed, the consequences for both countries and the region could be very serious. There is, however, still an opportunity to prevent further religious intolerance, discrimination and violence, protect and promote religious pluralism and help both countries in their transition to prosperous, stable and democratic societies. We urge you to use the opportunities you have at APEC, in bilateral discussions, and with your own personal history in Indonesia, to speak for the values of religious pluralism, freedom, justice and peace.

Yours sincerely,



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