

# INDONESIA 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution provides a guarantee of freedom of religion and the right to worship according to one's own beliefs but states citizens must accept restrictions established by law to protect the rights of others and, as noted in the constitution, to satisfy "just demands based upon considerations of morality, religious values, security, and public order in a democratic society." Individuals continued to be detained and received prison sentences for violations of blasphemy laws. In April, police arrested individuals across the country for blasphemy related to social media uploads that included altered lyrics to a popular song about the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. Some local governments imposed local laws and regulations restricting religious observance, such as regulations banning Shia or Ahmadi Islamic practice. In Aceh Province, authorities continued to carry out public canings for sharia violations, such as selling alcohol, gambling, and extramarital affairs, including caning a woman, who received 200 strokes for her extramarital affairs with two men, who each received 100 strokes for their involvement. In Riau Province, a local community had been preventing renovations at a Catholic church until President Joko Widodo's cabinet became involved in February and mediated the dispute to ensure the renovations could begin. At the national level, government and religious leaders cooperated closely in developing restrictions to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some disputes occurred between government authorities and religious groups at the local level. In December, a joint ministerial decree outlawed the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a group known to observers for violence and religious intolerance, for its violations of law. That same month, police arrested the leader of the FPI for organizing large gatherings in violation of COVID-19 health protocols and for being involved in an altercation that left six FPI members dead. In September, a Christian pastor was killed in Papua Province, with human rights organizations stating that members of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) involved in a conflict with Papuan armed separatists were responsible. In February, local authorities in Bandung, Central Java, organized an interfaith parade that attracted more than 6,000 persons, where government and police officials signed a document stating their intent to support religious tolerance and harmony.

Shia and Ahmadi Muslims reported feeling under constant threat from "intolerant groups." Anti-Shia rhetoric was common in some online media outlets and on social media. Individuals affiliated at the local level with the Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI), a national, quasi-governmental Muslim clerical body, used

rhetoric considered intolerant by religious minorities, including Shia and Ahmadi Muslims. There were multiple reports of assaults on Shia Muslims at Shia events. In August, several Islamic organizations associated with the South Sulawesi chapter of the United Islam Community Forum (FUIB) released a statement condemning the Shia community and its plans to commemorate Ashura. In April and May, reports of a “worldwide Jewish conspiracy” spread on social media that claimed Jews, Christians, and communists were using COVID-19 and restrictions on public gatherings to destroy Islam. In March, an interfaith group of representatives from 11 youth wings of the largest religious organizations in the country signed a declaration promoting religious tolerance within the country and internationally.

In October, the U.S. Secretary of State gave a speech at an event hosted by Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest independent Muslim organization in the world, on the importance of religious freedom and pluralism. The Ambassador and embassy and consulate officials advocated for religious freedom with the government, including at the highest levels. Issues raised included actions against religious minorities, closures of places of worship, access for foreign religious organizations, convictions for blasphemy and defamation of religion, the importance of tolerance and rule of law, and the application of sharia to non-Muslims. Members of the U.S.-Indonesia Council on Religion and Pluralism – an organization endorsed by both governments and comprising religious and civil society leaders, academics, and experts from both countries – met with the Ambassador to discuss religious freedom. The embassy and consulates conducted extensive outreach to promote respect for diversity and religious tolerance through events, media interviews, social media initiatives, digital and public-speaking engagements, youth exchanges, and educational programs.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 267 million (midyear 2020 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, Gafatar, 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 five million Muslims are Shia. Many smaller Muslim groups exist; estimates put the total number of Ahmadi Muslims at 200,000 to 400,000.

Many religious groups incorporate elements of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, making it difficult to disaggregate the exact number of followers. An estimated 20 million persons, 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 Sikh population is estimated between 10,000 and 15,000, with approximately 5,000 in Medan and the rest in Jakarta. There are very small Jewish communities in Jakarta, Manado, Jayapura, and elsewhere, with the total number of Jews estimated at 200. The Baha'i Faith and Falun Dafa (or Falun Gong) communities report thousands of members, but independent estimates are not available. The number of atheists is also unknown, but the group Indonesian Atheists states it has more than 1,700 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 practice the religion of one's choice and specifies that freedom of religion is a human right that may not be limited. The constitution states, "The nation is based upon belief in one supreme God," but it guarantees all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief, saying the right to have a religion is a human right that shall not be discriminated against.

The constitution also says the state is based on the belief in one God, and the state is obliged to guarantee the freedom of worship. It states citizens must accept restrictions established by law to protect the rights of others and to satisfy, as noted in the constitution, "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,

oversteps common moral standards and religious values, or jeopardizes security or public order.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) extends official recognition to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The government maintains a long-standing practice of recognizing Sunni Islam as the official version of Islam of local Muslims, although the constitution has no such stipulation.

Blasphemy articles in the criminal code prohibit deliberate public statements or activities that insult or defame any of the six officially recognized religions or have the intent of preventing an individual from adhering to an official religion. These articles also stipulate that in any case of defamation of the six officially recognized religions, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the MORA, and the Attorney General's Office must first warn the individual in question before bringing a defamation charge. The articles also forbid the dissemination of information designed to spread hatred or dissension among individuals and/or certain community groups based on ethnicity, religion, or race. Individuals may be subject to prosecution for blasphemous, atheistic, or heretical statements under either of these provisions or under the laws against defamation and may face a maximum prison sentence of five years. A separate law forbids the electronic dissemination of the same types of information, with violations carrying a maximum four-year sentence.

The government defines a religion as having a prophet, holy book, and deity, as well as international recognition. The government deems the six officially recognized religions meet these requirements. Organizations representing one of the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law 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. Religious organizations other than the six recognized religions listed in the blasphemy law must obtain a legal charter as a civil society organization (CSO) from the MOHA. Both ministries consult with the MORA before granting legal status to religious organizations. The law requires all CSOs 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 religious hatred. By law, all religious groups must officially register with the government. Registration requirements for religious organizations include: (a) organizations may not contradict *Pancasila* and the constitution; (b) they must be voluntary, social, independent, nonprofit, and democratic; and (c)

they must have notarized articles of association (bylaws) and a specifically defined purpose. The organization then registers with the MORA. After MORA approval, the organization is announced publicly through the state gazette. Violations of the law may result in a loss of legal status, dissolution of the organization, and arrest of members under the blasphemy articles of the criminal code or other applicable laws. Indigenous religious groups must register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as aliran kepercayaan to obtain official, legal status.

A joint ministerial decree bans both proselytizing by the Ahmadi Muslim community and vigilantism against the group. Violations of the Ahmadi proselytizing ban carry a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy. According to the criminal code, vigilantism carries a maximum five-and-one-half-year prison sentence.

A joint ministerial decree bans proselytizing and other activities by the Fajar Nusantara Movement, known as Gafatar. Violations of the ban may be charged with blasphemy, and may receive a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy.

There is no joint ministerial decree that bans proselytizing by other groups. The MUI, however, has issued fatwas that ban proselytizing by so-called deviant groups such as Inkar al-Sunnah, Ahmadiyya, Islam Jama'ah, the Lia Eden Community, and al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah. While the MUI has not labelled Shia Islam as deviant, it has issued fatwas and guidance cautioning against the spread of Shia teachings.

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

A 2006 joint ministerial decree issued by the MORA and the MOHA states that religious groups may not hold services in private residences, and those seeking 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 responsible for implementing the decree, and local regulations, implementation, and enforcement vary widely. The decree also requires approval from the local interfaith council, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). Government-established FKUBs exist at

the provincial and district/city level and comprise religious leaders from the six official 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, but teachers are not always available to teach the requested religion classes. Under the law, individuals may not opt out of religious education requirements. In practice, however, students of minority religious groups are often allowed to opt out and attend study hall instead.

Under the terms of a 2005 peace agreement that ended a separatist conflict, Aceh Province has unique 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. The Aceh government states sharia in Aceh only applies to Muslim residents of the province, although nonresident Muslims and adherents to other faiths may accept sharia in lieu of punishment under the criminal code.

Aceh's provincial sharia regulations criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct, adultery, gambling, consumption of alcohol, and proximity to members of the opposite sex outside of marriage for Muslim residents of the province. An Aceh governor's decree forbids women from working in or visiting restaurants unaccompanied by their spouse or a male relative after 9 p.m. A Banda Aceh mayoral decree forbids women from working in coffee shops, internet cafes, or sports venues after 1 p.m. Sharia regulations prohibit female Muslim residents of Aceh from wearing tight clothes in public, and officials often recommended wearing headscarves. The regulation allows local officials to "remind" female Muslims of these regulations but does not allow women's detention for violating them. One district in Aceh prohibits women from sitting astride motorcycles when riding as passengers. The maximum penalties for violations of sharia regulations include imprisonment and caning. There are regulations intended to limit the amount of force that authorities may exert during a caning.

Many local governments outside of Aceh have enacted regulations based on religious considerations; most of these are in majority-Muslim areas. Many of these regulations relate to matters such as religious education and only apply to a specific religious group. Some religiously inspired local regulations in effect apply to all citizens. For instance, some local regulations require restaurants to close during Ramadan fasting hours, ban alcohol, or mandate the collection of *zakat*

(Islamic alms). Other local regulations forbid or limit the religious activities of religious minorities, especially Shia and Ahmadi Muslims.

The law does not explicitly forbid interfaith marriage, but it requires that parties must perform the marriage ceremony according to the rituals of a religion shared by both the bride and groom.

The law requires the leader of an aliran kepercayaan group to demonstrate group members live in at least three regencies, which are administrative designations one level below a province, before the leader may officiate legally at a wedding. This constraint effectively bars believers of some smaller groups without such geographic presence from receiving official marriage services from a member of their faith, although groups may aid each other and facilitate marriages by a group with similar faith traditions and rituals.

A joint ministerial decree requires domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from the MORA to receive funding from overseas donors and forbids dissemination of religious literature and pamphlets to members of other religious groups, as well as door-to-door proselytizing. Most religious groups may, however, proselytize in their own places of worship, except for some groups such as Ahmadi Muslims.

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

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

The government was involved in a number of actions against the FPI that included a December 7 altercation with police that resulted in the deaths of six FPI members; the December 12 arrest of the FPI's leader for violating COVID-19 related health protocols; and a December 30 government proclamation outlawing the FPI, its symbols, and any of its activities. Civil society and religious organizations have long accused the FPI of being a hardline Muslim group that engages in acts of violence, extortion, intimidation, and intolerance against other Muslims and religious and ethnic minority communities.

On November 10, Rizieq Shihab, the leader of the FPI, returned to the country after three years of self-exile in Saudi Arabia. Shihab had originally left in 2017 while facing criminal investigations related to accusations that he had committed blasphemy, spread hate speech, been involved in land grabs, insulted the national ideology of Pancasila, and violated the antipornography law. Following his return, Shihab organized several large gatherings in Jakarta and West Java on November 13-14. Police arrested Shihab on charges of involvement in organizing mass gatherings in violation of COVID-19 health protocols. On December 29, a South Jakarta District Court judge ordered authorities to reopen the investigation into Shihab's possible violation of the antipornography law for exchanging sexually explicit messages with a follower, a crime that carries a maximum punishment of 12 years in prison.

On December 7, police shot and killed six FPI members on the Jakarta-Cikampek toll road. According to Jakarta police, they received a tip that the six were part of a group planning to prevent police from questioning Shihab. Police officials said the shooting occurred in self-defense after the six FPI members attempted to attack the police. An investigation by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), an independent, government-affiliated body, was underway at year's end.

On December 30, Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Mahfud MD announced a joint ministerial decree that declared the FPI was a "nonregistered" organization; it banned the organization, its symbols, and its activities. The FPI's permit to operate as a religious organization had expired in June 2019, and it had been operating without a clear legal status for 18 months. Mahfud MD stated that during this period, the FPI had engaged in activities that violated the law and public order and refused to amend its articles of association to make it consistent with the law. A coalition of prominent human rights organizations released a statement saying that while they criticized the FPI's violent actions, hate speech, and violations of law, the joint ministerial decree was not consistent with the country's constitution and was an unjust restriction on the right of association and expression.

On September 19, Yerima Zanambani, a Christian pastor, was fatally shot in Intan Raya Regency, Papua. Local activists and religious leaders called for an independent investigation into the killing, accusing TNI personnel as being the likely culprits. Minister Mahfud MD established an independent fact-finding team that concluded TNI personnel may have been involved. Komnas HAM publicly released its own report into the incident, which determined that TNI personnel were responsible for the killing. A TNI internal investigation continued at year's



end. Human rights organizations and religious leaders linked the incident to operations by security forces against armed separatists in the region, but they did not attribute the attack to religious discrimination or persecution.

In Aceh, authorities continued to carry out public canings for sharia violations such as selling alcohol, gambling, and extramarital affairs. Canings continued to occur in public spaces despite the Aceh governor's 2018 order that they should be executed only in prison facilities. Government and sharia officials stated non-Muslim residents of Aceh could choose punishment under either sharia or civil court procedures, but Muslim residents of Aceh must receive punishment under sharia. According to media reports and human rights activists, several non-Muslim residents of Aceh chose punishment under sharia, reportedly due to its expediency and to avoid the risks of prolonged and expensive trials and possible lengthy prison sentences.

On February 12, authorities in Central Aceh Regency caned a Christian man 27 times for selling alcohol. On March 5, authorities in Bireuen Regency caned a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman 24 times each for sexual relations outside of marriage. In both cases, the non-Muslim men accepted punishment under sharia in lieu of punishment under the regular judicial system. On April 10, authorities in Aceh Tamiang Regency caned a woman 200 times for her extramarital affairs with two men, who each received 100 strokes. On April 21, authorities in North Aceh Regency caned two men 25 and 40 times, respectively, for sexual abuse of a child, and a couple convicted of adultery received 100 strokes each. On June 5, authorities in the North Aceh Regency began caning a man sentenced to 100 strokes for adultery. The man collapsed following the 74th stroke and was taken away in an ambulance.

In August, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation reported 38 blasphemy cases from January to May, two of which involved five individuals younger than 18. According to two government officials, blasphemy laws were often used to discriminate against religious minorities. On August 21, the chairman of Komnas HAM, Ahmad Taufan Damanik, said a lack of clarity in the blasphemy law meant it was often used to target religious minorities. On March 6, the commissioner of the National Women's Commission, Siti Aminah Tardi, said prosecutions under blasphemy laws targeted women, especially those from religious minorities.

On January 7, police in West Sumatra arrested Sudarto, an activist from Pusaka Foundation Padang, a human rights and environmental advocacy organization, for violating the Electronic Information and Transaction (ITE) law by disseminating

information with intent to incite hatred based on religion, ethnicity, race, and/or class. Sudarto had uploaded a post on Facebook that stated the local government in Dharmasraya Regency, West Sumatra, had banned Christmas. According to media reports, in December 2019, police officials in Dharmasraya had told the local community not to hold Christmas services there and instead travel to a church in neighboring Sawahlunto Regency, 75 miles from the village. Sudarto was released a day after his arrest.

On January 15, police in South Sulawesi arrested and charged Paruru Daeng Tau, the head of the Organization for Implementing the Mandate of Adat and Pancasila (LPAAP), with blasphemy after receiving a complaint that Tau allegedly told his followers he was the last prophet and to disregard the basic tenets of Islam. The local MUI branch in Tana Toraja Regency had issued a fatwa in December 2019 denouncing LPAAP as a heretical organization. On June 3, Tau was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to two years and four months in prison.

In February, media reported that a panel of judges decided that Suzethe Margaret, a Catholic woman accused of blasphemy after bringing a dog into a mosque in June 2019, was guilty of blasphemy but would not be sent to prison due to mental illness. Prosecutors had previously recommended that she be sentenced to eight months in prison.

In March, police in Probolinggo Regency, East Java, arrested Indriyanto for sharing a picture of Hajar Aswad (a spiritually significant stone set in one of the corners of the Kaaba) that resembled female genitalia and for sharing an image that showed the word “Allah” being defecated on. On July 9, the Probolinggo State Court of East Java sentenced Indriyanto to four years’ imprisonment and imposed a five million rupiah (IDR) (\$360) fine for violating the ITE law.

In April, police arrested and charged individuals across the country for social media uploads that included an altered version of “Aisyah Istri Rasulullah,” a popular song about the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. On April 10, Rahmat Hidayat, a YouTube celebrity popularly known as Aleh Khas Medan, was arrested in Medan, North Sumatra, for posting a YouTube video that included the song, as well as for actions authorities deemed offensive. On October 1, Hidayat was sentenced to seven months in prison under the ITE law. On April 15, police in Surabaya arrested and charged Bambang Bima Adhis Pratama under the ITE law after Bambang uploaded a video of himself on social media, singing the song with changed lyrics. On April 30, police in South Sulawesi detained Bahrul Ulum, a university student, for tweeting the changed lyrics of the song. In May, police in

Gorontalo Province arrested three young adults after they uploaded a video of themselves singing and dancing to the song with changed lyrics on WhatsApp.

On May 4, police in Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, detained a woman for blasphemy after she uploaded a video to TikTok of herself dancing in clothes traditionally worn during prayer. Following the arrest, an official from Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic groups in the country, encouraged local police to release the woman, stating that she did not intend to commit blasphemy. It was unclear whether police released her.

On July 9, port police in Makassar arrested and charged Ince Ni'matullah with blasphemy after she allegedly threw a Quran during an argument with her neighbor.

On August 4, a court in Medan sentenced Doni Irawan Malay to three years in prison for blasphemy. According to prosecutors, on February 13, Malay desecrated a Quran in the Al-Mashun Mosque, including putting it down his pants, tearing out pages, and throwing it in the trash.

On August 8, police arrested Apollinaris Darmawan in Bandung under the ITE law for a series of tweets and videos posted on Twitter and Instagram that, among other things, stated Islam was not a religion and should be expelled from the country. Immediately prior to the man's arrest, a crowd outraged at his postings stormed his house, dragged him into the street, and stripped him of his clothes. It did not appear that police detained anyone involved in the assault. On November 24, public prosecutors formally charged Darmawan under the ITE law and sought the maximum allowable punishment of six years in prison and an 800 million rupiah (\$57,000) fine. Darmawan had been convicted and sentenced in August 2017 to four years in prison and an 800,000,000 rupiah (\$57,000) fine for violating the ITE law for a series of pictures and articles he posted to Facebook which depicted Allah as a monster, the Prophet Muhammad as homosexual, and which made other disparaging descriptions of Islam. Darmawan was released early from prison in March as part of an assimilation program. It is not clear if this release was related to a government effort that helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 in overcrowded prisons.

On September 29, a court in Medan sentenced Muhammad Qadafi, alias Udin, to 18 months in prison for blasphemy after he was found guilty of throwing a Quran inside a mosque during an incident on March 25.

On December 4, police arrested a Muslim cleric in Cibadak Regency, West Java, for distributing a video in which the man conducted the call to prayer with altered wording that made it a call to jihad instead. The man was arrested under the ITE law for spreading hate. Prominent Muslim leaders from Nahdlatul Ulama and the MUI publicly condemned the video when it began circulating in late November.

On December 28, police called in Haikal Hassan for questioning related to potential violation of the ITE and blasphemy laws for stating he had met with the Prophet Muhammad during a dream. Haikal was the spokesman for the 212 Alumni Association, a group formed in commemoration of the December 2, 2016, protests by conservative Islamic groups against then Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama that called for his prosecution under blasphemy laws.

From August 18 to August 27, a coalition of CSOs hosted an online conference entitled “Blasphemy Law: Protection or Criminalization?” The conference explored trends, patterns, and developments in criminalization involving accusations of blasphemy, as well as what were described as “discriminatory practices” occurring in the country. The organizers of the conference surveyed the 2,247 participants and found that 78 percent believed the greatest challenges facing religious freedom were discriminatory regulations, intolerant acts against minorities, and a lack of remedies for victims. The survey also showed that 84 percent agreed efforts were needed to eliminate discriminatory regulations, promote effective law enforcement against those who violate others’ religious freedom, and provide remedy for those accused of violating blasphemy laws.

The government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing policies to prevent the spread of the virus through limiting public events, including religious gatherings. At the national level, government and religious leaders cooperated closely in developing these restrictions. For example, on March 16 the MUI issued a fatwa recommending the suspension of communal Friday prayers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In June, President Joko Widodo met with interfaith leaders to discuss how their organizations and religious groups were planning to adapt to COVID-19.

Several other disputes between government authorities and religious groups occurred at the local level regarding health restrictions related to the COVID-19 virus. In April, members of Ar-Rahmah Mosque in Parepare city, South Sulawesi, reported the district head, Andi Ulfa Lanto, to police for blasphemy after Lanto attempted to stop Friday prayer at the mosque. Mosque officials said Lanto’s actions constituted blasphemy because the local COVID-19 regulation encouraged

persons only to avoid mass gatherings, as opposed to explicitly banning Friday prayer. On May 1, Parepare Mayor Taufan Pawe responded by filing a police report accusing the members of the mosque of failing to adhere to health protocols and of obstructing an official from conducting his duties. The South Sulawesi chapter of the MUI and the FUIB stated that Lanto did not commit blasphemy.

On April 19, two men entered the residence of a Christian family in Bekasi Regency, West Java, and demanded they terminate a religious service being held in the home. The disruption was recorded and disseminated widely online. According to media reports, one of the men was a local Muslim leader.

On January 27, the Regent of Bogor, West Java, Ade Munawaroh Yasin, issued a letter to the local Ahmadiyya community stating that Ahmadi Islam was illegal in Bogor and calling on the Ahmadi Muslims to stop all activities inside and outside their compound in Kemang Bogor. On March 16, activists from the Benteng Aqidah Alliance, an ad hoc group comprised of local Islamic groups seen by observers as more hardline, rallied in front of the regent's office to support her decision to outlaw Ahmadi activity in Bogor. In response, a group of 31 local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) created an Alliance for a United Bogor to condemn the rally and to support tolerance in Bogor.

According to media reports, in July, the Ternate Municipality Team for Supervision of Beliefs and Religious Sects in Society (PAKEM), which includes the police, the Prosecutor's Office, MORA, FKUB, and MUI, implemented a ban on activities by the Shia Jafariah religious group in the North Maluku city. The PAKEM meeting was held after the Shia group hung a banner to celebrate Eid al-Fitr. The North Maluku chapter of the MUI issued a fatwa against the group in 2015, designating it a heretical organization.

On July 27, the congregation of the Indonesian Pentecostal Efata Church in Indragiri Hilir Regency, Riau, accepted an offer from the local government to relocate its church to a location 10 kilometers (six miles) away. In 2019, local officials had prevented the congregation from worshiping at the location because it was not formally registered as a house of worship.

On August 5, the Bali Customary Village Council, created in 2019 by the Bali provincial government, banned all worship activities by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in the province's 1,493 customary villages. The council chairman stated ISKCON teachings were fundamentally different from Hindu teachings, and therefore the ban was necessary to preserve Hindu and

Balinese culture. The Bali chapter of the Indonesian Hinduism Society (PHDI) publicly revoked its recognition of ISKCON and encouraged the central PHDI to do so on a national level.

On July 1, the MORA spokesperson stated the ministry would involve the TNI in efforts to increase religious harmony. Legislators and a coalition of CSOs stated that security forces' involvement in religious affairs would likely create artificial and coerced religious harmony rather than the interfaith dialogue required for true harmony. On July 7, then Minister of Religious Affairs Fachrul Razi, a retired TNI general, clarified before the legislature that the MORA had only requested the military's input, not involvement, into religious efforts, and specifically only in Papua, to help ease tensions there.

The Smart Pakem smartphone app, launched by the Jakarta Prosecutor's Office in 2018 to allow citizens to report heresy and blasphemy cases, was removed from both the Google Play Store and the Apple Store. Following its launch, human rights organizations had criticized the app and requested Google and Apple to remove it. It was unclear what caused its removal.

The MORA maintained its authority at the national and local levels to conduct the "development" of religious groups and believers, including efforts to convert minority religious groups to Sunni Islam. Beginning in 2014, Ahmadiyya communities in several West Java regencies reported that local governments were forcing or encouraging the conversion of Ahmadi Muslims, using a requirement that Ahmadi sign forms renouncing their beliefs in order to register their marriages or participate in the Hajj. However, in July, members of the Ahmadiyya community in Tasikmalaya City, West Java, reported they were no longer required to sign such forms prior to marriage or the Hajj.

According to religious groups and NGOs, government officials and police sometimes failed to prevent "intolerant groups" from infringing on others' religious freedom and committing other acts of intimidation, such as damaging or destroying houses of worship and homes. Groups often identified as intolerant included the FPI, Islamic Community Forum, Islamic Jihad Front, and Indonesian Mujahideen Council.

Throughout July and August, the East Nusa Tenggara FKUB held a short story competition on the value of religious harmony within the province. The organizers received 71 entries from university students. To celebrate the winning entries, the

local FKUB chapter collaborated with local print media to publish the stories. The top 10 stories were also compiled into e-books, and published.

In August, East Java Governor Khofifah Indar Parawansa designated three villages in the province as “Harmony Awareness Villages,” Mojorejo village in Batu, Tenduro village in Lumajang, and Wonorejo village in Situbondo Regency. Governor Khofifah and East Java MORA officials selected them based on accomplishments in promoting religious tolerance.

In September, Minister of Villages, Underdeveloped Regions, and Transmigration Abdul Halim Iskandar designated Banuroja village in Gorontalo Province as a “Pancasila Village.” Iskandar and ministry officials selected Banuroja due to its ethnic and religious diversity.

In September, Tajul Muluk, leader of a community of more than 500 Shia Muslims, stated his intent to convert to Sunni Islam, along with the majority of his community. The community had been displaced to the outskirts of Surabaya, East Java, since 2012 after communal violence forced them from their homes in Sampang Regency, Madura. In a September 10 letter to the Regent of Sampang, Muluk requested that he and his followers be converted to Sunni Islam. The letter and subsequent media interviews did not make clear the reason for the request for conversion. According to media reports, the regent stated that he had not requested Muluk write the letter.

In January, a group of local human rights organizations released a report entitled *2020 Outlook on Freedom of Religion and Faith in Indonesia*. The report stated the number of religious freedom violations was increasing every year and criticized the government’s approach to religious freedom as increasing based on majoritarianism and repression. Speaking at the report release, Alissa Wahid, Coordinator of Jaringan Gusdurian and daughter of the late former president Abdurrahman Wahid, stated, “Favoritism and majoritarianism are getting stronger in Indonesia. The government is not doing enough to enforce the constitution, and more and more conflicts are being solved by local agreements, which often represent the interests of the majority.” Asfinawati, chairwoman of the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, stated during the report’s release that “the state has been employing a repressive approach [to religious differences], which only deepens conflicts and segregation instead of ending intolerance.”

In April, the legislature resumed discussions on a draft penal code that was tabled for further discussion in September 2019 due to mass public protests. CSOs

expressed concerns that the legislation might expand the blasphemy laws and other criminal sections that could be used to restrict religious freedom. On April 14, the National Alliance of Reform of the Criminal Code, a coalition of 41 CSOs, released a statement criticizing the legislature's proposal to resume deliberations in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic on the grounds that it would prevent meaningful public participation. The alliance was also critical of numerous provisions in the draft, including sections that might restrict religious freedom. The legislature continued discussing the proposed legislation at year's end.

In July, the Wahid Foundation released a report documenting cases of religious freedom abuses, as defined by the foundation, that occurred from 2009 to 2018. The report found that during that period, there were 1,033 cases of abuse by state actors and 1,420 cases by nonstate actors, with the largest categories of state abuses being the restriction/closure of places of worship (163), and nonstate abuses being intimidation (205). According to the report, cases of persecution by state actors increased during the Joko Widodo administration compared to the prior administration, but nonstate and violent cases decreased.

The governors of two provinces requested the removal of translated Bibles that were available through smartphone apps. On May 28, the Governor of West Sumatra, Irwan Prayitno, sent a letter to the Minister of Communication and Information requesting the removal of an app called "The Bible in the Minangkabau Language." Pravitno stated that the translation had made the Minangkabau people uncomfortable because it contradicted their culture. On May 30, acting Governor of Aceh Nova Iriansyah sent a letter to Google Indonesia requesting it remove an app titled "Aceh Holy Book," a version of the Bible translated into the Acehnese language, stating it was provocative and triggered unrest in Acehnese society. In both cases, the developer chose to voluntarily remove the application from the Google Play Store. Sources stated that there was no indication that the application violated Google's content policy or that the Ministry of Communication and Information requested the developer to remove the application.

Across the country, minority religious groups, including Muslim groups in non-Muslim majority areas, continued to state the official requirement for a specific number of supporters to build or renovate a house of worship was a barrier to construction. Members of the Jewish community stated that since their numbers nationwide were so few, it was impossible for them to build new synagogues.



Local governments did not issue permits for the construction of new places of worship even when congregations obtained the required number of applicants, since opponents of the construction sometimes pressured other congregants not to approve. In many cases, a few vocal opponents from the local majority religious affiliation were reportedly sufficient to stop construction approvals. State-recognized religious leaders in government-supported interfaith forums reportedly found ways to block aliran kepercayaan believers from constructing places of worship, largely through stringent permit requirements. Aliran kepercayaan adherents said they feared accusations of atheism if they contested such treatment in court. Christian leaders reported that local officials indefinitely delayed the approval of requests to build new churches because the officials feared construction would lead to protests. Ahmadi and Shia Muslims and Christians said they also faced problems when seeking approval to relocate to temporary facilities while a primary place of worship underwent renovation.

Local governments, police, and religious organizations reportedly tried to close religious minority groups' houses of worship on the grounds of permit violations, often after protests from "intolerant groups," even if the minority groups had been issued a proper permit.

Many congregations could not obtain the requisite number of nonmember signatures supporting construction of houses of worship and often faced protests from "intolerant groups" during the application process, making permits nearly impossible to obtain. Even when authorities issued permits, they halted construction on some houses of worship after facing legal challenges and public protests. Protestant and Catholic churches also reported that "intolerant groups" forced them to pay protection money if they continued operating without a permit. Some houses of worship established before the joint ministerial decree on house-of-worship construction came into effect in 2006 reportedly were still obligated to meet the requirements or face closure. Many houses of worship operated without permits in office buildings, malls, private homes, and shops.

In February, President Joko Widodo and then Minister of Religious Affairs Fachrul Razi interceded with the local government of Karimun Regency, Riau, to allow the renovation of a local Catholic church. The Saint Joseph Catholic Church had received a permit to renovate its premises in 2019, but local opposition prevented the beginning of construction. Following the intervention, construction of the Church began in April.

In February, President Joko Widodo approved the construction of an underground tunnel connecting Istiqlal Mosque, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, with the Jakarta Cathedral. President Joko Widodo termed it the “Tunnel of Brotherhood” to represent the deep connections among the country’s religions. Construction was to occur as part of a larger renovation of Istiqlal Mosque. Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo, head of the Jakarta Archdiocese, stated the tunnel was a continuation of the vision of the country’s first President, Sukarno, who decided to build Istiqlal Mosque opposite the cathedral to promote a message of tolerance. Istiqlal Mosque Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar said that one day the road separating the two houses of worships might be removed to create one large interfaith campus shared by the two congregations.

In February, local authorities in Bandung, Central Java, organized an interfaith parade that attracted more than 6,000 persons. At the conclusion of the event, officials from the local legislature, government, and police signed a document stating their intent to support religious tolerance and harmony in Bandung.

Ahmadiyya congregations faced pressure from local officials to stop reconstruction and renovations on their houses of worship. According to a complaint filed by Ahmadi Muslims in Sukabumi city, West Java, to Komnas HAM in February and March, local government, police, and military officials attempted to intimidate the Ahmadi community in order to stop renovation of the Al-Furqon Mosque. Local officials visited the site on several occasions, warning that continued renovation would cause unrest and lead to attacks. According to media reports, on March 16, local officials permanently sealed the mosque. In a similar case, on January 27, the government of Tasikmalaya city, West Java, enacted a joint decree that banned renovation of the Ahmadi Al-Aqso Mosque, as well as forbidding Ahmadis from conducting worship activities publicly or proselytizing. On April 4, local officials sealed the mosque.

On March 6, protesters rallied against the construction of a Baptist church in the Tlogosari Kulon area of Semarang city, Central Java. The church had obtained a building permit from the city government in 1998, but construction had not been completed. Following the protests, local police contacted the church and requested it suspend building for three months to avoid more protests. On September 24, the mayor of Semarang issued a new building permit for the church, and construction resumed in October. Similar protests had stopped construction of the church in August 2019.

On July 20, local officials closed a tomb built by members of the Sunda Wiwitan religious group in Kuningan Regency, West Java. Local authorities said the group had built a monument, which according to local regulations required a building permit, while members of Sunda Wiwitan said that the structure was just a tomb and thus did not require a permit. Members of Sunda Wiwitan filed a complaint with Komnas HAM, which offered to mediate between local authorities and the religious group. On August 13, local officials removed the seals on the structure and it was reopened.

According to media reports, in September, in Cikarang city, West Java, individuals protested against a Christian church and used large speakers playing Islamic chants to drown out religious services. Leaders of the protest stated the church was located in a residence that did not have a valid permit to operate as a house of worship.

On September 17, the Regent of Singkil Regency, Aceh, sent a letter to Pakpak Dairi Christian Church ordering it to stop construction on a house for the pastor of the congregation. According to the letter, the house was being built without a proper permit and threatened the religious harmony of the area. Earlier in September, the congregation sent a complaint to the local office of the Komnas HAM that said local authorities were not responding to their communications. The congregation stated that since the building was a house for the pastor, it should not require the same approval as a house of worship.

According to media reports, on September 21, government authorities in Ngastemi village in Mojokerto Regency, East Java, asked a Christian woman to stop renovating her house after they suspected she was using her home as place of worship without a permit. Reportedly, local authorities halted the renovation after they discovered one of the newly renovated windows depicted a cross.

In March, the Paramadina Center for the Study of Religion and Democracy released a research study on the 2006 joint ministerial decree on houses of worship and FKUBs. Researchers received questionnaires from 24 provincial-, 33 city-, and 110 regency-level FKUBs – approximately 30 percent of the total 548 FKUBs in the country. The study found discrepancies among FKUBs in recommending whether new houses of worship should be built. For example, the FKUB in Solo, Central Java, had received 396 requests to build houses of worship, approving them all. The FKUB in North Lampung Regency, Lampung, however, had received 47 requests and refused 38 of them. The report concluded that vagaries in the 2006 decree meant the performance of FKUBs depended on local government

regulation; the membership of FKUBs was not particularly diverse and was made up mostly of older, male government employees; and the FKUB's mission to promote interfaith dialogue and prevent religious conflict was hampered by the administrative workload related to processing requests for the construction of houses of worship.

Aliran kepercayaan followers continued to say teachers pressured them to send their children to religious education classes conducted by one of the six officially recognized religions. Minority religious groups not among the six recognized religions said that schools often allowed their children to spend religious education time in study hall, but that school officials required parents to sign documents stating their children received religious education. Ahmadi Muslim students reported religion classes on Islam focused only on Sunni teachings.

On June 12, the Regent of Gowa, South Sulawesi, implemented a Quran reading-fluency test for Muslim civil servants seeking promotion. The local regency required 76 local civil servants to read the Quran to be considered for promotion. Fourteen civil servants failed to pass the test and were told to achieve a sufficient level of fluency in six months; otherwise, they would be not be considered.

According to media reports, in April, the local government of East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, asked the Ahmadi Muslim community there to relocate from their current temporary shelter to a new location. The community had been housed in the shelter since being displaced from their village of Gereneng by communal violence in 2018. The community refused the government request to relocate.

In Mataram, the capital of West Nusa Tenggara, 131 Ahmadi Muslims remained internally displaced in cramped apartments after a mob expelled them from their East Lombok village in 2006. According to media reports in June, the governor of West Nusa Tenggara offered to build a new apartment for the community, but as of the end of the year no progress had been made.

Although the government generally allowed citizens to leave the religion column blank on their identity cards (KTP), individuals continued to report difficulties accessing government services if they did so. Faced with this problem, many religious minority members, including those following indigenous beliefs, reportedly chose to identify as a member of an officially recognized religion close to their beliefs or reflecting the locally dominant religion. According to researchers, this practice obscured the real numbers of adherents to religious

groups in government statistics. A 2017 Constitutional Court ruling allowed citizens to select indigenous faiths on their KTPs. According to media reports, in January, 450 adherents of Sapta Darma, an indigenous religious group, were able to change their KTPs to reflect their religion.

NGOs and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the government to remove the religion field from KTPs. Religious minorities reported they sometimes faced discrimination after others saw their religious affiliation on their KTPs. Members of the Jewish community said they felt uncomfortable stating their religion in public and often chose to state they were Christians or Muslims depending on the dominant religion where they lived, due to concern that local communities did not understand their religion.

Men and women of different religions who sought to marry reportedly had difficulties finding a religious official willing to perform a wedding ceremony. Some couples of different religions selected the same religion on their KTPs in order to marry legally.

Minority Muslim groups, including Ahmadis, Shia, and Gafatar, also continued to report resistance when they applied for KTPs as Muslims, effectively denying them access to public services if they could not secure KTPs.

Both the central and local governments included elected and appointed officials from minority religious groups. For example, Andrei Angouw won the December 9 election for mayor of Manado, becoming the country's first Confucian mayor. President Joko Widodo's new 34-member cabinet included six members of minority faiths (4 Protestants, 1 Catholic, and 1 Hindu), the same total number as during his previous administration.

Many individuals in the government, media, civil society, and general population were vocal and active in protecting and promoting tolerance and pluralism. On August 14, President Joko Widodo delivered his annual Independence Day address, during which he stressed the need for an inclusive and united society. He said, "Indeed, democracy guarantees freedom, but it is only for freedom that respects other people's rights. No one should be self-righteous and blame others. No one should think of themselves as the most religious." At a December 27 interfaith conference, newly appointed Minister of Religious Affairs Yaquut Cholil Qoumas stated that Ahmadi and Shia Muslims have the same protections under the law as any other citizen. Qoumas also stated that he opposed Islamic populism,

which sought to use religion as a source of division and conflict, and encouraged religious differences to be resolved through dialogue rather than violence.

The MORA introduced a “Religious Moderation” campaign that sought to improve religious tolerance. In January, President Joko Widodo signed the *2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan*, a strategic document for the government’s overall development efforts, which included “Religious Moderation” as a goal. The national plan budgeted 21.9 trillion rupiah (\$1.56 billion) for the MORA to pursue this goal from 2020 to 2024. Religious moderation was also included as a goal in the MORA’s strategic plan released in June. The principles underpinning the Religious Moderation campaign were laid out in a book published by MORA in October 2019. According to officials and civil society organizations involved in the effort, specific activities to be undertaken by the campaign were still being developed.

In September, Komnas HAM released its *Standardized Norms and Regulations on the Rights to Freedom of Religion or Belief*. The document is a consolidated reference guide for national and international law related to religious freedom in Indonesia, including definitions of key terms and rights.

Foreign religious workers from numerous religious groups continued to state they found it relatively easy to obtain visas, and some groups reported little government interference with their religious activities.

Police provided special protection to some Catholic churches in major cities during Sunday services and Christian holidays. Police also provided special protection to Buddhist and Hindu temples during religious celebrations.

According to the law, a marriage is legitimate if performed according to the laws of the respective religions and beliefs of the parties concerned. Religious leaders, human rights activists, and journalists stated, however, that interreligious marriage was difficult unless the groom or bride was willing to marry according to the religious rituals of only one of the two religions. Many individuals preferred to go abroad for interreligious marriage, although this option was severely limited due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

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

In November, suspected Islamic militants killed four Christians in Lemban Tongoa village, Central Sulawesi Province. The perpetrators also burned down several

homes, including one used as a house of worship. Following the attack, President Joko Widodo called the killings “beyond the limits of humanity.”

Shia and Ahmadi Muslims reported feeling under constant threat from “intolerant groups.” Anti-Shia and anti-Ahmadi rhetoric was common in online media outlets and on social media.

Individuals affiliated at the local level with the MUI used rhetoric considered intolerant by religious minorities, including fatwas declaring Shia and Ahmadi as deviant sects. In February, the chairman of the East Java MUI, Abdusshomad Buchori, stated he wanted the national MUI to release a new fatwa against the Shia community. The national MUI did not address or repudiate local MUI officials who called for such fatwas.

In August, a group of youths attacked a Shia prewedding ceremony in Solo city, Central Java, shouting anti-Shia slogans and assaulting several participants. Following the event, local police arrested several suspects for the assault.

According to Shia Rights Watch, in August, unknown individuals assaulted Shia Muslims attending a welcome dinner for a new Shia leader in the community, resulting in injuries to two youths.

In August, several Islamic organizations associated with the South Sulawesi chapter of the FUIB released a statement condemning the Shia community and its plans to commemorate Ashura, and said they would disrupt any events that the Shia community planned. The chairman of the South Sulawesi chapter of the FUIB, Muchtar Daeng Lau, cited an MUI fatwa that denounced Shia Islam as a form of heresy and condemned Shia commemorations of Ashura.

In April and May, reports of a “worldwide Jewish conspiracy” spread on social media that claimed Jews, Christians, and communists were using COVID-19 and related restrictions on public gatherings to destroy Islam. Large Muslim organizations dismissed the conspiracy theory, with the secretary general of Muhammadiyah, Abdul Mu’ti, stating in April that it was baseless.

Many of the largest and most influential religious groups and NGOs, including the two largest Islamic groups in the country – Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah – officially endorsed and advocated for tolerance, pluralism, and the protection of minority groups on numerous occasions. For example, on March 4, an interfaith group of representatives from 11 youth wings of the largest religious organizations

in the country signed a declaration promoting religious tolerance within the country and internationally.

In January, the Alvara Research Center, a sociopolitical survey and marketing research company, released *Indonesia Moslem Report 2019: The Challenges of Indonesia Moderate Moslems*. The study consisted of face-to-face interviews with 1,567 Muslims across the country's 34 provinces. The study's findings included the following: 69.3 percent of respondents approved of or were neutral to the construction of houses of worship of other religions located near them, while 19.2 percent opposed such construction; 56.3 percent approved of or were neutral to the idea of non-Muslim political leaders, while 32.5 percent said they would not support a non-Muslim political leader; 82.9 percent would openly accept and help neighbors of different religions, while 16.3 percent said they would accept them but would limit the relationship due to religious differences; 0.5 percent said they would not accept neighbors of different religions; 81.6 percent believed the secular national ideology of Pancasila was an appropriate foundation for the country, while 18.3 percent believed a religious-based ideology would be more appropriate.

In November, the Center for the Study of Islam and Society at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University released a study showing that conversations on social media about religion were dominated by what it termed conservative narratives and traditional interpretations of the original teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Researchers categorized religious conversations on Twitter between 2009 and 2019 as being dominated by Islamist (4.5 percent), conservative (67 percent), moderate (22.2 percent), or liberal (6.1 percent) narratives. The lead researcher of the study, Im Halimatussa'diyah, told media that a "noisy minority" pushing a conservative narrative was often able to co-opt conversations, while moderate narratives struggled to gain traction on social media.

In December 2019, the MORA released its Religious Harmony Index for 2019. The index used a survey of more than 13,000 respondents in 34 provinces to measure harmony across three dimensions: tolerance, equality, and solidarity. The index was scored from 0 to 100, with 100 being the most harmonious. The national score for 2019 was 73.83, up from 70.90 in 2018. According to the index, the most religiously harmonious provinces were West Papua (82.1), East Nusa Tenggara (81.1), Bali (80.1), North Sulawesi (79.9), and Maluku (79.4), all in the central and eastern parts of the country. The five lowest-rated provinces were Aceh (60.2), West Sumatra (64.4), West Java (68.5), Banten (68.9), and Riau (69.3), all in the west. Some civil society organizations and experts criticized the



index as providing an overly optimistic assessment of religious freedom and harmony in the country.

On February 14-16, the Association of Journalists for Diversity held a three-day training event for students from different faiths and universities in Jakarta. Participants stayed with Ahmadiyya, Sunda Wiwitan, Catholic, and Christian communities in Kuningan Regency, West Java. After the event, the association encouraged participants to write about their experiences to promote religious freedom and tolerance among youth.

Hindu sites experienced acts of vandalism. In March, unknown individuals damaged three religious statues at the Agung Jagatnatha Temple in Denpasar city, Bali. In January, a Hindu school in Banyuwangi city, East Java, reported that unknown perpetrators broke into the facility and vandalized property.

On August 20, members of the local chapters of GP Ansor and Banser, organizations associated with Nahdlatul Ulama, confronted individuals suspected of supporting Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in Pasuruan Regency, East Java. HTI is the Indonesian branch of the Hizbut Tahrir, outlawed in 2017 by the government. Video of the confrontation spread widely online and appeared to show GP Ansor and Banser officials aggressively questioning and reprimanding alleged HTI supporters. Then Minister of Religious Affairs Fachrul Razi praised the organizations' actions, while the secretary of the East Java chapter of the MUI, Ainul Yaqin, stated they should have reported the case to local police.

On September 29, a mosque in Tangerang regency, Banten, was vandalized with anti-Islamic messages written on the walls. On October 1, police arrested a suspect.

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

On October 29, the Secretary of State visited the country and addressed an audience of interfaith leaders at an event on religious pluralism hosted by Nahdlatul Ulama. The speech focused on several themes: the importance of religious tolerance and pluralism in democracies; opposing blasphemy accusations and discrimination against nonofficial religions; and calling on all religious leaders to defend the rights of other religions. The speech was followed by a question-and-answer session with attendees, where the Secretary emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue in pursuing peace and human rights around the world.

The embassy, the consulate general in Surabaya, and the consulate in Medan regularly engaged with all levels of government on religious freedom issues, such as actions against religious minorities, closures of places of worship, access for foreign religious organizations, convictions for blasphemy and defamation of religion, the undue influence of “intolerant groups,” the importance of the rule of law, the application of sharia to non-Muslims, the importance of education and interfaith dialogue in promoting tolerance, the equal protection of all citizens regardless of their religion or belief, and promotion of tolerance in international forums.

The U.S.-Indonesia Council on Religion and Pluralism is a civil-society-led entity endorsed by both governments that includes a diverse group of experts, academics, and religious and civil society leaders established to promote interfaith dialogue, pluralism, and tolerance. The Ambassador engaged its leadership by discussing ways to augment the council’s activity on issues affecting the country’s religious communities. To mark Religious Freedom Day on January 16, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith gathering with council members, representatives of the country’s six officially recognized religions, and representatives of nonrecognized religions, including Ahmadi Muslims and Baha’is. During the event, the Grand Imam of the National Istiqlal Mosque, Nasaruddin Umar, who has published a series of weekly columns about religious pluralism in the United States since his return in 2019 from a U.S. exchange programs, thanked the Ambassador for frequent interfaith engagement during his tenure and noted the United States had been the most active country in doing so. In October, the chair of the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights met with members of the council to discuss the environment of religious freedom in the country.

In August, the embassy initiated a project with the Yogyakarta-based Srikandi Lintas Iman to promote religious pluralism through early childhood education and utilizing social media among women. The project used funding related to the Department of State’s Meeting on Education, Resilience, Respect, and Inclusion. In August, the embassy launched a digital storytelling project, which places students from 20 high schools across four provinces (East Java, Central Java, West Java, and Jakarta) in interfaith groups to create videos, stories, photographs, and essays on themes of tolerance, diversity, and peace. Interactive webinars facilitated group discussions, and online content-creation workshops equipped diverse, interfaith groups of students with the skills to identify and avoid misinformation.

The embassy continued an \$11.5 million project through a cooperative agreement with the Asia Foundation to engage with legal aid organizations to defend human rights and religious freedom in six provinces, including all provinces in Java except Banten and Papua. The embassy supported these partners in developing advocacy papers for outreach on regulations that discriminate against religious minorities, improving their capacity to represent minority religious groups in legal cases, undertaking strategic public campaigns to build wider civil society engagement in challenging intolerance, and publishing periodic reports on abuses of religious freedom.

The embassy continued a \$27 million project aimed at developing more effective tools and systems to bolster religious tolerance. The project partnered with national and local-level government officials, CSOs, universities, research institutions, and grassroots movements that focus on promoting religious freedom and tolerance.

Early in the year, the embassy launched a three-million-dollar activity to promote religious tolerance and pluralism among high school students. Through partnerships with the Ministries of Religious Affairs and Education and Culture, the project aimed to design and implement innovative arts and cultural curricula in select districts to advance community resilience to religious intolerance.

During Ramadan, the embassy and consulates conducted extensive outreach throughout the country to highlight religious tolerance. The consulate in Surabaya hosted a Ramadan chat series with American Muslims that highlighted the contributions of U.S. Muslims in American society. The embassy hosted two events at its @America venue. The first consisted of former participants of embassy exchange programs discussing their experience of religious freedom in the United States during Ramadan. The second program celebrated Eid al-Fitr with an Egyptian-American singer-songwriter, who discussed his experiences practicing his religion in the United States.

The Ambassador and Charge d’Affaires met periodically with leaders of the country’s two largest Muslim organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, to discuss religious tolerance and pluralism and to further develop areas of cooperation.

Embassy officials met regularly with counterparts from other embassies to discuss support for freedom of religion and belief and to exchange information on areas of concern, programs being implemented, and possible areas of cooperation.

In February, 23 leaders of religious groups and communities in East Java visited the consulate in Surabaya to learn about the consulate's activities in the east, as well as to exchange ideas on how to collaborate to promote religious freedom.

In August, the consulate in Surabaya hosted an event on religious freedom and multiculturalism that was headlined by Zuhairi Misrawi, a former participant in a U.S. exchange program.

The embassy posted translated speeches and commentary on religious freedom by the Secretary of State, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and other high-level government officials on its website. The embassy also developed graphics for social media and sent information to local journalists to encourage them to cover these issues.