

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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Response to Information Request Number:	IDN04001.ZSF
Date:	November 14, 2003
Subject:	Indonesia: Information on Attacks by Muslims Against a Chinese Christian Neighborhood in Jakarta in September 2002, and Police Protection of Chinese Christians in Jakarta
From:	CIS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Indonesia / Ethnic conflicts / Intolerance / Prosecution / Protection / Religious conflicts / Religious minorities / Vulnerable groups

Query:

Is there any available information about Indonesian Muslims attacking a Chinese neighborhood in Jakarta on September 15, 2002? Additionally, are there current reports that police and/or other government authorities in Indonesia have improved their efforts to protect Chinese Christians in Jakarta?

Response:

The Resource Information Center (RIC) was unable to locate any sources of information to confirm independently that attacks by Muslims against Chinese Christians in a Jakarta neighborhood took place on or around September 15, 2002. The human rights group International Christian Concern (ICC) maintains a detailed chronology of events involving Christians in Indonesia on its web-site (URL: <http://www.persecution.org/Countries/indonesia.html>). The chronology lists eight events concerning Christians in Indonesia in September, 2002— none of which referred to violence in Jakarta (ICC updated Jul 2003).

In regard to whether police and/or other government authorities in Indonesia have improved their efforts to protect Chinese Christians in Jakarta, Indonesia specialists at the

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U.S. Department of State and at Boston University both told the RIC in telephone interviews that the police in Jakarta have made a significant attempt over the past two years to improve protection of Chinese Christians in Jakarta. Both referenced past incidents in Jakarta involving Chinese Christians but stated that Chinese Christians in Jakarta are not affected necessarily by current violence against Christians elsewhere in Indonesia (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003, Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The Boston University expert, who is a professor of anthropology, said that in the aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings, the police in Jakarta have been improving efforts to protect all citizens of Jakarta (Professor 30 Oct 2003). He also stated that many Chinese Christians in Indonesia "are ethnically distinguishable from non-Chinese and the subject of some popular resentments by non-Chinese, 'native' (pribumi) Indonesians" (Professor 14 Nov 2003). He noted that "Chinese Indonesians as a group also tend to be better off economically, and as such are the target of some discriminatory practices" but said that he does not feel that this discrimination in general would "justify blanket asylum requests" (Professor 14 Nov 2003). He did say, however, that "there have been Chinese individuals who have been the subject of special discrimination whose cases might require individual attention" (Professor 14 Nov 2003).

The Indonesia specialist at the U.S. Department of State told the RIC that there has been a recent up-take in violence against Christians in the Moluccas and in Sulawesi but that instead of "mob violence" involving average Muslims against Christians, these incidents are linked to activity by extremist groups. He said there have been reports that in some of these instances of violence, Muslim bystanders have provided or attempted to provide assistance to the Christian victims (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003).

According to the May 2002 US Commission on International Religious Freedom report on Indonesia, conflict between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia's Moluccan islands starting in May 1999 has resulted in the death of "approximately 9,000 people" (USCIRF 3 May 2002). According to the State Department's INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT 2002: "During late 2001, the Government worked to end Muslim-Christian violence in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas by dispatching thousands of soldiers and police officers to the area and by brokering peace agreements between the two communities in December 2001 and February 2002. The agreements reduced but did not end the violence" (U.S. DOS 7 Oct 2002).

The JAKARTA POST reported on December 27, 2002, that police continued to guard churches throughout the country during the Christmas holiday season, in response to bomb blasts that occurred in 2000 and 2001 (Siboro 27 Dec 2002). In contrast, the World Evangelical Alliance reported May 21, 2003, that in Bekasi, 20 kilometers southeast of Jakarta, "churches are being threatened and intimidated by local radical Muslim groups, and local authorities are doing nothing to protect the Christian minority or rein in the Islamist militants" (World Evangelical Alliance 21 May 2003).

On October 14, 2003, Agence France Press reported that the Government of Indonesia was deploying police and troops to avert Muslim-Christian violence in Central Sulawesi province (AFP 14 Oct 2003).

On September 22, 2003, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, on a visit to New York, stated that her government pays attention to the interests of all parties, including the minority. This was stated in response to a question on how the government protects Indonesian minorities, especially Christians (INNA 23 Sep 2003).

In regard to Jakarta in particular, the Indonesia desk at the U.S. Department of State reported that in 2002, "religious extremists, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)...physically attacked a number of nightclubs, bars, and billiard clubs in the name of religion, claiming that the establishments were immoral. The most high-profile attacks occurred in Jakarta on October 5, 2002" (U.S. DOS 30 Oct 2003). According to an AP article, the Government of Indonesia charged the FPI leader, Habib Rizieq, with "inciting violence," and he is currently on trial in Jakarta. "[In justifying the attacks, Rizieq]...claimed to be destroying immoral establishments that were allowed to operate with the support of the police. But detractors claimed he was only doing the bidding of the police, who were angry at establishments that refused to pay protection money" (Casey 8 May 2003).

According to the Boston University professor, the establishments in Jakarta that were attacked by the FPI were typically Chinese-owned [Chinese Indonesians tend to be Christian], but the attacks were largely economically motivated (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The professor said that there were always police who were very unhappy with "freelance deal-making" between high-ranking police command officers and extortionist groups such as FPI, and that serious physical confrontations between some police officers and the FPI made this tension clear. He also said that the police were not engaged in these extortion schemes for religious but for economic reasons, and that the schemes were not sponsored at the institutional level of the police force (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The professor also said that, in a couple of instances, the FPI have attacked Christian churches in Jakarta, though not under the name "FPI". The FPI also burned down an evangelical Christian school in Jakarta in late 2000 or early 2001. The professor's impression is that the FPI are less active today because while they once enjoyed the blessing of high ranking members of the Indonesian armed forces, this backing has diminished (but not disappeared) (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

The professor said that the Indonesian police have greatly improved their efforts to protect ordinary citizens and have become more assertive in their efforts to curb activities of criminal gangs who operated under the garb of Islamist activists. He feels there is "discrimination" against Christians in Jakarta, but not "systematic persecution" and that the situation has "significantly improved" over the last year partly due to improvements in the

Indonesian police force. The professor indicated that the situation in the Moluccas and Sulawesi, where there has been real ethno-religious violence involving Muslims and Christians (although not typically Chinese Christians), is very different from the situation in Jakarta, and that he is not seeing systematized mistreatment of Chinese Christians in Jakarta (Professor 30 Oct 2003).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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