



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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28 March 2006

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Indonesia: Reports of attacks against ethnic Chinese, Christians and non-Christians alike; state protection available (2004 - 2006)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Reports of attacks specifically against Chinese Indonesians between January 2004 and March 2006 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. In 13 March 2006 correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a fellow in Southeast Asian studies at Monash University, who is also the author of a book on anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, wrote that she had not come across any reports of "significant" attacks against Chinese Indonesians between March 2005 and March 2006. *The Encyclopedia of Diasporas* reports that, "[s]ince the end of the repressive Soeharto regime [in 1998], aside from localized incidents, the ethnic Chinese have been left more or less alone" (2004, 805). Conflicts in various parts of the country, such as Aceh, have instead consumed the attention of Indonesians, according to the *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* (2004, 805). The Southeast Asian studies fellow at Monash University remarked, however, that "the situation of ethnic Chinese, though much improved, remains legally and socially vulnerable" (13 Mar. 2006). Information on that situation, including reports of discriminatory practices against Chinese Indonesians, follows.

There are about six million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, which represents roughly two per cent of the total population (*Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities* 2005, 609). Other estimates of the number of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, however, vary from 1.5 per cent to 4.0 per cent of the population (Dow Jones International News 20 Jan. 2004; *The Economist* 4 Feb. 2006, *Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006). *The Economist* pointed out that many Chinese Indonesians likely did not identify themselves as such in the 2000 census, "for fear of discrimination" (4 Feb. 2006). Jemma Purdey, a former political science fellow at the University of Melbourne, commented in a paper she presented at the 2004 Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) conference in Canberra that the majority of Chinese Indonesians adhere to non-Muslim faiths, including Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism (Purdey 29 June-2 July 2004, 1). Pockets of Catholics and Protestants found throughout Indonesia altogether make up about eight per cent of the population (*Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities* 2005, 610).

Some ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have been centuries-long inhabitants of Indonesia and are, according to the *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities*, "nearly assimilated [and] largely Christianized" (ibid., 609). These Chinese Indonesians speak the Indonesian language and carry Indonesian names (ibid.) - a legacy of the Suharto regime, which banned expressions of Chinese heritage (Budiman 2005, 98). Since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, successive governments have repealed legislation that discriminated against the Chinese (*The Economist* 4 Feb. 2006; see also *Straits Times* 19 Mar. 2004), leading to their gradual participation in politics, the arts and the media (*Wall Street Journal Europe* 9 Feb. 2005). For instance, in 2002, then-president Megawati Sukarnoputri declared the Chinese New Year a national holiday (*Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006; see also *The Economist* 4 Feb. 2006). More Chinese are joining political parties and running for election, Chinese-language newspapers have been introduced, and interest in Chinese language and culture has increased (*Straits Times* 19 Mar. 2004; *Wall Street Journal Europe* 9 Feb. 2005; see also AFP 26 Jan. 2006). Chinese Indonesians have also established organizations to lobby the government to abolish discriminatory legislation (Budiman 2005, 100).

Post-1998 reforms, however, have so far been "insufficient to deliver freedom from institutionalized discrimination for the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia," according to Tim Lindsey (Lindsey 2005, 42), director of the Asian Law Centre at the University of Melbourne (Lindsey and Pausacker 2005, xiii). While some members of the Chinese community have complained that the state is unable or unwilling to protect their rights, during Chinese New Year celebrations in 2006, current president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono acknowledged that Chinese Indonesians continue to face discrimination (*The Jakarta Post* 8 Feb. 2006). The prevailing perception of the ethnic Chinese as rich businessmen who dominate the Indonesian economy reportedly persists (AFP 26 Jan. 2006; *The Jakarta Post* 3 Sept. 2004; *Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006; see also AFP 19 Jan. 2004). But, according to *The Jakarta Post*, it is not possible to calculate the exact economic power of any ethnic group in Indonesia (3 Sept. 2004). The *Straits Times*, citing an academic of Chinese Indonesian affairs, related that, in reality, wealthy Chinese Indonesians represent about 20 per cent of the entire Chinese community, as many ethnic Chinese make a more modest living as small- to medium-scale entrepreneurs, labourers, or hawkers (3 Feb. 2006).

Despite the repeal of administrative rules deemed discriminatory, Chinese Indonesians still experience difficulties obtaining identity documents such as birth and marriage certificates (*The Jakarta Post* 28 Jan. 2006a;

ibid. 28 Jan. 2006b; Lindsey 2005, 45; *Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006). Anti-discrimination lobbyists complain that, although the state abolished the requirement that Chinese Indonesians present a "Letter Proving the Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia" (SKBRI) in order to obtain various documents, including identity cards and passports, some government offices continue to ask for its presentation (AFP 19 Jan. 2004; *The Jakarta Post* 28 Jan. 2006a; ibid. 28 Jan. 2006b; *Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006; see also *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* 2004, 806; Lindsey 2005, 52-53). Tim Lindsey observed that local and regional bureaucrats continue to exercise discretion in implementing anti-Chinese policies (Lindsey 2005, 53). When applying for citizenship, for example, Chinese Indonesians are, according to a spokesperson of the Anti-Discrimination Institute of Indonesia (LADI), sometimes asked for supplementary documentation, or must pay bribes in order to obtain commonplace documents (*Straits Times* 3 Feb. 2006). Charging the ethnic Chinese higher fees for processing documents also occurs, owing to the perception that the Chinese are wealthy (Lindsey 2005, 54). According to LADI, there are roughly 300,000 ethnic Chinese who have not been able to obtain citizenship, despite having spent their entire lives in Indonesia (AFP 26 Jan. 2006). There are, in addition, several hundred Chinese Indonesians in Jakarta alone who are both poorly educated and now unable to set up businesses because they did not/do not have the required citizenship documents (AFP 26 Jan. 2006). A human rights lawyer in Indonesia told an Agence France-Presse (AFP) journalist that "[m]ore than 50 laws and regulations remain that discriminate against ethnic Chinese;" the reporter, for his part, stated that the Chinese "have remained practically aliens" in Indonesia (AFP 19 Jan. 2004).

In late 2005, the news media reported that Chinese Indonesians were receiving anonymous cellular text messages, which threatened violence and accused them of being "robbers with Indonesians' money" (*Straits Times* 3 Nov. 2005; see also AFP 2 Nov. 2005). President Yudhoyono asked the police to investigate the allegations, though one of his spokespersons explained that it would be difficult to trace the perpetrators because they had used prepaid cellular telephones to send the messages (ibid.). Further information on the incident could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Reports of violence against Christians in Indonesia between 2004 and 2006 did not, in most cases, indicate the ethnicity of the victims (AP 31 Oct. 2005; Dow Jones International News 31 Dec. 2005; Reuters 7 June 2004). In June 2004, Reuters reported that police suspected the involvement of about 50 local men in attacks on two churches in Tangerang, near Jakarta, during services, which left a preacher injured (ibid.). In the paper she presented at the 2004 ASAA Conference, Jemma Purdey also made note of these attacks on Chinese Christian churches in Tangerang, as well as other places of worship in Bogor (Purdey 29 June-2 July 2004, 6). A pastor and a parishioner were injured while attempting to stop the attackers, according to Purdey (ibid.). Reuters noted that local Muslim communities in Indonesia have resisted attempts by Christians to open new churches for fear they might proselytise (Reuters 7 June 2004).

In late October 2005, three Christian schoolgirls were beheaded, and another injured, in Central Sulawesi province (AP 31 Oct. 2005; Dow Jones International News 31 Dec. 2005), where almost half of the population is Christian (ibid.). Other attacks in Central Sulawesi were reported: a May 2005 market bombing which killed twenty-two people, most of them Christians; an October 2005 blast on a minivan carrying Christians, resulting in one death; and another market bombing in December 2005 which killed eight and wounded forty-five, most of them believed to be Christians (ibid.; AP 31 Oct. 2005). Police said it was unclear who was behind these attacks (ibid.; Dow Jones International News 31 Dec. 2005), although prior to the December 2005 bombing, there had been repeated warnings that the militant group Jemaah Islamiyah were planning attacks during the holiday season (ibid.). The government reportedly responded to these warnings by deploying thousands of troops across the country to guard churches and places frequented by foreigners (ibid.). Associated Press (AP) reported that, in the months preceding the October 2005 beheading of the three schoolgirls, Indonesia's "highest Islamic body" had condemned liberal Islamic thought and radical Islamic groups were campaigning to prevent the building of Christian churches (31 Oct. 2005). Following the murder of the schoolgirls, the government sent over 1,500 troops to patrol the province (AP 31 Oct. 2005). By 31 December 2005, no charges had been laid in connection with the slayings or with the May 2005 market bombing (Dow Jones International News 31 Dec. 2005).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

Two oral sources did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sources, including:** *Asian Ethnicity*, Asian Human Rights Commission, Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Minority Rights Group International, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (Resource Information Center), United States Department of State.

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