

Indonesia's Intolerance

A few years ago Indonesia made headlines for being a country that lacks tolerance of religious minorities in Indonesia. The Jakarta post wrote that "...The UN Human Rights Committee questioned Indonesia's commitment to protecting religious freedom in June when it reviewed the government's report on compliance with the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Indonesia signed and ratified in 2006."

Indonesia's law requires a person's religious affiliation on their ID card, between Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or 'other.' And many claims, even the United Nations, that this depicts religious intolerance in the country.

History shows how Indonesia has assimilated and facilitated so many cultures and religions in the country. Islam came peacefully there in the 4th century CE, whereas Catholicism and Protestantism were welcomed with open arms, despite the colonization by the people who introduced the religions to the Indonesian people. And following the Chinese invasion of Java in 1293, their religion and culture have stayed. We have gotten used to it. It is in our blood.

I also would like to point out to a 20-m high menorah in Manado, North Sulawesi, built in 2009. The menorah, being possibly the largest Jewish symbol in the world, costs up to US\$150,000 and it was paid by the local government. Elisheva Wiriaatmadja, one of the founders of Eits Chaim Indonesia Foundation, even said that the biggest obstacle of Jewish people in Indonesia is the lack of kosher meal or Jewish religious books, for a community that until 2016 recorded to have around 2000 members. Wiriaatmadja also admitted that the Indonesian people are more open about other religions than most people think.

And another striking religion-among others- that I myself am so eager to see is that of the people in Toraja. Toraja or Tana Toraja is situated in South Sulawesi, and the Torajans are mostly Christians, others are Muslims, and a minority still holds on to Aluk Tadolo, a local belief that means "Way of the Ancestors". It consists of animism, myths of the walking dead, ancient and intricate funeral rituals, and it is now the second most popular destination for tourists in Indonesia following Bali.

The issue today following possibly the biggest ever demonstration in Indonesia on November 4th is that once again, Indonesians are said to be intolerant and racist to a non-Muslim Chinese ethnic non-active Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or better known as Ahok. The public demanded Ahok to be detained for the accusation of blasphemy of Islam. In Indonesian law, a person committing blasphemy could be sentenced for up to five years. And similar cases have happened before, and those people who committed blasphemy was instantly detained, put in trial, and once found guilty, they were put to jail. That is what the public demanding the government to do.

Yes Indonesia is the biggest Muslim populated country in the world. But a report from the Christian Broadcasting Network in 2012 has shown that the growth of church establishment in Indonesia is the highest in the world. And how many countries in the world would make religious holidays of Islam, Catholics, Protestant, Hindu, Buddha and Confucius as public holidays? And last but not least, who voted for Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok to be Jakarta's governor a few years back? Many Muslims would proudly claim that they did. Yet I see 206,000 results when typing Indonesia's religious intolerance on my search engine.

I was there on November 4 demonstration to cover the story. Personally, it was a very peaceful demonstration since the beginning until nearing the end, when a lot of the people have actually left the event. I was in Istiklal mosque during the Friday mass prayer. Istiklal mosque is situated right across another historical building, the Cathedral church. The mosque, its perimeters and the road between Istiklal and Cathedral were full of demonstrators. Yet YouTube videos and news outlets reported of a couple that were helped by the police and the demonstrators to be able to go to the Cathedral church to have their wedding in place.

I hope I have shown enough evidence of Indonesia's religious tolerance. This country is one of the most

ancient homes of man, followed by migrant from unknown regions, followed by so many different cultures and religions brought by different groups, and all of us are still here, together. We are mature enough to appreciate differences, and also mature enough to respect our own beliefs highly.