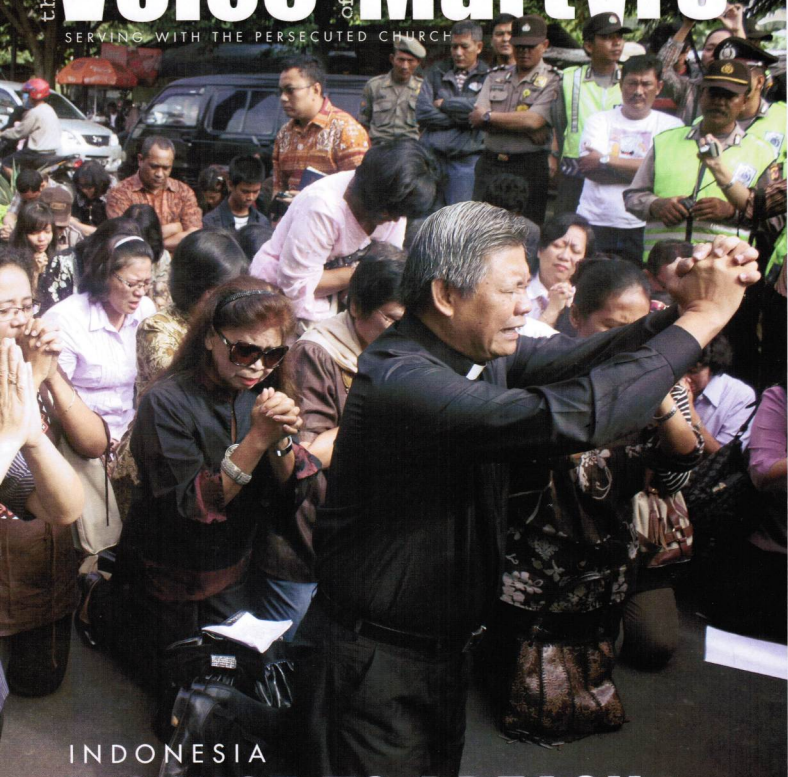


the Voice of the Martyrs

SERVING WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH




INDONESIA

LICENSE TO PREACH

MARCH 2012





Christians from the Yasmin church have been meeting along the street since being denied access to their church building.

LICENSE TO PREACH

by Dr. Tom White

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation in the world. Although the Indonesian constitution guarantees religious freedom, Islamic radicals have gained influence in all levels of government during the last 12 years. In the last two years, at least 59 churches have been attacked, burned or vandalized. In addition, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is now considering a bill that would further limit the ability of Christians to practice their faith. If enacted, the "Religious Tolerance" law would regulate proselytism, religious holidays, funerals, religious education and the construction of places of worship.

Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church

A church in Bogor City, West Java, has fought an ongoing battle with city officials over its right to exist, despite a Supreme Court order confirming the church's right to meet for worship. In 2002, the 150 believers from the Yasmin Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) collected 170 signatures from neighbors who approved construction of the church's new building on its recently purchased property in Bogor. Indonesian law requires the signatures of at least 60 local residents in support of any new place of worship.

The mayor of Bogor granted a building permit for the church's new sanctuary on July 13, 2006. But the church was ordered to

stop construction and move less than two months later, initiating a struggle between the church and city government that has continued for more than five years.

On Feb. 10, 2007, after construction had begun and a roof was on the church, a Muslim mob opposed to the church held a demonstration in front of the provincial House of Representatives. Four days later, the city froze the church's building permit. The church then filed legal complaints that progressed slowly through the judicial system. In 2009 and 2010, the higher courts and eventually the Indonesian Supreme Court sided with the Yasmin church, and they resumed construction.

Under pressure from Muslim



In October 2010, the congregation celebrated Communion in the street as security forces and Muslim protesters watched.

fanatics, Mayor Diani Budiarto called for local police and other security forces to keep the new church building closed. In complete disregard of the high court's ruling, police posted a sign on a fence outside the church on March 11, 2010, reading "disegel" — sealed.

Church members wrote letters to the police and local military notifying them that they intended to begin worship services on April 11. The day before the first service, police arrived at 5 p.m., cut the church's lock off the gate and replaced it with one of their own. They then hung a second sign on the gate reading "disegel." Prevented from entering their new sanctuary, the congregation met for worship on a small strip of property along the road

in front of their church. They have been meeting there ever since police sealed the church. "The pastors who brought the sermons spoke about loving those who hate you," said a church member.

The church has been meeting outdoors for more than a year. "When it looked like we would have rain on our church service, we used ropes, plastic tarps and bamboo poles," one church member said. "We would tie the big plastic tarps to the fence and run the ropes through the door handles of cars, making a big tent so we could worship. Then our photocopied hymn sheets would not get wet."

On March 11, 2011, the mayor revoked the church's building permit, claiming the church had falsified the signatures of local residents on its permit application. He also threatened action against the church if it insisted on standing by the Supreme Court ruling.

Three days after the mayor revoked the church's permit, more than 200 local government security forces converged in front of the church with armored cars and water cannons. On special occasions like Easter, local police increased their show of force with six mobile brigades, police tactical vehicles and troops from the Indonesian army. In addition, Muslim organizations set up camp near the church and protested with banners expressing hatred and slander about the apostasy of Christians.

"The police said that they were there to protect us," a GKI church leader explained. "But on the street they would try to disturb our communion service, pushing us and trying to grab the bread and wine, trying to scare us. Between the 150 of our congregation and the 70 Muslim demonstrators were 300 to 500 police and military personnel.

"Choirs from other churches in our area would come and sing in a show of love and support for us. Our own choir of 20 would also sing. When we began to sing, the mob on the other



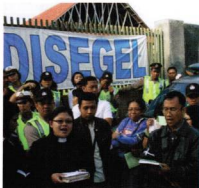
Security forces removed a sign announcing the resumption of church services.



The Bogor mayor ordered police to keep the church closed, ignoring a Supreme Court ruling that the Christians be allowed to use their building. A church member fainted after standing outside in the hot sun for a church service.

side of the police would become calm. When we stopped singing, they would again start chanting 'Allahu Akbar' — Allah is great.

"After the Supreme Court agreed with our right to reopen and worship inside our building, the mob became even angrier," a church leader said. "Five times we had Sunday school there when we were sure the children would be safe. Hearing the mob shouting, the children would ask us, 'Why are those people making so much noise?' We would explain that because we are Christians



The mayor declared the church "disegel," or sealed, but the hearts of these Christians are open.

they try to disturb us.

"All of these incidents are in the plan of God. In such times, here on the sidewalk, we can testify about Christ to the world and the policemen and the other officials who are there. We read in the Bible how Christians were persecuted, so we are not afraid or discouraged."

Faith Built on the Rock

In Solo, Central Java, the Bethel Full Gospel Church faced a more sudden and violent confrontation. Pastor Yonatan Yap Setiawan tells their story:

"On Sunday, Sept. 25, 2011, Pastor Sigit Purbandoro from Surabaya had preached about 'God's Help' from Psalm 121:1-8. The prayer of blessing was uttered at 10:45 a.m., and believers left their pews and walked out from our church hall. The singers and music band were sending out the

believers with praise and worship songs. Suddenly, a loud explosion shattered the joyful atmosphere.

"I ran to the center of the stage. I thought the blast sound came from the sound system speakers, but then I saw thick white smoke coming from the main door. This smoke had a sharp powder smell. I ran to the source of the white smoke. There was blood on the floor, and some were crying out hysterically in pain.

"'Lord, help your children; don't let them die,' I uttered many times in my heart. I told the wounded believers, 'Don't be afraid! The Lord is protecting you. You will get help.'

"I found a dead body and realized that this was the suicide bomber. The deacons helped me secure the church building. The church's security personnel closed the church's gate so that no outsiders could come into the



The blood of a suicide bomber stained the church floor, but his attack served only to strengthen church members' faith.

building. In 15 minutes the church deacons managed to evacuate all 30 of the victims to the hospital. None of the wounded died, only the bomber. Fourteen of the 30 victims had to stay in the hospital to undergo operations.

"I left the hospital and returned to the church. I sat on a chair not far

Bombing Victim Remains Faithful

Delviana Alovita, an 18-year-old woman who was severely wounded in the bombing of the Bethel Full Gospel Church, said the attack was unforgettable but has not made her fearful.

"After the second Sunday service, my parents, sister and I walked down from the church's balcony to the first floor, and I stopped for a moment to check my mobile phone," she said. "I leaned against the main door outside of the sanctuary. Suddenly I heard the shocking sound of an explosion, and in seconds my face was full of blood. Even though he was wounded in his arm by shrapnel from the bomb, my father took off his shirt and tried to clean my face. At that moment I uttered the name of Jesus many times because I believed only he could help me. I felt the Lord Jesus was beside me. I didn't feel any pain. I didn't even cry. On the other hand, when others looked at me they cried.

"My father took me to the hospital in the church's car. At that moment, everything was moving so fast. I was told that I would undergo an operation right away. I was wondering, 'Why should I undergo an operation? What had happened to my forehead?' I was confused and began to fear. I tried to fight this fear. I knew that the Lord would never leave me alone. I surrendered to the Lord to face what might happen. When the nurses wheeled me into surgery, my lips started to sing a statement of faith that came from my heart, 'In the name of Jesus there is a victory.'

"My operation was successful. Three pieces of metal from the bomb were removed from my forehead. I'm thankful that even though I was not fully fit, I took part in our Christian Youth Concert on Oct. 3.

"I'm thankful to the Lord because he keeps strengthening me. I know that he is using me to show his might and power. I diligently go to church on every Saturday at 4 p.m. to attend the youth meeting and every Sunday at 9 a.m., the adult meeting. I want to use my life to serve the Lord because I know our Lord has changed my life. Please keep praying for my health because I often get headaches. Whatever my condition, I don't hate those who harm me."



Delviana returned to church less than two weeks after being injured in a bombing.



VOM paid medical expenses for some of the bombing victims, including Delviana's father, who helped her despite his own injuries.

from the dead body of the bomber. After looking at the bomber's body for a while, I thought, 'Should his life end tragically, wasted like this?' At that moment there was no hatred or revenge in my mind, but only love for this bomber who had chosen the wrong path.

"Based on the video recorded by the church's closed circuit television, the bomber had come into the church's hall through a small side door wearing a white long-sleeve shirt, black trousers, a cap and sunglasses. He had a small bag slung over his chest.

"When the bomber pressed the button, shrapnel spread out. A piece of sharp pipe as big as an adult's fist ejected and pierced the church's ceiling. If it had hit believers, they would have died instantly. But none of our believers died. The happiest thing is that all the victims suffered but are not angry at the Lord. They were harmed, but they forgive their enemies.

"Church member Yulianti, who is 74 years old, told me, 'I'll stop attending church meetings for a while.' But on the following day she said, 'After I'm healed, I'll go to church again. I'm not afraid anymore, because Lord Jesus is everything.' She said, 'Pastor Yo, through this way I can testify how great our Lord Jesus is. And this is the chance to show to unbelievers that I'm not afraid to walk with the Lord Jesus and show them that I forgive those



VOMedical personnel met with Pidongo Tondawami, injured on Dec. 31, 2005.

who have harmed me.' This is faith which is built on the Rock.

"Let us sow the seeds of love and forgiveness, not revenge and hatred. We love and we forgive. No bitterness, but thankfulness to the Lord. After dark, then the light comes. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."