

Indonesia deploys 192,000 security personnel to safeguard Christians over Christmas



Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, announced on 17 December the deployment of 192,000 security personnel to safeguard Christians, and other minorities, during the Christmas period – a heightened time of risk for Islamic extremist attacks.

Authorities on the south-east Asian archipelago, where Christians make up at least 15% of the population, are posting police officers and navy personnel across the country, including the predominantly Christian provinces of Papua and West Papua, to secure celebrations held over Christmas and also on New Year's Eve (the latter is often wrongly perceived in non-Western countries as a Christian festival).

The force is larger than the 167,000 personnel deployed last year. A police spokesman said, "Based on the intelligence data, there are potential risks ... so we are taking preventative measures." He added, "As many as 10,000 personnel will

be deployed in Jakarta alone.”

Until a generation ago, Muslims and Christians lived peaceably as equals in Indonesia but since the 1980s the role of Islam in public life has dramatically increased. This can especially be seen in the semi-autonomous province of Aceh where local authorities have implemented sharia law, and in the blasphemy case brought in 2017 against the Christian former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as “Ahok”.

Islamic terrorists previously struck Indonesia in May 2018. A family of IS suicide bombers targeted early morning worship services at three churches in Surabaya, on the island of Java, killing 13 people and wounding more than 40 others. It was the deadliest atrocity since Christmas Eve 2000, when 19 people were killed and more than 100 injured in a wave of coordinated attacks on church services in Jakarta, Bekasi, Medan, Sukabumi, Mojokerto, Bandung, Batam Island and Lombok.

In November 2019, the Indonesian authorities announced they were cracking down on hard-line Islamist ideology by urging members of the public to report extremist content posted online by civil servants and taking action to replace school textbooks deemed to contain radical material.

— Source: barnabasfund.org