

Religious intolerance, extremism in Indonesia worry rights group

LONDON – An alarming rise in extremism and intolerance has prompted a London-based rights group to express “deep concern” over religious freedom and violence after a two-week fact-finding visit to Indonesia.

The team from Christian Solidarity Worldwide met representatives of Catholic and Protestant churches, interfaith groups and Muslim civil society groups in June, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide joined three Indonesian groups – the Wahid Institute, the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace and the Human Rights Working Group – in welcoming the establishment of a human rights dialogue between Indonesian authorities and the European Union, which is scheduled to start June 29.

The fact-finding mission heard from the Setara Institute that it had recorded more than 200 violations of religious freedom in 2009. Among the violations were at least 30 attacks on churches or church property. The Jakarta Christian Communication Forum said it had recorded at least 20 violations so far in 2010.

In addition to Christians, the London rights group found that the Muslim Ahmadiya sect faced “serious violence and discrimination” throughout the country, particularly since the government banned it from propagating its beliefs in 2008.

“We applaud Indonesia’s long tradition of religious pluralism and freedom, but we are deeply concerned that intolerance and extremism are gaining ground, said Stuart Windsor, Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s national director.

“We urge the Indonesian authorities to create a climate more conducive to pluralism by revising or repealing intolerant legislation and providing pro-active support to protect religious minorities from attacks,” he said.

The group said the EU-Indonesian dialogue should address abuses of the country’s 1965 Religious Defamation Law.

In April, the Constitutional Court, Indonesia's highest tribunal, rejected an appeal submitted by seven Indonesia human rights groups and four prominent Islamic scholars to repeal the law.