Muslims-Christians Relationship in Indonesian Reformed Era

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Jakarta, 2015

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ABSTRACT

Religious intolerance in Indonesia apparently comes together with political transition from an authoritarian into a democratic state in late 1990s. This article finds that religious intolerance comes from both government and civil society in terms of religious groups. Of religious groups, religious intolerance in Indonesia mainly happened to Indonesian Muslims and Christians. To analyze their relationship, this article looks at some relevant cases such as churches destruction, banned and closing in the last two decades. This research will deeply elaborate the discussion of why religious intolerance between Muslims and Christians significantly increases in Indonesian Reformed Era. To explain the relationship between Indonesian Muslims and Christians in the reformed era, the author will elaborate three influencing factors namely the historical mutual perception between Muslims and Christians, the weakness of government to uphold and implement rules of conduct regarding religious freedom and the impact of decentralized system. This study will conduct case study approach as it looks at number of variables and complex relationship between central government and local government and between different religious groups in terms of Islamic and Christian groups. Of case study approaches, this research will also use historical studies to seek information with regards to Muslims-Christians relationship from the earlier period of Indonesia to the last decade. Data is gathered through interview with some religious leaders and from various literatures such as reports, books, journals, articles, newspapers, and online news.

Keywords: Muslims-Christians relationship, religious intolerance, religious freedom, democracy

Introduction

The case of Tolikara, a remote district in Papua province, once again provoked what so-called religious intolerance in Indonesia, mainly between Islam and Christian groups. Superficially, some people perceive this case as a religious conflict, particularly when a small mosque was burnt and destructed at the time of Muslims' Feast Day on 17 July 2015. Without deeper analyzing, the leader of Jemaah Muslimin (Hizbullah), Dr. Yaksyallah Mansur bravely concluded this case as an attack to all Muslims all over the world and accused Christians from

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Gereja Injili di Indonesia (GIDI) as the perpetrator of the burnt. (Serambi Indonesia, 2015) More sinisterly, Habib Rizieq, the Imam of Front Pembela Islam (FPI) or Islamic Defender Front, promptly declared war with Christians and the members of GIDI in Tolikara as well as called his members for retaliation and conducting jihad in Papua. (www.fpi.or.id, 2015)

Not only did some radical Muslims announce their threaten statements, but also they reacted violently. As a sign of retaliation, some militants burnt two churches, Gereja Baptis Indonesia in Bantul, Yogyakarta and Gereja Kristen Jawa in Purworejo, Central Java. (CNN Indonesia, 2015) Indeed, according to Head of Public Relations of Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (PGI) or The Association of Churches in Indonesia, Jerry Sumampouw, other churches in West Java, Central Java and Yogyakarta received various threats following the Tolikara case. (CNN Indonesia, 2015)

Church destructions following Tolikara case are amongst hundreds of other churches' destruction in the last two decades in Indonesia. The increasing number of churches and other Christian institutions' destruction has become the motivation to conduct this research. This article mainly discusses the causative factors of the increasing tension between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, particularly in the Reformed Era manifested in church and other Christian institutions' destruction, banned and closing. To deeply elaborate the discussion, this article looks at influencing factors such as mutual perception between Muslims and Christians as well as the failure of democratic government.

To answer the question of why Islam-Christian tension significantly increased in Indonesian reformed era, this study conducts case study approach by analyzing three variables such as Muslim-Christian mutual perception, the implementation of religious freedom in Indonesia and the impact of decentralization system. Of case study approaches, this research also utilizes historical studies to seek information with regards to Muslims-Christians relationship from the earlier period of Indonesia to the last decade. This article is divided into six sections: introduction, religious intolerance in Indonesia, Muslims and Christians mutual perception, religious freedom in Indonesian Reformed Era, the impact of decentralization, and conclusion. Data and information in this research are gathered from interviews with some religious leaders as well as from various literatures such as reports, books, journals, articles, newspapers, and online news.

Religious Intolerance in Indonesia

Influenced by western political scientists, (Beetham, 2000; Smith, 2003; Sikkink, 1993; Norman, 2005) state leaders as well as international community believes that democratic political system is an essential basis for the enforcement, promotion and protection of human rights deriving from the inherent dignity of human beings.[3] They acknowledge that human rights, including freedom of religion and rights to practice its belief, are embedded and inseparable from a human being since one was born. At the bottom line, the UN Charter admits that religion is a personal attribute and analogous to sex, race, language or other status of human beings and therefore all democratic states shall promote and protect such right. (Dickson, 1995)

Interestingly, religious intolerance in the current Indonesia shows that a democratic state has yet to experience religious freedom. It is true that many Western Countries have praised Indonesia as a country with a moderate majority Muslim population. UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, has also addressed Indonesia as "a home of a thousand separate ethnic groups living wisely and harmoniously, side-by-side resolving all differences of opinion through dialogues," in the Sixth Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations 29 August 2014. Yet they failed to capture religious intolerance and related violence occurred in the country. Religiously motivated violence in Indonesia particularly occurred to minorities groups such as Ahmadiyyah, Christian, Bahais, Syiah and other traditional religions. (Human Rights Watch World Report, 2015)

Indeed, the religious intolerance in Indonesia comes from two parties, the government and other religious groups, mainly from militant Sunni groups. The Indonesian government initially conducted religious intolerance in Indonesia when in 1953 the Ministry of Religion reported the existence of 360 new religions and traditional beliefs. The government then established "Pengawasan Aliran Kepercayaan di Masyarakat" (Supervision on beliefs in the society) which also called "Pakem." (Mulders, 1983) Originally, this body served merely to supervise new religions and traditional beliefs coupled with their practices. Yet, its function changed as an increasing tension between Islamic political parties and the supporter of traditional beliefs occurred shortly after the 1955 general elections. Some relevant cases

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[3]   It is clearly stated in the Preamble Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights initially acknowledged and used the term of fundamental human rights in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was entry into force in 23 March 1976.

showed that in Central Java and Jogjakarta, places where traditional beliefs had the most followers, Islamic political parties failed to capture major constituents. (Parulian, 2008)

By the Law No. 15/1961 regarding the Main Provisions of Indonesian General Attorney, Pakem team was moved from the supervision of Ministry of Religion Affairs to General Attorney, which also gave greater authorities to not only monitor but also to interpret, charge and ban divergent traditional beliefs. (Article 2) To support this function, the former President Soekarno published the Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 regarding The Prevention of Religion Desecration, that limited the existence of religions in Indonesia and legalized only six of them, namely Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddha and Kong Hu Cu. These two laws accordingly gave Pakem team, under the supervision of Attorney, authorities to give recommendation to security apparatus either to allow or to ban any religions and their activities that may harm the state and the people.

During the New Order era under Soeharto regime, the government revised the Law No. 15/1961 and published the Attorney Law No. 5/1991 which mainly gives greater authority to General Attorney. This law justifies attorney to put charges on criminal acts as well as civil law (Art 27, verse 1 and 2). The Art 27 verse 3 also gives authorities for the attorney to maintain public order and convenient by monitoring traditional beliefs that might harm the state and the people as well as preventing the misuse of religions. By this law, general attorney accordingly has the right to commit acts whatever needed to maintain public order, including to charge and to ban any traditional beliefs and religions with their practices.

In the Reformed Era, the government aborted the Law No. 5/1991 and launched the Attorney Law No. 16/2004, which further confirms the principal tasks of general attorney to monitor traditional beliefs that might harm the state and the people. In line with the process of democratization and decentralization in Indonesia, the Attorney Law No. 16/2004 has become a reference for Pakem Team to perform their authorities. By this law, after a recommendation from Pakem Team in West Sumatera and West Java, General Attorney then launched decrees to monitor and commit necessary acts to Al Qiyadah Al Islamiyah teachings and practices as well as to ban Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI). (Parulian, 2008)

Not only does government commit religious intolerance in Indonesia, but also civil society in terms of radical groups. The increasing numbers of worship places' destruction and closing in many regions in Indonesia as well as religious violence conducted by Islamic

militant groups such as Laskar Jihad, Laskar Mujahidin, Laskar Jundullah, Mujahidin Indonesia, Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defender Front), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, and a terrorist group named Jemaah Islamiyah Indonesia (JII) significantly perform that reality. As confirmed by Bahtiar Effendy (2003), rather than responding to the Indonesian democratic transition, some movements emerged as instruments to actively express and uphold certain radical ideology using religious symbol. Their interest is shown by articulating their own truth and many times are materialized in destructive methods against every situation or behavior that is not in accordance with their belief.

Their radical ideology and methodology to a greater extent creates religious intolerance in some areas in Indonesia. There are at least 24 Ahmadiyah mosques that have been destructed and banned in year 2008-2012 (Alternative Report of ICCPR, 2012). With regard to churches destruction, the number has significantly increased in Indonesian Reformed Era as there were more than 200 churches and other Christian institutions have been destructed, banned and closed only from 1998 to 2011 (Tahalele, 1998; Ali-Fausi, Panggabean, et. al, 2011, PGI Reports 2004-2011). These numbers are in addition to the 24 incidents of bombing explosion directed against churches on Christmas Eve 2000, (Gunawan, 2006; BNPT 2013) and 192 destroyed churches in Poso and Ambon during religious conflicts in late 1990s. (Damanik, 2003; Pieris, 2004; Lay 2009)

Although there is a significant number of Ahmadiyah mosques destruction and a mosque explosion in 2011, the number of churches as well as other Christian institutions' destruction and explosion during reformed era is much greater than any other worship places in Indonesia. This is not to mention a prolonged religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in Poso and Ambon in earlier years of Indonesian reformed era. Such religious intolerance leads us to assume that the tension between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia is more concerned than of any other acknowledged religions in the country.

Indonesian Muslims and Christians' Mutual Perception

Derived from the increasing numbers of churches destruction, closed and banned, as well as other Muslim-Christian conflicts in Indonesia, we might say that both Muslims and Christians have become threat to each other. When groups of society have to live, interact and receive reciprocal unpleasant experiences, they are likely to have mutual threatened perception. This situation also applies for Muslims and Christians in certain regions in Indonesia. The threat

itself comes from both ways, while Christians in Indonesia feel threatened by radical groups activities and Islamic Law or Syariah law upheld in some regions, Muslims are threatened with Christianization or evangelistic program and the increasing numbers of Christians in Indonesia. (Mujiburrahman, 2006; Fahardian 2005, Aritonang, 2004, Arifianto, 2009)

Threats can be defined as a situation in which one agent or groups has either the capability or intention to inflict a negative consequence on another agent or group (Davis, 2000; Rousseau, 2007). This situation is likely to be uncertain, as according to Rousseau (2007), the threats may or may not be carried out. From a broader perspective, threats can be divided into two categories, threats against an individual and threats against a collective of individuals. According to MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson (1992) threats against both an individual and a collective of individuals might come in the form of (1) military that brings consequences in physical security, (2) economic which cause loss in personal or collective wealth and income, and (3) cultural that impose negative consequences in personal or collective values and beliefs.

Historically, a fragile relationship due to reciprocal threat perception between Islam and Christian societies in Indonesia has occurred since their first rendezvous. Islam came to Indonesia in the 8th century, introduced initially by some traders from the Middle East. Islam then reached its peak in Indonesia in the 16th century with the collapse of the Kingdom of Majapahit. However, the influence of previous dominant religions such as Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism persisted particularly in Java and Sumatera Muslim societies. (Wanandi, 2002; Lau-Fong, 2002; Beatty, 1999) Christianity, on the other hand, entered Indonesia later in the 16th century brought by Dutch evangelists along with Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, when Islam had reached its peak in Java and Sumatera. (Steenbrink, 2006)

The evangelistic program brought by Western missionaries was difficult to apply in Indonesia for two reasons. *First*, the local residents, mostly in Java and Sumatera, rejected new religion as they had embraced Islam. This situation caused Christianization only succeeded in Eastern part of Indonesia such as Ambon, Manado and Papua. (Steenbrink, 2006) *Secondly,* the coming of evangelists at the same time of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia complicated the spread of Christianity. As noted by Steenbrink (2006) since its arrival in Indonesia, Christian missionaries and their followers, are often described as infidels or devils by some Muslims. Christianity was also associated with "a religion of the Colonialists." (Goh,

2005) The rejection from local residents, who are mostly Muslims, significantly performs that the presence of Christianity in Indonesia from the beginning, perceived as a threat.

The rejection continued although Dutch colonialist had left and Indonesia gained its independence. During Indonesian independence in August 1945 there was a tough contention regarding the form of newly born state. Some Islamic leaders insisted to establish an Islamic state under the Syariah law. Through the Committee of Indonesian Independence Preparation (*Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia*), they proposed "Jakarta Charter" to be inserted in the constitution. The Charter basically confirmed a new Republic that was founded on the principle of "Belief in One God, with the obligation for Islam adherents to practice Islamic law." (*Ketuhanan dengan kewajiban menjalankan Syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*) (Arifianto, 2009) They also further demanded a Constitutional clause that would require the president of the new republic to be 'a native born Indonesian who is a Muslim' and that Islam be declared the new state's sole official religion (Aritonang, 2004).

Nonetheless Christian leaders, represented by AA Maramis and Sam Ratulangi, strongly rejected the Islamic-based state proposal. They subsequently threatened the new government that Christian-dominated region in Eastern part of Indonesia such as East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and North Sulawesi, would secede and establish a new state unless the government deleted the words of Islamic Syariah in Indonesian Constitution. (Aritonang, 2004; Arifianto, 2009) Led by Soekarno and Moh. Hatta, Nationalist Party then proposed a more secular state for the sake of Christians and other non-Muslims. In return, Soekarno gave a greater opportunity for Islamic parties to take part in Indonesian political system through Masyumi Party. (Mujiburrahman, 1971; Solahudin, 2011)

The unwritten agreement between Islamic and Christian parties in building the new state did not necessarily create a smooth relationship between them. A separatist movement called Darul Islam and led by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirdjo insisted to establish an Islamic Sate. The Indonesian Islamic State was planned to cover West Java, Central Java, partly of Aceh and South Sulawesi. (Fealy, 2005; Solahudin, 2011) Although this movement was defeated when Indonesian government executed Kartosuwirjo in 1962, their successor, such as Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Baasyir, remained harsh to Christians and other Non-Muslims. Later in 2000 their new movement, called Jamaah Islamiyah Indonesia, executed more than 24 bombing explosions against churches in at least seven different regions in Indonesia. (BNPT, 2012)

As mentioned by Robbie Goh (2005) some radical Muslims remained harsh to Christians and gave hindrance to Christianity to become a dominant religion in Indonesia. However, the number of Christians has been growing and becomes the religion with second largest number of followers in Indonesia, after Islam. Based on data from the Agency of Indonesian Central Statistic (2005), Islam remained the major religion with 87.2% of population, while the number of Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics was 9.5%. This might not be a great number, yet Christianity increased significantly from 2.8% in 1933, 7.39% in 1971 and 8.92% in 2000. (Mujiburrahman, 2006; Solahudin, 2011)

The increasing number of Christians is surely followed by a rapid growth of its places of worship. Moreover, unlike Muslims, Christians should worship in a church based on their membership and denomination. There are various denominations of Christianity in Indonesia as evangelists from different countries deliver different practices of Christianity in Indonesia. Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reformist, Methodist, Anglican, Pentecostalism and Charismatic are some of the denominations. (Goh, 2005) The increasing numbers of Christians and the variety of Church denominations, led to the establishment of a great numbers and various denomination of churches. The increasing numbers of churches certainly raises concern and is perceived a threat by some Muslims. They have accordingly been critical towards so-called Christianization program conducted by missionary organizations in Indonesia and from abroad. (Sudarto, 1999; Timotius, 2005; Mujiburrahman, 2006; Fahardian 2005, Aritonang, 2004, Arifianto, 2009)

A vulnerable relationship and mutual threat perception between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia from their first encounter to current situation makes the two societies easily to be provoked. In many cases of socio-religious conflict in Indonesia, like in Poso, Ambon, and Papua, religion has been used to provoke both groups. By using their sensitivity and religious awareness, certain party then easily brought them to involve in and enlarge a small quarrel into a big clash between the two groups. Indeed, they ignore many other aspects such as economic gap between local people and settler, political competition during election, and other social problems caused by unemployment, migration and cultural clashes. (Damanik, 2003; Pieris, 2004; Hasrullah 2009)

Religious Freedom in Indonesian Reformed Era

In line with its transformation into a more democratic state in late 1990s, Indonesia performs a lot of changes particularly in social and political system. Superficially, Indonesian Reformed Era has opened greater opportunities to civil society to largely participate in such system and enjoyed a greater freedom. A direct election of president followed by direct elections of local governments' head, as well as an active role of media, the enhancement of freedom of speech, union and organized confirm the differences with formerly system. This also confirms that the Indonesian government has put a lot of efforts to promote, protect and respect its citizen's rights as one of democracy indicators.

A good government, as concluded by Aristotle (350, BC), is established when the ruler could act on behalf of the population as a whole and for the benefit of all. From this conception, the former US President, Abraham Lincoln then defined democracy as a form of "government of the people, by the people and for the people." Following this credit, numerous countries with historical legacies of autocracy and dictatorship have subsequently moved towards democratic political system. Indeed, democracy has developed into a more popular political system particularly when United Nations (UN) published paper titled "Philosophical Enquiry into Current Ideological Conflicts: The Meaning of Democracy." With this paper, UN then urged its member-states in 1949 to adopt the ideas of democracy as it respects personal freedom and gives wider popular participation. (Wright, 1949)

Dominguez and Jones (2007:8) also confirm that democratic regimes must serve their citizens, which can be associated with states' obligation to respect, protect and promote their citizen's fundamental rights. These basic rights include the rights to life and property, expression and association, as well as rights to belief and to exercise their faith. (O'Day, 2007; Weston, 1984; Lauren, 2003; Shestack, 1998) As also mentioned by Aristotle (350 BC), democracy, as a political system should put liberty and equality to all citizens as its foundation. It is thus important to place the promotion, respect and protection of human rights in the first position of democratic states. As confirmed by Brian O'Day (2007) human rights are priority issue in democratic states.

As a member of UN since 1950, Indonesia is bound by and therefore shall respect and subject to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Indonesia has finally ratified the ICCPR

after democratic transition in the country, through the Law No. 12/2005. Indeed, the commitment to promote and protect its people's rights has initially been performed by the government through *Pancasila*[4] and its constitution *Undang-undang Dasar* (UUD) 1945, when the state was just born. These basic rights include the right to have equal position before law (Art. 27 verse 1), right to have feasible job (Art. 27 verse 2), freedom of expression, speech and union (Art. 28), right to education (Art. 28C verse 1) and freedom of belief and right to conduct its belief practices (Art. 28E verse 1 and 2, Art. 29 verse 1 and 2).

To further confirm its commitment in protecting its citizen's rights, the Indonesian government under Reformed-Era regime launched Law No. 39/1999 regarding human rights and Law No. 26/2000 regarding the courts of human rights. With regard to religious freedom, the Law No. 39/1999 Article 4 and 22 justifies the commitment of Indonesian government to acknowledge and guarantee religious freedom. In addition, this article also gives freedom to Indonesian people to worship God based on their faith and religion. For this reason, Indonesian government has also supplied Religion Affairs Ministry with authorities to manage all acknowledged religions in Indonesia and monitor all religion worship practices so that all Indonesian citizens enjoy equal religious freedom without discrimination.

The above national laws and mechanisms regarding human rights judicially confirm the commitment of Indonesian government to respect religious freedom. Nevertheless, the increasing number of churches destruction, closing and banned, particularly in the era of reformation, shows that there is a gap between the legislation and its implementation. In many cases of churches destruction, closed and banned, security apparatus as well as local officials remained silent when radical groups stopped and destructed churches. (VOA Indonesia, 2012) Government seems to let the destruction happened and sides to majority. A favorable policy from the officials to support majority may calm the crowded and avoid conflicts. Yet, in return it benefitted them to gain more voters during elections.

Transformation into a more democratic system opens a wider access to popular participation in social and political aspects. As the third President of Indonesia, B.J. Habibie, ratified the Law no. 2/1999 on Political Parties, politics became a public sphere where everybody can involve. (Singh, 2001; Effendy, 2003) Moreover, the system allows all people

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[4] Pancasila is believed as the foundation of the nation and the Indonesian people's way of life, which includes five basic principles of the nation, such as: (1) Believe in the One Supreme God, (2) Just and civilized humanity, (3) The unity of Indonesia, (4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives, and (5) Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia.

to participate and compete each other in political machine. A direct election of president, head of region and parliamentary members leads people to run for position in executive and legislative bodies by gaining as many voters as they can as. In this situation, political interest seems more important than the implementation of religious freedom to certain parties and in certain region. At the bottom line, a changing into democratic system positively contributes to a greater freedom of speech, expression, and union as well as popular participation in political spheres. Nevertheless such system leads to political competition using religious symbols and without a strong political commitment to uphold the law, this situation can be fragile in a country like Indonesia where majority and minority based on religion remained problematic.

The Impact of Decentralization System

Not only does human rights become priority, but to effectively implement the role of democratic government, decentralization is also needed. The "Seoul Declaration on Participatory and Transparent Governance" which is resulted in the 6th Global Forum on Reinventing Government organized by South Korea and the United Nations in 27 May 2005 confirmed "… good governance requires an appropriate level of decentralization, innovation and development of local government. Local administration can be made more effective and autonomous through the promotion of administrative and financial decentralization, digitalization of government, and result-base performance management." This statement declares agreement of world leaders to justify that decentralization is vital in democratic system. They believe that democratic polity should give spaces as well as opportunities for local people to actively participate in local administration.

Although decentralization is important in democratic system, a proportional management and clear power distribution between central and local government remains needed. As far as power distribution is concerned, Miftah Thoha (2013) explains that power distribution in democratic political system can be divided into horizontal and vertical distribution. Horizontal power distribution follows the classic idea of Montesquieu's *Trias Politica*. (Montesquieu, 1748) It is assumed that no single authority can use all power without corruption. Thus, separation of powers into three branches, legislative, executive and judicative is vital to avoid power abusing through a check and balance mechanism. As far as horizontal power sharing in concerned, Thoha (2013) then divided governments into parliamentary and presidential. The former gives Prime Minister, who is appointed by

majority party in the legislative, to act as the power executor. The latter gives President, who is elected in general election either directly or indirectly, to act as the executive authority.

On the other hand, vertical power distribution applies in the relationship between central government and its subsidiaries or local governments as well as between the federal and state governments. Like the horizontal power separation, Thoha (2013) also distinguishes two types of power distribution between central and local government, the unitary system and the confederation. In unitary system, the central government holds greater authorities than the local government. Thus the central government has the right to delegate part of administrative functions that can be organized by local governments and those handled by central government. The confederation system performs a greater authority in the hand of local government. In this type, the central government simply receives power delegation from the local authorities.

Indonesia, according to its 1945 Constitution, adopts presidential and unitary state.[5] Thus, as a presidential state, its Constitution gives authority to the President to act as the executive power. Moreover, as a unitary state, this state theoretically gives greater authorities to the central government so that all rules of conduct enacted by its subsidiaries shall follow those that made by the central government. Moreover, according to the Law No. 23/2014 regarding Local Government, Art. 9 verse 2 and Art. 10, religious matters are of absolute government affairs fully under the authority of central government. This is in addition to foreign policy, judicial, defense and security as well as monetary and fiscal matters. This law justifies that central government, not local government, has a full authority in religious issues.

Nevertheless, some cases perform that local government such as in Bandung, Bekasi and Bogor, robustly prohibit a number of Christian churches construction, complicate churches' permission granting and ban worship activities. Moreover, these local governments decided to ban or close the churches shortly after some Islamic movements performed their refusal and violence against the churches' activities. These cases are relevant to HKBP (Batak Christian Protestant Church) Filadelfia in Bekasi, GKI (Indonesia Christian Church) Yasmin in Bogor and many other churches in Bandung, Jawa Barat. (Human Rights Watch World Report, 2012)

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[5] 1945 Indonesian Constitutional, Chapter I, Article 1, verse 1: "Indonesia is a Unitary State in a form of Republic," and Chapter III, Article 4, verse 1: "The President of the Republic of Indonesia holds the executive power according to the Constitutional."

In the case of HKBP Filadelfia, local officials in Bekasi closed the church as they claimed that this church has no establishment permission. Yet, as confirmed by the leader of the church, Pastor Torang Simanjuntak, it is very difficult to proceed and gain permission letter for churches in that region. Although the State Administrative Court in Bandung has ordered Bekasi officials to grant establishment permission in 2010, they refused to fulfill the decision until today. (Tempo.co, 2013) Similarly, local officials in Bogor refused to comply the decision of central government through Supreme Court that allowed GKI Yasmin to practice its services. By now, the congregations of GKI Yasmin and HKBP Filadelfia continued to worship in private houses. This confirms that difficulties in getting church permission in certain region as well as rejection from local residents and officials are of hindrances to Christians to exercise their religious freedom.

The local officials' rejection to fulfill State Administrative Court's as well as Supreme Court's decision in allowing the congregations of HKBP Filadelfia and GKI Yasmin to conduct their religious activities obviously performs their disobedience to central government.[6] The failure of central government to force its local officials to comply its decision performs its weakness, particularly in exercising the authority of absolute government affairs according to the Law No. 23/2014. It is true that decentralization is important in democratic system as this very system gives greater popular participation. Yet the cases of HKBP Filadelfia – Bekasi and GKI Yasmin – Bogor confirms that without a strong commitment and good monitoring from central government, then local officials, backed by interest groups and political parties in their region, may fail the fulfillment of their obligation to serve the citizen, mainly minority groups.

Conclusion

Transformation into a more democratic state not necessarily leads Indonesian government to fully respect, promote, and protect human rights. The increasing numbers of churches destruction, closed and banned in the reformed era confirms that religious freedom and Muslim-Christian tension in Indonesia remains problematic. A vulnerable relationship from their initial encounter coupled with lack of commitment to uphold and to implement the national laws regarding religious freedom as well as lack of control from central government

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[6] It is stated by Prof. Dr. Ryaas Rasyid, former Minister of Regional Autonomy in Seminar, "All Politics is Local," in Christian University of Indonesia, Jakarta, 27 Aug 2015, as the writer asked about the current situation regarding the status of GKI Yasmin and HKBP FIladelfia, during question and answer session.

towards local officials caused Muslims-Christians tension increased in the last two decades. Indeed, Indonesian government has provided sufficient laws and rules to religious freedom. Yet, both central and local government should have a strong political commitment to uphold and implement the laws. Central government should also be firmer to force local officials to comply the national regulations, particularly those with regards to religion affairs as central government has the authority to manage them in decentralization system. In addition, religious leaders should be involved in building confidence measures between Muslims and Christians to reduce and in turn demolish all mutual threat perception between the two parties.

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