



Photo: Walter Kovacs for USAID

# DEFENDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM THROUGH LEGAL AID

## CONTEXT

Indonesia, with its vibrant tapestry of cultures and religious traditions, recognizes the critical importance of religious freedom as a cornerstone of its democratic values. Indonesia's Constitution showcases its commitment to fostering an inclusive and harmonious society by guaranteeing the right to practice, express, and choose one's religion freely.

Recently, unfortunate incidents related to freedom of religion or belief (FORB) have increased. According to the Setara Institute, there were at least 175 FORB-related infringements in 2022 alone. These incidents range from attacks on houses of worship to discrimination against individuals based on their religious identity. Targeted interventions are needed to address these challenges and ensure that the principles of religious freedom are upheld for all Indonesian citizens.

## INDONESIA RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The USAID TOLERANSI program is a groundbreaking initiative aimed at protecting and promoting FORB in Indonesia. Over the course of five years, the program, in partnership with the Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia or YLBHI) and its provincial offices in West Java, West Kalimantan, and North Sulawesi; civil society organizations; and other key

stakeholders, will work to defend the rights of groups and individuals if their religious freedoms or beliefs are violated. USAID TOLERANSI demonstrates a shared commitment between Indonesia and the United States to protect the fundamental rights and liberties of individuals of all faiths.

USAID TOLERANSI's unique approach is to improve the efficacy and sustainability of sub-national legal aid organizations, enabling them to better defend religious freedom in their communities. The program also seeks to enhance public awareness and engagement in mechanisms through which constitutional rights and religious freedoms can be protected and promoted.

## **ANTICIPATED RESULTS**

Through the USAID TOLERANSI program, we aim to promote a more open, tolerant, and democratic society in Indonesia where individuals and groups of all faiths can exercise their rights without fear of discrimination or persecution. This will be achieved by:

- Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of legal aid organizations to defend religious freedom;
- Improving cooperation among rights defenders on matters related to freedom of religion and belief; and
- Increasing public awareness and engagement in mechanisms that protect constitutional rights and religious freedoms.

These efforts are expected to contribute to the safeguarding of religious freedom and civil liberties in Indonesia, further enabling and sustaining an inclusive and tolerant society.

## **CONTACT**

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