

## **Indonesia high court upholds blasphemy law**

**By: Lawrence D Jones, *Christian Post*, 21 April 2010**

The Constitutional Court of Indonesia upheld the country's blasphemy law on Monday, arguing that the decades-old law is still needed to maintain public order among religious groups.

"If the blasphemy law was scrapped before a new law was enacted ... it was feared that misuses and contempt of religion would occur and trigger conflicts in society," explained court justice Akil Mochtar, one of eight judges who upheld the law Monday, according to the Jakarta Post.

Only one justice, Maria Farida Indrati, voted against the 1965 law, which allows the government to ban religious groups that "distort" or "misrepresent" any of the country's six official religions – the recognised forms of Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

Indrati, the only woman on the Constitutional Court, stated in her dissenting opinion that the blasphemy law fell short in many areas related to human rights and highlighted the "arbitrary actions" often triggered in the law's implementation.

As happens in most predominantly Muslim countries with such laws, prohibitions against blasphemy, heresy, and deviance lead to many cases in which members of the majority persecute religious minorities and unorthodox sects.

The law leads to discrimination, harassment, and violence against religious minorities, insist rights groups arguing against the constitutionality of the Blasphemy Law.

Furthermore, violence committed against religious minorities is commonly justified by the perpetrators, who often say they were simply taking action against hatred, heresy, blasphemy, or deviance.

Anyone found guilty of heresy, on the other hand, can face up to five years in prison.

Presently, Muslims make up about 88.2 per cent of Indonesia's population of about 240 million people, while Protestant Christians make up 5.9 per cent, Catholics 3.1 per cent, Hindus 0.8 per cent, Buddhists 0.2 per cent, and other religions 0.2 per cent.

The vast majority of Indonesia's people are moderate Sunni Muslims.