

Judul : Religious tolerance : OIC legislators to discuss anti-blasphemy
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RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

OIC legislatures to discuss anti-blasphemy

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The House of Representatives (DPR) has decided to follow up a proposal for an international anti-blasphemy provision by garnering support from legislatures throughout the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The need for an international anti-blasphemy provision was mentioned by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his address to the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in October.

As the President's call received short shrift from other governments, the House has initiated work with the foreign legislative bodies to create a "collective understanding" about blasphemy at a parliamentary event on interfaith dialogue scheduled for Tuesday and Friday in Bali.

House Speaker Marzuki Alie said that the gathering aimed to encourage each respective parliamentary body to produce, among other things, legislation that would not tolerate any justification for blasphemy, even democracy.

"Blasphemous acts are often tolerated in the name of democracy. Democracy is also cited to prohibit a government punishing a citizen who insults a certain religion. We think it's inappropriate to use freedom of religion to validate blasphemous acts. Therefore, all countries need to have the same understanding [on blasphemy]," Marzuki told reporters on Monday.

"It's the government that often encourages meetings to endorse such an anti blasphemy protocol. It's time for the world's legislative bodies to follow suit so that we can produce legislation encouraging religious harmony in our respective countries," the Democratic Party politician added.



JP/PJ. Leo

Marzuki Alie

Concurring with Marzuki, lawmaker Hayono Isman from the House's Commission I on foreign affairs said that the move was also "a response to a call by the United Nations secretary-general [Ban Ki-moon] for the House to play a more active role in nurturing religious tolerance in the country".

While the Indonesian government and lawmakers believe in the urgency of setting legal guidelines to counter blasphemy internationally, the UN's rights body has deemed Indonesia's existing laws on such matters, such as the 1965 Blasphemy Law and a 2008 joint ministerial decree, as discriminatory against religious minorities.

The UN has continued to call on Indonesia to amend or repeal such discriminatory laws after the government's refusal to adopt such a recommendation following a UN quadrennial rights summit in Geneva, Switzerland, last May.

Through its high commissioner on human rights, Navanethem Pillay, the UN has again urged the Indonesian government to amend or repeal all laws and regulations deemed discriminatory against religious minorities groups or risk the country's pluralist nature being hijacked by religious extremists.

Marzuki refused to comment on Pillay's call, saying that the decision would be made later after the four-day interfaith gathering in Bali.