

Police arrest lawmaker over school arson attacks

Central Kalimantan councillor accused of masterminding the burning of 7 elementary schools Police arrest lawmaker over school arson attacks



A lawmaker in Indonesia's Central Kalimantan province has been arrested for allegedly orchestrating a string of arson attacks on elementary schools. Yansen Alison Binti, 60, a Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerinda) politician and member of the Central Kalimantan Provincial Legislative Council, was arrested on Sept. 10.

Police said Binti was the mastermind behind arson attacks that saw seven schools destroyed in Palangkaraya, capital of Central Kalimantan province in July. None of the targeted schools were Catholic run.

Eight alleged perpetrators have also been arrested and confessed during questioning that Binti ordered them to burn the schools, investigators said.

"He ordered the schools burned down to pave the way for his own projects on the same sites," National Police spokesperson Sr. Com. Martinus Sitompul said.

If found guilty, Binti could face up to 15 years in prison, while the eight arsonists face 12 years behind bars.

The attacks have shocked educators throughout Indonesia.

Franciscan Father Vinsensius Darmin Mbula of the National Council of Catholic Education, said whatever the motive, burning down schools is a barbaric act.

"It's a serious threat to the goal of education, which is to humanize people and create a more civilized and just society," said Father Mbula, who is also a member of the bishops' education commission.

"It hurts children who are fighting for their right for an education," he said.

Father Silvanus Subandi, chairman of Catholic Education Council in Palangkaraya Diocese said the attacks desecrated educational institutions, and ripped away children's right to get a decent education in a region where school buildings and facilities are most needed.

"Now students have to study under government provided tents in the compounds of the burned out schools," Father Subandi, also the vicar-general of Palangkaraya Diocese, told ucanews.com, on Sept. 12.

The priest said the students are still in trauma as a result of the attacks and their parents are confused because their children have to study in tents.

A parent of a child at one of the schools, Paulus Ekot, has voiced frustration at authorities for their response to the attacks.

All the school equipment was also burned, so students attending classes now have to sit on the ground, without chairs or tables.

"This has been going on for a month now," he said.

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