

UK urged to press Indonesia on religion



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Rights group Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today urged the UK government to use Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's state visit this week as an opportunity to discuss religious intolerance in his country.

The government should press the president to protect the rights of religious minorities and defend the rule of law, CSW said in a letter to David Cameron, the prime minister, and William Hague, the foreign secretary.

It said rising religious intolerance and human rights violations in West Papua were "matters of urgent and serious concern" which threatened to "undermine Indonesia's progress as a democracy and a pluralist, tolerant nation."

CSW expressed concern over forcible closures of churches by local authorities under pressure from extremists.

In one case, it says, the closure was in defiance of a Supreme Court ruling, which made it "a rule of law issue, not simply a religious freedom issue."

The letter also calls on the Indonesian authorities to institute measures to advance a peaceful solution to the long-running conflict in West Papua.

The three-day visit beginning tomorrow is “an important opportunity to deliver some very clear and important messages,” Andrew Johnston, CSW’s advocacy director, said.

“In his final term as president [Yudhoyono] has an opportunity to leave as his legacy a reputation to upholding and strengthening Indonesia’s tradition of pluralism.

“But he also faces the danger that he will be remembered as the president who failed to stop rising religious intolerance.”

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