

Peter Dunlop – Oral Evidence on Indonesia and Malaysia

My wife is a Dutch Citizen - born in Indonesia – became Dutch and thus lost Indonesian citizenship when her, now our twins were adopted as sickly infants from an Ethiopian orphanage.

Her mother, now in her 90s was brought up in a Dutch Nun's orphanage - - betrothed aged 12 or 13. Married as a teenager. Had 9 Children - Roman Catholics – my wife has become Presbyterian like me via the Anglican Church. Of her sisters 3 have become Muslim - and now won't get involved in the family in anyway except to try to get their father to fund them going on the haj.

I began to make some notes prior to this evidence session with information from my wife's connections with whom I have been in some discussion on the subject of difficulties faced by Christians. One of them is in contact with an active RC priest in Surakarka (Solo) near Yogyakarta. They are very cautious about anything that might identify them as Christians in the wider world.

Distribution of Christians is different in Indonesia - in some places the density of Christians is quite high, in others, like Jakarta, quite low. Christians have difficulties in getting good employment because Muslims are preferred. Even good graduates from the best university – Gajah Mada university- can't get onto further second degree courses. Need guidance on how to mobilise information.

One of my wife's sisters is in the Far East of Indonesia in Timur Province is working for an international NGO.

I Lived in Malaysia and saw a change in society from when I first went to Malaysia in the 1970s – then much more relaxed form of Islam – knee-length skirts for primary school girls – now down to the ground and heads fully covered. The north-east is more radical now, but with a strong indigenous culture which causes difficulty in reconciling the non-Islamic parts. There are difficulties and the country is becoming more radicalised. Indonesia is following, except Bali which is non-Muslim (a form of Hinduism) and tolerant. Western tourists go there because it is more tolerant but some misbehave, badly.

In Malaysia - there is a bumiputera policy (Princes of the Soil). Native Malay peoples - Definition of a Malay is that by definition s/he professes Islam – s/he may not renounce that faith - very difficult for women in particular. Various examples. Most of the citizens Christians will be Chinese or Indians. Very racially aware societies. Talk about Race - advertise jobs by race. Not necessarily in an aggressive way. Not felt to be discrimination. Being less favoured in Malaysia is more to do with racial origins rather than religion – the Bumiputera policy. In East Malaysia there are not many Malays. Sultans of Brunei are Malay - people of the interior are the Ibans and Dyaks - treated as second class Bumiputera - East Malaysia Christians - they are treated differently from the Malay Bumiputeras.

Indonesia - different people – in Batak in central Sumatra - around Lake Bromo in Sumatera- is very largely Christian, Java is less Christian. Number of Christians in Indonesia is growing - they are active in their faith in a way that people are not in the UK. If you are a Christian in Indonesia, you go to church every week. I think that this is partly from being a minority. Many Christians are ethnically Chinese or from the poorer communities.

Aceh in North Sumatra makes life difficult for Christians, it has a more devolved government and Sharia Law. In Sulawesi and Ambon – the communities, Muslim and Christian are nearly equal in size which has led to warfare. Something prompts it, an event seen as anti-Muslim such as Asia Bibi or elsewhere in the Muslim world – and it is vented on the Christian community.

The Indonesian Constitution embodies “Pancasila” - five principles - freedom & liberties - states that you must belong to a faith that believes in one God. Tribal groups that don’t meet this are persecuted.

Some of them adopt Christianity - untouchable castes - in the past they may have converted to Christianity. Persecuted for being different.

Tribal people in Malaysia are persecuted by a requirement for identity cards requiring a racial indication and being forced to settle in villages nominally so children can be schooled where they are persuaded to become Muslim.

Q. When would the change date from in Malaysia

Since independence it has been governed by a coalition – with parties linked to race – Malay, Chinese, Indian. The Malays dominate, but with roles for others. Historically the British educated civil servants from the Ruler’s children - imported Indian civil servants also. In Kelantan in NE Malaysia there are now male and female check outs in supermarkets. Dominant political party is an Islamic Party – has governed Kelantan (north-eastern state) for the last 20 years. Federal Government have sometimes starved them of resources because they didn’t like their radical Islam, but it has spread.

Not all women cover their heads but most do.

Q. Is there any support from the British Embassy in Indonesia and the High Commission in Malaysia for Persecuted Christians as far as you are aware?

A. I am not aware if there is support or not – I have not lived there since 2010. In the past I have found our diplomats to be a bit out of touch with the ordinary local people, perhaps their terms of service are too short.

Q. Is there open persecution of Christians in Indonesia or Malaysia?

A. Christians are not able to use the word Allah for GOD - this is the word they use in their Bible – it went to court in Malaysia because the Muslim authorities feel that this word should only be used by Muslims- not sure what the situation is in Indonesia. A particular case, however, is the prosecution and imprisonment of “Ahok” the former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian for “blasphemy.” He was put in prison - made great strides in recent years - to stamp out corruption. Electorate is getting more informed. Doesn’t take much money to raise a rabble-rousing crowd which is what happened to the Christian Governor. He was cleaning up the rivers - opposition picked up an unwise statement and was put in prison.

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