News

A health care makes rounds at a Catholic church training center turned into a self-isolation sh

A health care makes rounds at a Catholic church training center turned into a self-isolation shelter for COVID-19 patients in Jakarta, Indonesia, July 22, 2021. (CNS photo/Ajeng Dinar Ulfiana, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Jakarta, Indonesia — December 22, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Nearly 180,000 Indonesian police officers will guard churches and public places across the country during Christmas celebrations this year to prevent terrorist attacks.

All churches will be open over the Christmas period to allow Christians to attend Masses and other religious services despite the threat posed by the highly contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus and possible attacks by extremists, ucanews.com reported.

Indonesia has more than 11,000 Protestant and Catholic churches, according to the country's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Dozens of suspected members of Jemaah Islamiyah, an Islamist group, have been arrested by police across the country during the weeks before Christmas.

Authorities said they do not wish to see a repeat of terror attacks in which dozens of churches in Sumatra, Java and West Nusa Tenggara were attacked by the terror

group on Christmas Eve in 2000, killing 18 people and injuring many others.

A heavy police presence will be at churches that were previously attacked, including the Santa Maria Catholic Church and two Protestant churches in Surabaya, East Java, which were targeted by suicide bombers who killed 19 people in May 2018.

Police will also tightly guard 31 churches, including Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar in South Sulawesi province, which was attacked on Palm Sunday this year.

Advertisement

"We will deploy 177,212 policemen during Christmas this year," Imam Sugianto, assistant chief for operations of the Indonesian National Police, said Dec. 21.

Sugianto said police officers will guard churches, shopping malls and tourist locations.

"Catholic and Protestant churches across Indonesia will be guarded by at least 43,000 officers," he said.

Police will be helped by military personnel in what is being called Operation Candle lasting from Dec. 24 to Jan. 2, he added.

Father Antonius Suyadi, chairman of the Archdiocese of Jakarta's Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Commission, said church officials are coordinating with Jakarta police on security matters.

"We have asked Catholics in parishes to cooperate with police, interreligious groups and local authorities during Christmas," Father Suyadi told ucanews.com.

He said he hoped Catholics would follow instructions from priests,
local security officials and police so that everyone can celebrate Christmas safely.

Our Lady of the Assumption Cathedral in Jakarta and several other churches in the Indonesian capital were among the churches targeted in 2000.