

A Temporary Place of Worship

I worked as a priest
and gave the religious service
in a temporary place.

We'd already registered
the government had not given us the permit
to build a church.
The temporary place
was on the first floor of my house.
I had reported this
explained the situation.

One day, between two services,
I saw people approaching,
I told church members to close the door.
We started to conduct the mass, singing.
We heard a window break,
our door was broken
people yelling, they brought wooden sticks
and destroyed many things.
Our members were frightened and ran.

My wife and others went to the second floor
and I followed.
I heard the people but they did not find us.
From the window, I saw
police cooling down the mob.
I received a call, a police officer
saying he wanted to protect me and the church.

The police interrogated me for hours
made me a suspect
for gathering a large crowd without a permit.
I refused to be named a suspect,
we were not an illegal organization.

After the incident,
we had to wear a motorcycle helmet
to go outside.
Every afternoon, people watching our house.
I received texts
saying my house would be burned down
and I was to be killed.
Threats came for months.

The mastermind of the attack
did not come from my neighbourhood.
I've never had conflict with my neighbours

and they did not reject my place
as a place of worship.

After the first incident,
I was accused of conducting 'Christianization'.
I joined other religious minority groups
leaders and journalists.
I told them the legal problem we faced.

We decided to change our place
to a hotel, restaurant, military barrack.

As a priest, and now a human rights defender,
I have a call to disseminate the truth.
I met human rights activists,
and I realized that I am part of that.

Composed by Juliana Mensah from the interview transcript of an Indonesian human rights defender working on freedom of religion from the research project 'Navigating Risk, Managing Security, and Receiving Support', which focuses on the experiences of human rights defenders at risk in Colombia, Mexico, Egypt, Kenya, and Indonesia (securityofdefendersproject.org)