



Country Profile

INDONESIA

“Unity in Diversity” is the national slogan of Indonesia. It is easy to see why. It is a country made up of over 17,000 islands, of which over 4,000 are inhabited. They host over 750 people groups that speak 726 separate languages. Indonesia is a country of both remote jungles and densely populated cities. It is a paradise of beautiful shorelines and old volcanoes. It is also a harbor of violence and poverty.

Indonesia also offers diverse opportunities for Christian service. The population is about 80% Muslim. The country's minority of Christian believers needs prayer and support. There are still many people groups waiting to hear the gospel. Beyond this, the earthquake that created the December 26, 2005 tsunamis originated right offshore of the Indonesia island of Sumatra, the largest unevangelized island on earth. These tsunamis left massive damage along the coast. There is an enormous need for relief.

Religious Influences

By the time Christianity was introduced to Indonesia, Indonesia was already an Islamic country. Islamic traders preceded Christians by several hundred years. The Islamic sailors were probably stopping at Indonesian ports by the seventh and eighth centuries AD. Gradually many Indonesian rulers became Muslim. By the time Marco Polo stopped in Indonesia in 1292, entire cities had already converted to Islam. The Muslim faith spread throughout the islands by Islamic missionaries and peaceful trade.

Remarkably, the Christian church was able to establish herself in the midst of an Islamic society. When the Dutch colonialists took control of Indonesia in 1605, they established the Dutch Reformed church. It was the main Christian influence on these islands for roughly three hundred years. During this time, the Bible was translated into Indonesian, but the church had little evangelical impact on the indigenous peoples. As revival spread through Europe in the nineteenth century and Dutch power weakened, other European missions came to Indonesia. Several indigenous people groups turned to Christ. The





twentieth century brought more missionaries. In the 1980s Christianity was the fastest growing religion in Indonesia. Today roughly 16% of Indonesia professes to be Christian.

There are major religious tensions in Indonesia today. Indonesia has the greatest sheer number of Muslims in the world. Most of these are folk Muslims, having a faith that blends Islamic principles with ancient tribal beliefs. Sadly, there are several extremist groups that have declared holy war against Christian Indonesians. These groups have earned Indonesia its rating of 28th on Operation World's persecution index. Over 600 churches have been destroyed in the last few years, many burned to the ground. Since 1999 over five thousand Christians have been killed. A half a million more are left homeless. The extremist groups claim that Christianity is growing too quickly, and it needs to be restrained by force.

Unreached Peoples

According to the Joshua Project, there remain 190 separate unreached people groups in Indonesia. Their total population adds up to approximately 155,207,000 souls. Eight of these groups are among the world's top one hundred largest unreached peoples. Among these groups are the **Madura**, **Minangkabau**, and **Sunda** peoples.

The **Madura** are bullfighters who have gained themselves a rough and ruthless reputation. Other Indonesians fear them for their violence and black magic. They practice carok, a blood revenge for adultery, cattle theft, and public humiliation. They are an Islamic people who have combined traditional sorcery with their Islamic faith. Christians are intensely persecuted by the Madura. Those converting to Christianity are often murdered. Through the years missionary efforts have experienced one setback after another. Of these 13 million people, only about five hundred of them are known to be evangelical Christians. There are no known churches that speak the Madura language.

INDONESIA FACTS

Population: 213,000,000

Government Type: Republic

Leader: President Susilo Bambang

Capital: Jakarta

Religions:

Muslim 80% Christian 16% Protestant 7%

Roman Catholic 3% Other 6% Hindu 2%

Traditional ethnic 1% Other 1%

(Figures are from *Operation World*.)

Official Language: Bahasa Indonesian.

Total Languages: 726.

Languages with Scriptures:

Bibles: 20 NT: 38 Portions: 77

Monetary Unit: Rupiah

Climate: tropical, more moderate in highlands

Active Volcano Count: 220

The name **Minangkabau** comes from the words Minang ("winning") and kabau ("buffalo"). According to legend, the Minangkabau and the Javanese settled a dispute with a buffalo fight. Although the Minangkabau's buffalo was only a calf, through cleverly attaching knives to its nose, the Minangkabau won the feud. The Minangkabau are still known for their cunning ways, are shrewd businessmen, and proud of their heritage. The Minangkabau are also the world's largest matrilineal people group, tracing descent and inheritance through the mother's side. They are staunch Muslims and look down on folk religions. Of the 8,200,000 Minangkabau in Indonesia today, there are only 1,000 known believers.

The **Sunda** are rice farmers living on the island of Java. Although they are Muslim by name, they have kept a large part of their traditional religion. Most people wear charms on their bodies and post them

in their houses. The Sunda have shamans whom they call dukun. A dukun is consulted in everything from birth to death. The Sunda try to respect the principles of adat, what they consider to be the harmony of the cosmic order. Many Sunda were abused by Dutch colonialists during the time they occupied Indonesia. This treatment has disinterested them in Christianity, which they associate with the Dutch. They remain one of the largest unreached people groups in the world. Less than one percent of well over thirty million Sunda are evangelical Christians.

Christians in Indonesia are spread across many islands and come from many cultures and languages. They are facing pressure and persecution. There are many Muslims who need to experience Christ's love. And there are many more who have never heard the Good News for the first time. Indonesia is a land of opportunities.

Accounts From the Tsunami Disaster

Right before the tsunami struck a Thai beach, a ten-year-old British girl recognized warning signs. She had just studied tsunamis in school, and when the beach waters receded, she knew what was happening. She told her mother, who reported it to the hotel staff. The staff had the beach evacuated to safety. One hundred lives were saved.

Malawati, an Indonesian woman, was discovered after surviving for five days in the Indian Ocean. "I almost drowned twice, as I could not swim and was thrashing in the water trying to keep my head up when I chanced upon the tree trunk," she said. She hung onto the tree, and survived by eating its fruit and bark. Malawati is 18 weeks pregnant. Her husband is still missing.

A nine-year-old boy, Philip, from Kazakhstan, survived along with a younger brother by climbing onto a floating mattress. The rest of his family were swept away.

A five-year-old girl from Sweden was overcome by the wave. It threw her onto a hillside unconscious. She was discovered by a Thai woman and reunited with her father.

A Thai princess spotted an 18-month old Swedish baby in a pile of rubble. She had him airlifted to a hospital and reunited with his father. The baby's mother and one of the princess' own sons are still missing.

In India's Andhra Pradesh State, 32 people were involved in a moon-worship ceremony when the massive wave picked them up, carried them out to sea, drowned them, and tossed them back on shore dead at their exact place of worship.

Another report told of parents who were missing their 6-month-old baby. So they prayed and cried out to the God of Heaven; and while they were praying, a mattress floated directly to them with their baby lying on it unharmed!

A 4-month-old Sri Lankan boy was ripped from his mother's arms. When he was rescued hours later, nine women claimed him as their own child. His parents had to wait a month before DNA tests proved he was theirs.

Nine people spent thirty-eight days lost and disoriented on a remote island. A child belonging to a Stone Age tribe found them, and taught them how to light a fire. The child also brought them boar meat and cooked it for them one day. Indian rescuers finally found them during a canoe search through crocodile-infested waters.

Daylan Sanders, along with 28 children, his wife and 3-year-old daughter, were in their beachside orphanage when the tsunami struck. When they saw the wave coming they ran for their boat. Miraculously, the boat started, and they started racing for safety. Daylan felt the comfort of "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Lord will lift up a standard." When they saw the second and larger wave approaching, Daylan turned the boat to take the wave head-on. They crashed into the bottom of the wave at full throttle, and sailed over it. All of them survived.

In some areas, surprisingly few dead animals have been found. Scientists think that animals may have a "sixth sense" which allowed them to feel the tsunami coming. The animals were able to run to safety. *Oh, that mankind would heed God's voice and escape the wrath to come.*