

Komnas HAM calls for protection of Gafatar members

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The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) is calling on the government to protect Fajar Nusantara Movement (Gafatar) members, following a plan to disband the group.

"These people can't be abused or hurt because of their beliefs. Komnas HAM will put efforts into protecting their rights, as Indonesian citizens and also as human beings," Komnas HAM chairman Nur Kholis told *The Jakarta Post* on Monday.

Nur said the commission would observe and monitor Gafatar members.

"We will also coordinate with relevant institutions such as the Religious Affairs Ministry and the police, if Gafatar members face threats. It is a state's duty to protect its people," he added.

It was previously reported that the Indonesian Ulema Council

(MUI) would ask the government to ban Gafatar after issuing an edict last week stating that the teachings spread by the controversial organization were "heretical".

"After the edict was issued, we want the group to be banned and its followers put back on the right path," MUI chairman Ma'ruf Amin said.

Gafatar members, accompanied by a coalition of civil society groups, on Monday visited the Komnas HAM office in Jakarta to give an open statement.

They asked for support in three areas. First was for Komnas HAM to investigate the eviction of former Gafatar members from their homes in West Kalimantan on Dec. 19, while second was for the government to prioritize protection and human rights in tackling Gafatar members' cases. Last was for the National Police to impose the law on the mobs that forced the evictions and burned

Gafatar members' homes.

Gafatar member Yudhistira Arif Rahman said Gafatar members had experienced more than just material losses after locals evicted them from Mempawah, West Kalimantan.

"It was not only material losses, we also experienced trauma, especially the children," Yudhistira said during his visit to Komnas HAM.

He added that some women had suffered miscarriages during the incident.

"After we leave the camp, what we will do? We have nothing now," he said.

Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin previously said that Gafatar was an illegal organization and that community members were not permitted to join it.

The group's spiritual leader, Ahmad Mussadeq, was sentenced to four years in prison in 2008 for religious blasphemy after he declared himself a prophet. Gafatar has been

in the spotlight ever since a number of people reported missing were revealed to have joined the group.

Thousands of people from across the country left their homes to join the group in Mempawah, but were displaced after a mob ransacked and razed their community on Jan. 19. The group members have now been returned to their respective hometowns.

Human Rights Working Group director Rafendi Djamin said the government had violated the rights of Gafatar members by not providing them with protection from local people.

"The violent eviction of members of Gafatar shows that the government failed to uphold its responsibilities and act as a protector of its own citizens. A state does not control interpretation of belief, but it does control how people who hold beliefs have their freedom protected," Rafendi said recently.



JP/Arif Rahman

Unacceptable: Fajar Nusantara Movement (Gafatar) member Yudhistira displays on Monday pictures of mobs burning down Gafatar property in Mempawah, West Kalimantan, on Jan. 19. Gafatar followers have urged the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) to probe the incident.