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INDONESIA | Former Jakarta Governor Released

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the former governor of Jakarta known popularly as Ahok, was released from prison three months early. In 2017, he was sentenced to two years in prison following his conviction on blasphemy charges.

A photograph of Ahok completing the administrative process in advance of his release was published on his Instagram account on Jan. 24.

As a Chinese Christian, Ahok was Indonesia's most prominent ethnic minority politician and the first non-Muslim governor of Jakarta for over 50 years. However, his 2017 campaign for re-election was overshadowed by the blasphemy allegation against him. He lost the vote and was later imprisoned.

Ahok's old ally, President Joko Widodo, is running for re-election in Indonesia's presidential elections on April 17. There are concerns that religious tensions will be a factor in the campaigns. In a report published in November 2018, CSW warned that "radical Islamist extremism, the politicization of religion, and identity politics are contributing to a continuing and severe rise in religious intolerance in Indonesia."

President Joko Widodo has selected Ma'ruf Amin, a 75-year-old conservative cleric and former head of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), as his vice-presidential candidate. Amin signed the fatwa (religious edict) which resulted in Ahok's conviction and imprisonment.

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said, "We welcome the release of Ahok, although we believe his conviction and imprisonment represent a serious injustice and illustrate the dangerous misuse of the blasphemy laws. In light of this we call again on Indonesia to review the blasphemy laws, and we urge all candidates in Indonesia's forthcoming presidential election to protect and promote Indonesia's tradition of religious pluralism and take steps to counter religious intolerance, extremism and identity politics."