

TRIAL

JIS teachers awaiting sexual abuse case verdict

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THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

A ruling is expected soon in the sexual abuse case against two Jakarta Intercultural School (JIS) teachers, as judges at the South Jakarta District Court have now heard closing statements from both the prosecution and the defense.

A prosecutor who wished to remain anonymous said the closing statement from the defendant's lawyers was weak, as it mostly focused on refuting the police interrogation report (BAP) rather than the prosecutors' indictment.

"The foundation of the case is what was written in the indictment, not what is in the police investigation. The defense [closing] statement tried to argue the police investigation result instead of our indictment," the prosecutor told *The Jakarta Post* shortly after Thursday's hearing.

The prosecution believes the evidence is on its side and that both teachers will be convicted.

On March 12, prosecutors demanded that judges sentence the two JIS teachers — Canadian Neil Bantleman and Indonesian Ferdinand Tjong — to 12 years in prison and pay Rp 100 million fines (US\$7,700) for their involvement in the sexual abuse of three kindergarten pupils.

The prosecutor said both teachers were guilty of violating Article 82 of the 2014 Child Protection Law on child abuse and emphasized that their roles as educators should warrant them an even harsher sentence.

Meanwhile, the defendants' law-

yer, Hotman Paris Hutapea, said Thursday his team had presented all the evidence to prove their clients' innocence, pointing to the fact that the criminal trial could not be separated from the \$125 million demanded in a separate civil lawsuit filed by "a greedy individual".

Shortly after the case went to court, family members of one of the victims filed a civil lawsuit, demanding \$125 million in compensation from the school and the Culture and Elementary and Secondary Education Ministry for damages suffered by the pupil.

"Another important thing is there is no possibility that a pupil had been molested for months at school without his parents noticing," Hotman said.

Another lawyer, Mahareksha Singh Dillon, said the case against Bantleman and Ferdinand was weak because it was built on child testimony.

"A child was not under oath when he was going to testify before the court. The testimony should not become the main source of evidence, but that is what we saw in this trial," Mahareksha said, referring to the criminal case.

He added that he hoped the judges would look into all the evidence before making a ruling, as both Bantleman and Ferdinand wished for "nothing more than a fair verdict".

The panel of judges is scheduled to deliver its verdict on Apr. 2 in an open hearing. In accordance with the Criminal Law Procedures Code (KUHAP), excepting the reading of final verdicts, trials involving minors or sexual abuse cases are closed to the public.