

# Indonesia urged to bring Uighur rights issue to OIC

JAKARTA - 21/01/19 (3)

Agnes Anya

THE JAKARTA POST/ JAKARTA

According to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, at least 2 million Muslim Uighurs and other minorities in China's Xinjiang region have been forced into "political camps for indoctrination".

Many children have been separated from their parents and siblings, and a lot of Uighurs — including prominent scholar Muhammad Salih Hajim, who translated the Quran into the Uighur language — have died in unclear circumstances in the camps, the president of the Uighur American Association Ilshat Hassan Kokbore told *The Ja-*

*karta Post* recently.

Ilshat and his fellow Uighur activists, Omer Kanat from the Uighur Human Rights Project and Turgunjan Alwadun from the World Uighur Congress, visited the *Post* on the sidelines of their mission to meet with the Indonesian government.

Omer said they wanted to meet with officials at the Religious Affairs Ministry, to ask Jakarta to bring the Uighur issue to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which will hold a summit this year in Gambia.

"We are asking the OIC to take up this issue because that is the reason for the OIC being established — to safeguard the people of Islam, but why are you not tak-

ing up this issue?" he asked.

Before Indonesia, Omer said they had met with the Malaysian government to raise the request.

However, the OIC has yet to release an official statement on the human rights situation in the Xinjiang region.

According to the OIC's official Twitter, its Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) was briefed on the issue in December 2018 during its 14<sup>th</sup> regular session in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The IPHRC then expressed its concern on Twitter on "disturbing reports" about the treatment of Uighur Muslims while hoping that China "which has excellent bilateral relations with most

OIC countries as well as the OIC" would address the legitimate concerns of the world's Muslims.

The IPHRC also cited the Chinese Constitution, which provides "clear and full guarantees" for the right to freedom of religion and belief, "which makes it obligatory on its authorities to ensure the exercise of these rights by all its nationals".

Omer added that the Uighur organizations had tried to reach out to the governments of many Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Morocco. As yet, they were "very reluctant" to meet the Uighur representatives.

Other countries, like South Korea, also knew what the Uighur people faced in Xinjiang but they

did not want to raise the issue because of economic interests.

"We are not asking them to be China's new enemies but we want them, as [Beijing's] friends, to tell China that what they are doing is not right," Omer said.

He added that the organizations had decided to meet with the Indonesian government as they were convinced that Jakarta was on the Uighurs' side, as seen by a *#SaveMuslimUighur* rally in the country last month.

Following the rally, the Foreign Ministry summoned Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Xiao Qian to convey the concerns of Indonesian Muslims about the plight of their Uighur fellow Muslims.

The Chinese Embassy issued a

press statement the next day, saying that "China is a country with multiple ethnic groups and religions", which currently was facing the threat of religious extremism in Xinjiang as a result of a poor command of the nation's official language and a lack of skills.

It claimed the camps were "professional vocational training institutions" to provide courses on China's common language, legal knowledge and vocational skills, along with de-radicalization education "for citizens influenced by extremist ideas".

Omer said he was aware of China's narrative, countering that Beijing should not punish the entire Uighur people for the misbehavior of a small minority.