



## Indonesian Government Restores Hindu and Buddhist Worship at UNESCO World Heritage Sites

### Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs:

**“Prambanan Temple will no longer be simply a tourist destination, but rather a center of active worship for Hindus from Indonesia and throughout the world”**

**The restoration of Hindu and Buddhist worship at the great temple complexes of Prambanan and Borobudur reflects the compassionate spirit of *Islam Nusantara* (“East Indies Islam”) and offers a glimmer of hope amid the widespread destruction of religious and cultural sites across the world**

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia — On February 11, 2022, senior Indonesian government officials and religious leaders met to sign a *Memorandum of Understanding on the Use of Prambanan Temple and Borobudur Temple for the Religious Interests of Hindus and Buddhists in Indonesia and the World*. As a result, two of Asia's most renowned sacred sites, which in recent decades had been largely closed to ritual worship, are now available for the performance of Hindu and Buddhist religious rituals on a regular basis.

This development comes amid a dramatic rise in the destruction of religious and cultural sites, not only in the Middle East and Africa, where Muslim extremists seek to destroy the world's diverse cultural and religious heritage, but also regions such as Europe and North America. In Canada alone, at least 56 churches were set aflame or vandalized in the summer of 2021, many of them burned completely to the ground, while over the past decade thousands of churches were desecrated, vandalized and/or set ablaze in Europe. In recent years, synagogues, churches, mosques, and other houses of worship have been the target of deadly attacks in many Western nations, including Canada, the United States, France, and New Zealand.

The great temple complexes of Borobudur and Prambanan lie in the cultural heartland of Java, whose majority-Muslim population tends to embrace what is locally known as *Islam Nusantara* (“East Indies Islam”) or *Islam rahmatan li al-‘alamin* (“Islam as a source of universal love and compassion”).

Described by UNESCO as “one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in the world,” Borobudur Temple was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE during the reign of the Sailendra dynasty, which embraced Mahayana Buddhism. Prambanan — constructed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by the syncretic Hindu-Buddhist Mataram Kingdom — is the largest temple compound dedicated to Shiva in Indonesia.

In stark contrast to northern India, whose ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples were largely destroyed by Muslim invasion and conquest, pre-Islamic religious sites on the island of Java have, for centuries, enjoyed the protection of the Muslim-majority population and of Javanese rulers.

The decision to restore Hindu and Buddhist worship at Prambanan and Borobudur came at the initiative of Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, the Honorable Yaquut Cholil Qoumas,

and is fully supported by Nadiem Anwar Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology; Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno, Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy; Erick Thohir, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises; Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, Governor of Yogyakarta; and Ganjar Pranowo, Governor of Central Java.

Held in an ornate Javanese pavilion at the Governor's office in Yogyakarta, the MOU ceremony was widely covered, and praised, by Indonesian print, broadcast, and social media. Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X told participants, "This agreement to restore the ritual use of Prambanan, Borobudur, Mendut, and Pawon Temples by Hindu and Buddhist communities in Indonesia and throughout the world arises from the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Oneness Amid Diversity," Indonesia's national motto). *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is the key to developing a nation whose people value diversity amid the harmonious mosaic of a unified Indonesia."

At a related event, Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, [said](#):

On the coming anniversary of *Nyepi* (the annual Balinese day of silence, fasting and meditation), in March of 2022, Hindus may already use Prambanan Temple as a site of mass worship. This is an unprecedented accomplishment.

I would like to thank the Acting Director General for Hindu Community Guidance, Komang Sri Marheni, for her innovative and intelligent efforts in making this a reality. I recognize that her work on Prambanan Temple very much reflects the agenda and interests of Hindus. Prambanan Temple will no longer be simply a tourist destination, but rather a center of active worship for Hindus from Indonesia and throughout the world.

Hopefully this will enable Hindus to perform their religious duty to worship, in peace and contentment. What my staff and I are doing by facilitating this is not a "job" but rather the fulfillment of our own religious duty — and struggle (*jihad*) — to serve all people of faith.

The decision by the Government of Indonesia to restore Hindu and Buddhist worship at Prambanan and Borobudur temples fulfills an aspiration often expressed by former Nahdlatul Ulama chairman and Indonesian president, H.E. Kyai Haji [Abdurrahman Wahid](#).

"*Islam Nusantara* (Humanitarian Islam) does not seek to conquer anyone. Unlike ISIS, it does not come to destroy. Rather, it contributes to developing a better civilization for all humanity. As our Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'I was sent for no purpose other than to perfect noble character and morality.' [This is jihad to build, not destroy, civilization.](#)"

~ Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf

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The original [Indonesian version](#) of the following article appears on the website of the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs:

### **Hindu Thanksgiving Ceremony (“*Angayubagia*”) in Prambanan Following Memorandum of Understanding**

YOGYAKARTA (Ministry of Religious Affairs) --- The sun's heat seemed to abate a little when a hundred Hindu worshippers began to enter the Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta on Friday, February 11. On this particular afternoon, the Hindu community performed a traditional rite of thanksgiving known as “*Angayubagia*.”

This ceremony was held to express the Hindu community's gratitude following the issuance of an official *Memorandum of Understanding for the Use of the Prambanan, Borobudur, Mendut, and Pawon Temples for the Religious Interests of Hindus and Buddhists in Indonesia and the World*.

The ceremony consisted of performing a Hindu offering or *puja* (*pejati* in Javanese), led by a Hindu priest, Romo Mangku, in the three main temples at Prambanan: i.e., the Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu temples. The *Angayubagia* ceremony concluded with the recitation of a communal prayer directly in front of the Shiva Temple. Dressed in traditional Balinese and Javanese religious vestments, the Hindus participating in the ceremony chanted Javanese sacred hymns and performed a temple cleansing ritual.

Also attending the ceremony were Komang Sri Marheni, Acting Director General for Hindu Community Guidance at the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs; Ishfah Abidal Aziz, Special Staff to the Minister of Religious Affairs; Anak Agung Gde Ngurah Ari Dwipayana, Coordinator, Special Staff to the President of the Republic of Indonesia; Agus Wijaya, Chairman of the Prambanan Temple “Launch Team” for Hindu Worship; and Trimo, Director of Hindu Religious Affairs at Prambanan Temple.

The Acting Director General for Hindu Community Guidance, Komang Sri Marheni, explained that the *Memorandum of Understanding* was issued in order to ensure the comfort of Hindus performing religious worship there. “Before, to perform worship, we had to secure a permit. We rarely received permission more than a day or two before an event. This often made us anxious about whether the event could proceed or not. But no longer,” said Komang.

Anak Agung Gde Ngurah Ari Dwipayana, Coordinator to the Special Staff of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, emphasized that Hindus should always maintain a mindset that Prambanan Temple belongs to the entire nation, and people, of Indonesia. “This temple belongs to the universe. It belongs to Indonesia. It belongs to our nation. We should never think that it belongs only to Hindus,” said Ari Dwipayana.

He added, “Since this temple belongs to our nation, let's discuss together how best to manage and coordinate the conduct of our religious activities here. Once we have agreed, let's go ahead and worship together.”

Meanwhile, Ishfah Abidal Aziz, Special Staff to the Minister of Religious Affairs, invited Indonesia's entire Hindu community to continuously safeguard the spirit of peace developed at Prambanan Temple.

In his address to Hindu religious leaders and others attending the ceremony, the Religious Affairs Minister's Special Staff, generally called "Gus Alex," added: "Let us develop a firm resolve to project and radiate peace, from here in Prambanan, not only throughout Indonesia, but also throughout the world, for the benefit of all humanity. We must regard what is happening here as a spiritual portent, and as an inspiration to benevolence."

The *Angayubagia* ceremony was the first Hindu ritual to be held after the signing of the *Memorandum of Understanding for the Use of Prambanan Temple for the Benefit of Hindus in Indonesia and the World*. According to a plan developed by the Prambanan Temple Launch Team for Hindu Worship, a number of ceremonies will be conducted in the Prambanan Temple complex in order to revitalize the temple's spiritual energy. These include the *Tawur Agung Kesanga* ceremony, an *Abhiseka* ceremony for Prambanan Temple, and an International *Maha Shivaratri* ceremony.