

JAKARTA — Wearing a traditional long white-flowing robe and sporting a beard, Fadzlan Rabbani Al-Garamatan has been going door-to-door and visiting the remote areas of West Papua province to promote Islam.

"I offer different kind of life to animists and non-Muslims there by applying humanity approaches," Fadzlan told IslamOnline.net in an interview.

West Papua, formerly West Irian Jaya or Irian Jaya Barat, is the least populous province of Indonesia.

The former Dutch colony has a population of approximately 2.6 million.

Christians make up nearly 78 percent of the population, Muslims 21 percent while the rest are Buddhists and Hindus.

There is also substantial practice of animism, though it is not recorded by Indonesian census.

Fadzlan, 40, has been spreading Islam in the province since 1990 by door-to-door visits to various remote areas.

He educates people about cleanness, health, patience and politeness as the basic elements of Islamic teachings.

"I was walking twelve days to reach one remote area and when they started to say Shahadat, I was crying."

He recalls a visit to another remote area where locals were very suspicious about him.

"Some of them were bombarding me with stones and even arrows, but now they are with us."

Through his Al-Faati Kaffa Nusantara foundation, Fadzlan says they have built 900 mosques, providing medical services and teaching locals about their new religion.

"At least 10 thousands people have been our followers."

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic state comprising 17,508 islands.

With Muslims making up some 90 percent of the 225-million population, it is also the world's most populous Muslim country.

Uniting Factor

Besides offering a new civilization in the Easternmost Indonesia, Fadzlan says his mission is also to look for the best way to solve the political tension in the West Papua to avoid more victims.

"Certain parties have been trying to separate region by using an ideology," he explained.

The poor, unstable and backward province has been experiencing political conflicts since Indonesia took control from the UN Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) in 1963.

The Christian Free Papua Movement (OPM), founded in 1965, has been fighting for the

independence of the territory, an insurgency that led to the death of more than 100,000 people.

The region has been split since 2003 into Papua province, Central Irian Jaya Province and West Irian Jaya Province.

The wealth of the most-eastern Indonesia region always arouses interests for international parties to control its natural resources.

The Foreign Ministry had lodged protests with the Australian government for protecting the Papuan rebel group, while an American citizen was arrested on charges of espionage activities several years ago.

"They will be easier to control it if Papua is separated from Indonesia," says Fadzlan.

He believes that Islam can help counter such schemes.

"When they converted to Islam, then the aspirations of being independent are reducing," he argues.

"I have obligation to keep struggling for the sake of my nation and people.

"Islam in Papua is preventing Indonesia from separation."

Long History

The latest report of the Belgium-based International Crisis Group claimed that one of the factors

that have led to increasing strains in Papua is continuing Muslim migration from elsewhere in Indonesia.

Fadzlan refutes the claims, asserting that the increase of Muslims population is coming from inside the province not because of external factors.

"At least hundreds and nine tribe heads have become Muslims," he said.

"Each tribe head controls at least five hundreds local people."

Fadzlan insists that he and his team teach Papuans about social and religious duties and how to life without prejudice or bias based on of skin color and blood.

"We never teach them about hatred."

According to Fadzlan, Islam has existed in Papua since thirteenth century far before Portuguese and Dutch colonized Indonesia.

Islam reportedly came to Papua for the first time by Syekh Iskandar from Samudra Pasai Kingdom, which is now Aceh.

"Papua has a long history as a peaceful place and society. So, Muslims are not source of conflict there."