

AN UNEXPECTED CLASS IN SUFFERING

Students from the Arastamar Bible School recently moved into new facilities, more than three years after being driven out by Muslim extremists.

History of the Arastamar Bible School

1987

The Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology (SETIA) is established in East Jakarta. The school's founders want to provide theological training to students who cannot otherwise afford it. Most come from farming families on small islands and can't afford to pay student housing. Many of the students are awarded scholarships; they live in campus dormitories on school property surrounded by cornfields and banana plantations.



2007

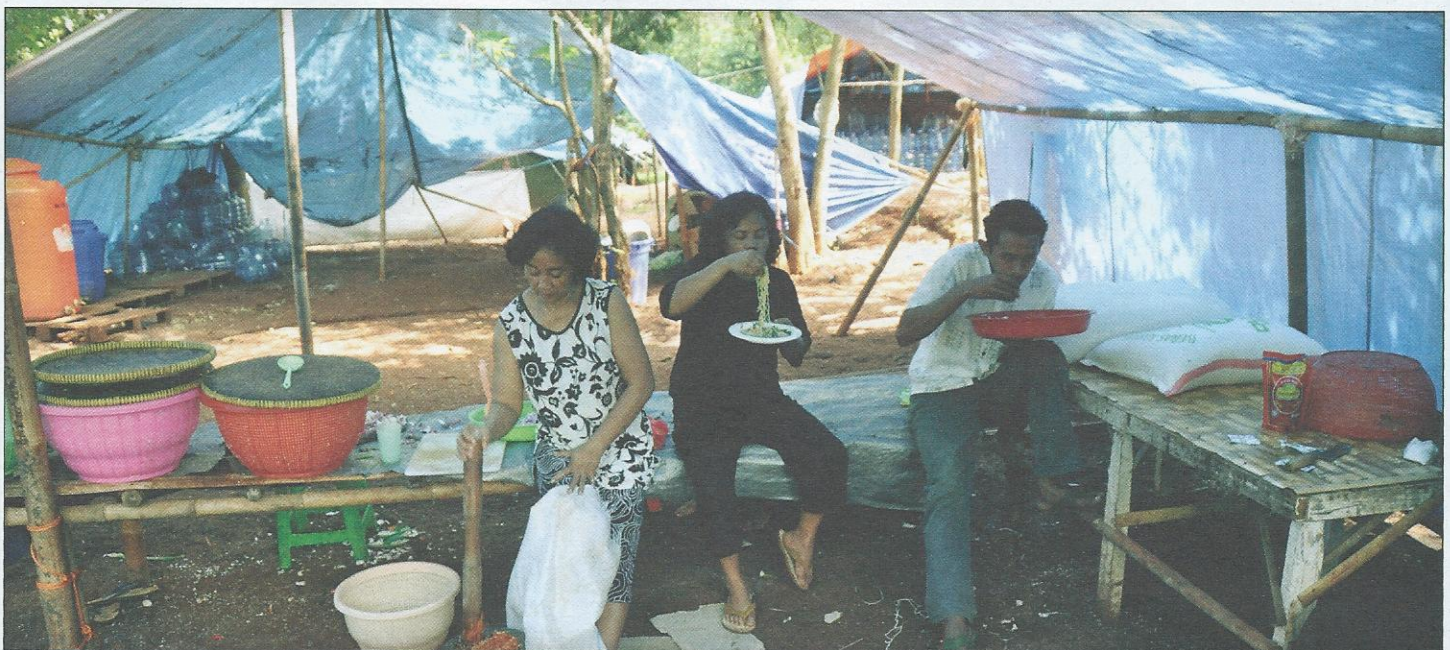
SETIA becomes the largest school of theology in the nation, serving about 1,500 students. Due to city growth, the school is now situated in a highly desirable commercial area. The Islamic Defenders' Front, a Muslim extremist group, complains that students are evangelizing in the area and that their singing disturbs the neighborhood. In March, more than 200 Muslims set fire to construction workers' quarters in an effort to prevent the school from adding a fifth dormitory. Three days later, 300 gather to demand that the school close.

July 26-27, 2008

A mob converges on SETIA around midnight on July 26, throwing stones and attempting to burn dormitories. The next day, attackers armed with metal clubs, sharpened bamboo sticks and machetes break into a female dormitory. Urged by announcements from a local mosque loudspeaker to "drive out the unwanted neighbor," they ransack the dormitory and throw tear gas and Molotov cocktails. As Indonesian police evacuate students and staff, the attackers throw acid and slash students with swords. At least 20 students suffer stab wounds and chemical burns, but none of the attackers are arrested.

July-December, 2008

About 580 students sleep for several nights in the lobby of Indonesia's parliament, requesting safe return to their college. The government refuses their request. About 700 students move to a Boy Scout campsite, living under leaking tents and holding classes under trees. Another 500 students settle in a former municipal building with inadequate sanitary facilities and water. Muslims opposed to the school hang a banner at the original campus reading, "If you dare to return, we will wipe you out."



2009

Our VOM sister office in Australia provides waterproof tent covers and other supplies to students living at the Boy Scout campsite. VOM provides books, small desks and other study supplies as well as funds for clean water. The Jakarta provincial government stops paying the campsite rental fee for the school. In October, water and electricity are shut off at the camp. VOM helps provide legal assistance for the school leadership.

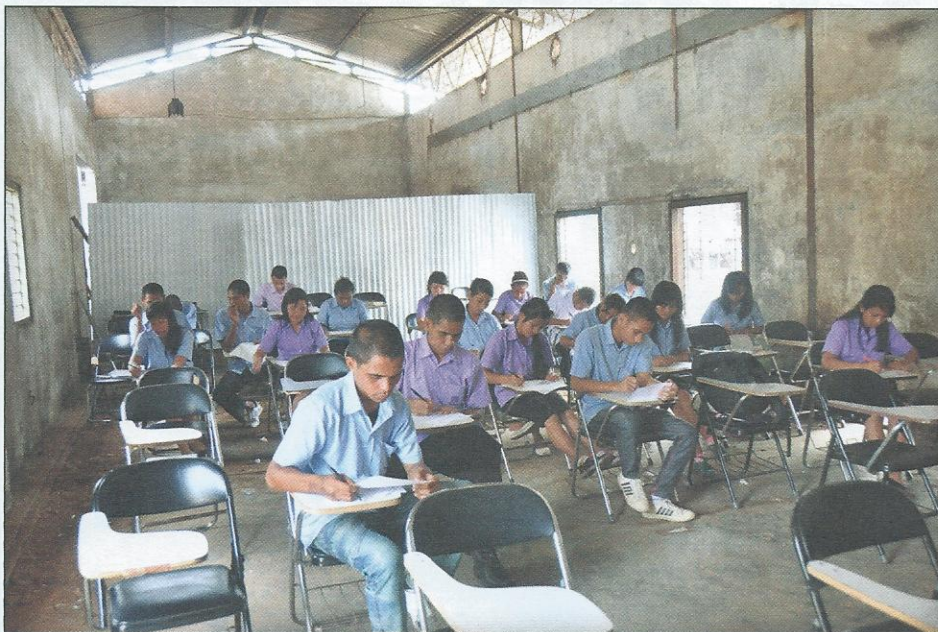


2010

Two and a half years after the attack on the seminary, students remain in temporary shelters. The school continues to ask the Jakarta Provincial Government for compensation for their eight buildings in East Jakarta. In February 2009, the vice governor agrees to pay for the buildings, but government officials never follow through, making it impossible for SETIA to purchase new facilities.

2011

The school's students, who have dropped in number to about 800, finally move to an abandoned factory in a warehouse district outside Jakarta. They eat, sleep and attend classes in the large, drafty buildings. VOM workers meet with SETIA leaders several times to assess how VOM can best help them.



2012

After providing ongoing support to SETIA for four years, this year VOM is funding a renovation project that will enable SETIA to build dormitory facilities, restrooms and classrooms within old warehouse structures.

VOM is committed to standing with these students and their school leaders. The SETIA students will minister in some of the toughest places in Indonesia. People from their home villages, who have supported them with prayer if not finances, have high expectations of how the students will serve God in Indonesia. These young men and women regard it a privilege to study God's Word and to learn the basics of pastoral care, missions and youth ministry, understanding that it is not important *where* they learn.

Despite the unexpected course in suffering these students have endured over the past four years, they have accepted their trials with the same victorious attitude as the Apostle Paul. And while they persevere through difficulties, VOM will stand with them. Just as the Philippians supported Paul, we will continue to share in the work of the gospel with these Indonesian believers until the day of Christ Jesus.