



2020 Pope Francis trip to Indonesia, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea possible

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Pope Francis. Credit: Daniel Ibanez/CNA.

Vatican City, Jan 17, 2020 / 05:00 pm ([CNA](#)).- A visit from Pope Francis to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor may happen in September, according to an Indonesian Muslim leader who met with the pope this week.

Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staquf leads the 50 million member Nahdlatul Ulama movement, which calls for a reformed "humanitarian Islam" and has developed a theological framework for Islam that rejects the concepts of caliphate, Sharia law, and "kafir" (infidels).

Stauf met with the pope this week, while in Rome for a meeting of the Abrahamic Faiths Initiative, which gathers Christians, Muslim and Jewish leaders to discuss the promotion of peace and fraternity. U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback attended the meetings.

Pope Francis met with the group Jan. 15.

After that meeting, Stauf told CNA that the pope said he plans to visit Indonesia, East Timor, and New Guinea in September.

The Vatican has not yet confirmed such a trip.

Indonesia is home to the largest population of Muslims in the world. The country's 229 million Muslims make up more than 12% of the global Muslim population. Nearly all of Indonesia's Muslims are Sunni.

There are 24 million Christians living in Indonesia, 7 million of them are Catholic. Pope St. Paul VI visited the country in 1970, and Pope St. John Paul II traveled there in 1989.

East Timor is a small country on the island of Timor. It gained independence from Indonesia in 1999, following decades of bloody conflict as the region vied for national sovereignty.

The country's second president, Jose Manuel Ramos-Horta, shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with East Timorese Bishop Ximenes Belo, for their efforts to reach a peaceful and just end to fighting in the country. Bishop Belo is now a missionary in Mozambique.

More than 1 million people live in East Timor; more than 98% of them are Catholic. It is one of few majority Catholic countries in Southeast Asia. Pope St. John Paul II visited East Timor in 1989.

Papua New Guinea is a country of nearly nine million people on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea. The other side of island consists of two Indonesian provinces. Papua New Guinea is a nation of considerable cultural diversity, comprised of small traditional communities of various groups, some of which remain uncontacted by Westerners.

Nearly all Papua New Guinea citizens are Christians, and 26 percent of the population is Catholic.

Pope St. John Paul II went to Papua New Guinea in 1984.

Pope Francis has long expressed interest in visiting Indonesia, and has also expressed interest in visiting Iraq in 2020.

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