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Social Dynamics of Conflict over the Construction of a House of Worship in Cilegon City: Implications for Inclusive Governance and SDG 16

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aims to analyze the social dynamics underlying the conflict over the construction of the HKBP Maranatha Church in Cilegon City, identify the social and political factors that intensified the conflict, and examine the role of local government in facilitating conflict resolution. The study also considers the relevance of inclusive governance and peaceful conflict management to Sustainable Development Goal 16. **Method:** The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving representatives of local government institutions, religious organizations, community groups, and parties directly affected by the conflict. The data were analyzed thematically and validated through source triangulation and member checking. **Results:** The findings indicate that the conflict was shaped by prejudice, interreligious distrust, unequal access to decision-making, political intervention, and ambiguity in the implementation of government regulations. The local government performed several roles as mediator, facilitator, collaborator, controller, and monitor. However, the effectiveness of these roles was constrained by inconsistent institutional responses and unequal power relations between majority and minority religious groups. **Novelty:** The study integrates structural conflict, symbolic interpretation, and local governance perspectives to explain how religious symbols, power inequalities, and administrative procedures interact in conflicts over houses of worship. It demonstrates that transparent regulation, inclusive dialogue, and equitable participation are essential for strengthening peaceful institutions in accordance with SDG 16.

INTRODUCTION

Cilegon, an industrial city located in Banten Province, Indonesia, is known as an important economic center with significant ethnic and religious diversity among its residents. The city, which is home to more than hundreds of thousands of residents, has a predominantly Muslim population of around 97.66%, while the rest belong to other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and other beliefs (Iqbal et al., 2022). Although this diversity should be a source of social and cultural wealth, the reality shows that these differences often trigger conflicts that undermine the expected social harmony. One of the most crucial and recurring issues is conflict over the construction of a worship house. This conflict not only reflects tensions between religious communities, but also highlights the challenges faced by society in realizing tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Issues related to the worship house construction in Cilegon City are often influenced by regional regulations that limit the establishment of worship places for religious minorities (Regus, 2022). This regulation, on the one hand, is considered an effort to maintain social balance, but on the other hand, it is often seen as a form of discrimination that violates the principles of freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. This condition is exacerbated by the negative perceptions and prejudices that develop among majority groups towards minority groups, which in turn trigger

prolonged conflicts and potentially lead to social and economic instability (Herrman et al., 2022). In many cases, the lack of interfaith dialog and the inability to reach agreement often leads to further escalation of tensions.

Continuing with the above, in 2022 the news in the media related to the rejection of the establishment of worship houses for religious minorities in Cilegon City stole the public's attention, especially the news that the people of Cilegon City calling themselves the Cilegon City Local Wisdom Savior Committee held a peaceful action in front of the DPRD office demanding the rejection of the establishment of the HKBP Maranatha Church in Cikuasa Village, Gerem Village, Cilegon City on September 07, 2022. According to *kompas.com*, Sunday (11/09/2022), the Cilegon City Local Wisdom Savior Committee agreed to reject the construction of the church on the basis of Serang Regent Ronggo Waluyo's agreement regarding the Closure of Churches / Places of Worship for Christians in the Serang Regency area (now Cilegon).

The Secretary of the Cilegon City Religious Harmony Forum revealed through *suara.com*, Monday (12/09/2022), that the peaceful action was triggered by the manipulation of the people of Cikuasa Village by the church construction committee of HKBP Maranatha Cilegon by giving one million rupiah per person. However, the community was not given an explanation regarding the provision of the money, they only knew it was for social activities so they were asked to sign as support.

In addition, the news through *bbc.com*, Thursday (01/06/2023), explained that the peaceful action was actually supported by the Mayor of Cilegon and his deputy who participated in signing a petition in the form of a banner rejecting the construction of the Cilegon HKBP Maranatha Church. The Secretary of the Cilegon City Religious Harmony Forum also revealed through *detiknews.com*, Wednesday (11/15/2023), that the peaceful action was triggered by the manipulation of the Cikuasa Village community by the church construction committee of HKBP Maranatha Cilegon by giving one million rupiah per person. However, the community was not given an explanation regarding the provision of the money, they only knew it was for social activities so they were asked to sign as support.

The formulation of the problem in this research is how social dynamics affect and are affected by the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City. This research will also identify the factors that cause conflict and its impact on society (Munawaroh & Kudus, 2023). Thus, this research aims to analyze the social dynamics in the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City, identify the factors that cause the conflict, and evaluate the impact of conflict on the local community (Riansyah et al., 2021). In addition, this research will explore the resolution efforts that have been made by various parties, including the government, community leaders, and religious organizations, as well as the effectiveness of these efforts in reducing tensions and promoting tolerance.

This research has several important benefits. First, this research is expected to provide in-depth insights for policy makers regarding the social dynamics behind the conflict over the worship house construction. This insight is important to formulate policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all religious groups in Cilegon City. Second, this research also aims to provide a better understanding for the wider community regarding the importance of interfaith dialog and tolerance as an effort to build a harmonious society. Third, for other researchers, this research can serve as a foundation for further studies on social and religious conflicts in Indonesia, especially in the context of the worship house construction.

This research uses the framework of social conflict theory proposed by Dahrendorf and Coser as the basis for analyzing the social dynamics that occur in conflicts related to the worship house construction in Cilegon City. Through this perspective, the research will explore how inequalities in the distribution of power and access to resources play a key role in triggering and exacerbating conflict. In addition, this conflict theory is also used to understand how such conflicts, although destructive, can be a trigger for significant social change in society, by opening up space for the renegotiation of social order and power balance.

Through this in-depth analysis, it is hoped that this research will not only be able to reveal the factors that cause conflict and its impact on society, but also provide concrete recommendations for relevant parties in seeking more effective conflict resolution. As such, this research can contribute to the efforts to create a more inclusive, harmonious and sustainable society in Cilegon City, which in turn can also serve as a model for other cities in Indonesia facing similar challenges.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the social dynamics in the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine more deeply the social interactions, views, and experiences of various parties involved in the conflict. Through case studies, this research can reveal complexities that often cannot be explained only with quantitative data, and provide a richer and deeper understanding of the situation under study.

The data collection methods used in this research include in-depth interviews, participatory observation and document study. In-depth interviews were conducted involving various parties directly related to the conflict, such as community leaders, religious leaders, and local government representatives. The informants considered valid and reliable in this research are the Local Wisdom Savior Committee of Cilegon City, the HKBP Maranatha Church Development Committee of Cilegon City, the Chairman of PCNU of Cilegon City for the period 2012-2022, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Cilegon City, the National Unity and Political Agency of Cilegon City, and Community Representatives of Cikuasa Village, Gerem Village. Through these interviews, researchers sought to explore diverse perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the motives, views, and dynamics that occurred from each party's point of view.

Participatory observation was conducted at the location of the worship house construction that became the source of conflict. The researcher acts as a neutral observer, observing the social interactions that occur in the field, the decision-making process, and the dynamics of the conflict that arises. This observation provides insight into how social situations develop directly and how various parties interact amidst existing tensions. The field notes generated from these observations include detailed descriptions of the physical environment, interactions between individuals, emotional expressions, and observed behaviors.

In addition, this research also used document studies to enrich and deepen the analysis of data obtained from interviews and observations. The documents analyzed included official government reports, news articles, laws and regulations, court decisions, and related academic literature. This document study serves to provide a broader context for the issues under study, both in terms of historical, legal and social aspects. The analysis of these documents also allowed the researcher to better

understand how the conflict was positioned within a larger framework, both at the local and national level.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which allowed the researcher to identify thematic patterns that emerged from the data. This analysis process was carried out through several stages, starting from transcription of the raw data, initial coding to identify potential themes, to reviewing and naming the themes to ensure they fit with the data obtained. This technique allows the researcher to understand the relationship between themes and how they reflect the existing social reality. This analysis was conducted iteratively and systematically to ensure that the results produced were truly representative of the data that had been collected.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this research applied data triangulation, where the results of interviews, observations, and document studies were compared and contrasted to find consistencies or differences that might emerge. With this triangulation, researchers can test the reliability of data from multiple sources and perspectives, thus increasing the credibility of the research findings. In addition, the member checking process was also carried out by confirming the interim findings with the respondents to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data was in accordance with their experiences and perspectives. This step was taken to increase the validity of the findings and ensure that the data obtained represented the authentic views of the various parties involved in this research.

By using this methodological approach, this research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the social dynamics in the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City, as well as theoretical and practical contributions for relevant stakeholders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of the research object

The selection of Cilegon City as the research object was based on various factors, including its status as a major industrial city in Indonesia. However, the most prominent factor is the issue of religious intolerance that surfaced in 2022. Cilegon is known as a city with a low level of tolerance, especially after a viral incident in which the Mayor of Cilegon co-signed a petition against the construction of a church in the city. The incident sparked widespread debate and highlighted the issue of interfaith harmony in Cilegon City.

This situation provides a rich context for research on the city's social, political and religious dynamics. By researching Cilegon City, it is hoped that it can provide deep insights into the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing interfaith tolerance and harmony in the region. With a long and diverse history and rapid industrial development, Cilegon City continues to be an important economic center in Banten province and Indonesia as a whole. However, the emerging issue of religious intolerance suggests significant challenges that need to be overcome to achieve better social harmony. Based on this explanation, the researcher felt the need to study the development profile and history of Cilegon City.

Since the formation of Cilegon District in 1816, the area has grown rapidly, transforming it from a small village into a Kewedanaan. The Cilegon District Office still stands strong today. On July 9, 1888, there was a peak of Cilegon people's resistance against the Dutch colonial led by KH. Wasid, known as the Geger Cilegon rebellion.

This rebellion inspired the people's struggle to free themselves from the oppression of the Dutch colonizers and the hunger caused by forced cultivation at that time.

The population of Cilegon City when divided by religion is dominated by Muslims at 453,847 people (97.66%) with details in each sub-district based on religion as follows:

Table 1. Population of cilegon city based on religion

No.	District	Islam	Christian	Catholic	Hindu	Buddhism	Confucian
1	Cibeber	61.839	1,326	452	72	205	-
2	Cilegon	50.808	830	264	65	181	-
3	Pulomerak	49.574	593	79	3	79	1
4	Ciwandan	52.896	107	21	-	21	-
5	Jombang	67.556	1.747	628	34	1.067	8
6	Gerogol	45.047	499	83	36	26	-
7	Purwakarta	42.623	771	193	27	71	1
8	Citangkil	83.504	1.176	155	15	33	-
Total Population		453.847	7.049	1.875	252	1.683	10
Percentage (%)		97.66%	1.52%	0.40%	0.05%	0.36%	0.00%

Based on this data, it can be seen that Muslims are the majority population in Cilegon City so that according to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2022, there are 768 worship houses for Muslims in Cilegon City with details of 381 mosques and 387 mushola. Meanwhile, until now there is not a single place of worship for other religions.

Conflicts related to the worship house construction in Cilegon City have been a protracted issue over the past few years, reflecting the social, religious, and political complexities in Cilegon City. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia once declared through the official website kemenag.go.id, Thursday (01/06/2023), that since 1995 there have been two acts of rejection of the establishment of worship houses by Muslims against Christians in Cilegon City.

Friction with the surrounding community occurred when residential facilities and infrastructure owned by HKBP congregants in the Pondok Cilegon Indah (PCI) housing complex were used as worship houses and the demolition of the Adventist church in Cilegon City. There were approximately 10 demonstrations by the majority Muslim community of Cilegon City to demand the closure of churches or worship houses for Christians (Riansyah et al., 2021). This conflict illustrates how differences in religious beliefs can transform into broader social tensions, especially in areas with a history of inter-religious conflict.

The background of the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City shows the involvement of various influential factors, such as differences in religious beliefs, socio- economic inequality, and political intervention at the local level. This research reveals that mistrust between religious communities and inequality in resource distribution are the main triggers for conflict. Deep mistrust, coupled with perceptions of injustice, often reinforces resistance against other religious groups.

Social dynamics analysis in the conflict of worship house construction in Cilegon City

The conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City can be analyzed through the lens of social conflict theory introduced by Dahrendorf and Coser. This

theory explains that conflict is inevitable in a stratified society, especially when there is inequality in the distribution of power and resources. Dahrendorf argues that these inequalities create powerful groups and excluded groups, leading to resistance and ongoing conflict (Coser et al., 1956). In the case of Cilegon City, the unequal distribution of power between the religious majority and minority is one of the main triggers for the emergence of tensions because the dominant group feels it has greater rights in determining public policies, including the worship house construction.

In addition, Coser emphasizes that social conflict is not always destructive but can also serve as a tool for better social change (Dahrendorf et al., 1959). Coser argues that conflict can bring out the need to correct the injustices and inequalities that underlie social structures. In the context of the rejection of church construction, the factor of inter-religious distrust is very prominent. Local communities are concerned that the presence of the church will threaten the dominance of the majority culture and religion in the region. This concern is often exacerbated by local political narratives that utilize religious issues to gain political support. Additionally, socio-economic inequalities between majority and minority groups also contribute to conflict, with unequal distribution of resources fueling discontent and a sense of injustice. These inequalities create gaps that widen the divide between religious groups, exacerbating existing tensions. It is the duty and obligation of regional heads/deputies, regents/mayors, and heads of provincial governments to safeguard and maintain religious harmony as an important part of national peace and security without partiality to any one religion (Deutsch and Coleman, 2000).

The research also found that local political interventions often exacerbate conflict. Parties with political interests can manipulate religious issues to consolidate their power, making conflict resolution more difficult to achieve. For example, the Mayor of Bekasi has a role related to conflict resolution over the rejection of the construction of the Santa Clara Church by following the rules of the Joint Ministerial Regulation No. 8 and 9 of 2006 (Sazali et al., 2015). The anomaly of the government's attitude related to its role and function affects the harmonization of the religious life of its citizens (Gurr, 1970).

Overall, the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon City is not only a matter of religious differences but also closely related to broader social, economic, and political dynamics. This suggests the need for a comprehensive approach in dealing with the conflict, which involves not only interreligious dialogue but also efforts to address socio-economic inequality and reduce the influence of identity politics in the decision-making process. In the context of the conflict in Cilegon City, this tension can be seen as an opportunity to open a broader discussion on how the rights of minority groups can be guaranteed and how the distribution of power can be more equitable. In some cases, conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation can lead to more inclusive and equitable social transformation, even though in the short term these conflicts may seem destructive.

Inter-religious mistrust in Cilegon City also exacerbates conflict dynamics. This is in line with the views of several sociologists who emphasize that social distrust can be a fuel for horizontal conflict in a plural society. Coleman and Deutsch explain that distrust rooted in differences in beliefs or ideologies often makes it difficult for the parties involved to reach common ground in the conflict resolution process (Kusuma et al., 2022). In the context of Cilegon City, this mistrust is strengthened by the history of unresolved inter-religious tensions, which limits the space for constructive dialogue and peaceful solutions.

This conflict shows that diversity, despite its potential as a social force, can easily become a source of tension when it is not accompanied by proper management. Studies carried out by Gurr on ethnic and political conflicts show that dissatisfaction arising from structural inequality often results in resistance from groups that feel marginalized (Lederach, 1997). Such dissatisfaction is usually exacerbated by non-inclusive policies or discriminatory measures. In this case, the conflict in Cilegon City can be seen as a manifestation of the inability of local governments to manage diversity fairly, creating space for dominant groups to maintain their positions and marginalized minority groups.

Overall, the conflict over the worship house construction in Cilegon reflects a larger dynamic in a plural society that has yet to fully address the challenges of social and political inequality. Mistrust among religious communities, uneven distribution of power, and a lack of constructive dialogue have exacerbated these tensions. To prevent similar conflicts in the future, more inclusive policies, open interfaith dialogue, and efforts to address existing structural inequalities are needed. As stated by Lederach, sustainable conflict resolution requires efforts to rebuild damaged relationships through dialogue and deeper understanding between disparate groups (pembudi, 2017).

Theoretical and practical implications in peaceful protest against the worship house construction

The conflict related to the peaceful protest against church construction in Cilegon City in 2022 is a concrete example of how inequality in the distribution of power and resources, as explained in the theory of social conflict by Dahrendorf and Coser, can trigger significant social tensions. The peaceful rally was triggered by plans to build a church in the predominantly muslim region, which led to resistance from some local communities. This rejection is based not only on interreligious distrust but also on the feeling that the majority group has greater rights to determine how public spaces are used, including in terms of the worship house construction.

Theoretically, this act of rejection reflects what Dahrendorf (1959) calls the conflict between the group that has power (the majority) and the group that feels marginalized or excluded (the minority). In this case, the majority group, through various formal and informal mechanisms, uses its power to suppress the rights of minority groups that want to build worship houses. Inequality in access to public decision-making and policy is one of the main factors that trigger conflict. This is consistent with Dahrendorf's view that power inequality creates constant conflict in stratified societies. In addition, Coser's (1956) views on the function of conflict in society can be applied in the analysis of such peaceful actions. This conflict, although destructive on the surface, can also be viewed as a way for society to express dissatisfaction with existing structures. Rejection of church construction in Cilegon is not only a rejection of worship houses, but also an expression of deeper dissatisfaction with the distribution of power between majority and minority religious groups. In this context, conflicts serve as an attempt to overcome existing tensions and encourage society to face the problem of inequality more openly. However, without proper conflict management, such as constructive interfaith dialogue, these conflicts risk triggering deeper tensions in the future.

The implications of this peaceful action are also closely related to the concept of social distrust introduced by Coleman and Deutsch (2000). Distrust between religious communities in Cilegon became one of the main factors that aggravate the conflict. This

distrust has grown over the years and is reinforced by ideological differences as well as negative perceptions of each other. When the government tried to facilitate church building, majority groups that felt threatened or did not believe in the good intentions of minority groups reacted with rejection. In this case, the peaceful action becomes a manifestation of deep social distrust, where dialogue and cooperation between religious groups are difficult to realize without serious efforts to build trust.

In practical terms, the peaceful protest against church construction in Cilegon provided important lessons for policy makers about the need for inclusive conflict management. Gurr (1970) highlights that social dissatisfaction is often the main trigger for conflict, especially when there are groups that feel marginalized. More inclusive and dialogic policies between the majority and religious minorities are needed to reduce tensions. Governments must take an active role in promoting open and sustainable interfaith dialogue, so that existing mistrust can be overcome and the rights of minority groups, including in the case of the worship house construction, can be respected.

In addition, this peaceful action also shows the need for a more equitable approach in the distribution of power and resources at the local level. Local governments must ensure that all groups, including minorities, have equal access to decision-making on issues affecting their lives. This is in line with the recommendations of Lederach (1997) who stressed the importance of rebuilding damaged relationships through ongoing dialogue and deeper understanding. In the absence of real efforts to create justice and trust across religious groups, similar conflicts may continue to arise in the future.

Overall, the peaceful protest against church construction in Cilegon city in 2022 reflects the complex dynamics of social conflicts in plural societies. Inequalities in the distribution of power, distrust between religious communities, and a lack of constructive dialogue all contribute to these tensions. Thus, the implications of this study are not only applicable in Cilegon but also in other areas that face similar challenges in managing religious and social diversity.

Local government efforts in conflict resolution

Prejudice and conflict between groups on the establishment of worship houses have become a sensitive and complex issue in various regions, including in Cilegon (Hikmawan et al., 2020). To overcome this challenge, the Cilegon Regional Government took proactive steps by involving various parties that have an important role in maintaining harmony and peace among religious communities. In an effort to deal with the conflict, resource representatives from the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB), the National Unity and Politics Agency (Kesbangpol), and the Cilegon branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCNU) collaborated to find a fair and inclusive solution (Nugroho et al., 2022). Through a dialogical and participatory approach, they seek to reduce tensions and encourage the creation of an atmosphere of mutual understanding in a pluralistic society. This discussion will explore more about the efforts and strategies undertaken by each speaker from FKUB, Badan Kesbangpol, and PCNU Cilegon in dealing with conflicts and establishment of worship houses in Cilegon (Faqih, 2021).

Government as mediator

The local government represented by the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) mediates and engages in dialogue with the local community on a regular basis. They held a quarterly meeting to discuss and evaluate the harmony and conduciveness in Cilegon. FKUB plays an important role in the mediation and facilitation of dialogue between

religious groups. They act as intermediaries who help resolve conflicts and promote religious harmony.

Local governments also seek to mediate conflicts through dialogue between the parties involved. This included meetings between HKBP groups and local communities who rejected the construction of the church. The dialogue aims to find solutions that are acceptable to all parties and reduce tensions. In addition, local governments actively communicate with community leaders and religious leaders to obtain support and input related to conflict resolution. These figures play an important role in bridging communication between government and society.

Local governments collaborate

The local government cooperates with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the process of mediation and conflict resolution. This is indicated by the presence of the Minister of Religious Affairs in the mediation process which shows the government's commitment to resolve this issue (Amal, 2020). This is evidenced by the closed cross-sectoral & vertical meeting regarding the situation and Conditions of Cilegon City related to the establishment of the church (after the mediation of the Ministry of religion of the Republic of Indonesia) on December 13 and 16, 2024, the meeting was led by the Deputy Mayor of Cilegon, Chairman of the Cilegon DPRD, and Dandim 0623 Cilegon

(Hotimah & Nurhayati, 2024). The meeting was attended by elements of Forkopimda Cilegon, Korem 064 Maulana Yusuf-Serang, Banten provincial Kesbangpol agency, as well as several other relevant agencies. The results of the meeting include mapping and early detection of threats, challenges, obstacles, and disturbances (ATHG) in Cilegon, especially in the village of Cikuasa, as well as building a collective agreement to maintain the conduciveness of the region (Armawi, 2013).

The Vice Mayor of Cilegon appreciated this meeting to maintain the maintenance of Public Order Security (HARKAMTIBMAS). The HKBP affirms its commitment to abide by the applicable rules and not create noise. In conclusion, all parties must jointly maintain the security and order of the region, the HKBP must respect the decisions and recommendations of the Ministry of religion of the Republic of Indonesia and Cilegon City Government not to conduct activities at the location of Cikuasa-Gerem, and the licensing process must be guided by applicable regulations. Coordination with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other relevant agencies aims to ensure that procedures are strictly followed so that there is involvement from the Ministry of internal affairs and presidential advisers (Rozikin et al., 2025).

Local government as a facilitator

Facilitator, the government conducts facilities for socialization on the importance of tolerance and religious harmony. These education and socialization programs are aimed at raising public awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence (Berman, 2012). Local government and FKUB communicate directly with the HKBP. In this case, the new pastor of HKBP apologized and was recognized by the FKUB, indicating the good faith to resolve the conflict by peaceful means.

Local governments also show their support for diversity by providing burial facilities for non-Islamic religions (McCrudden, 2008). This shows that the government supports religious freedom and respects all religious groups. Interfaith facilities are also evidenced by the regular coordination meetings with the team of Interfaith Community Leaders (Tomaliga) and Interfaith Youth Forum (Fordaliga) Cilegon (Munawaroh & Kudus, 2023).

Local government control and monitoring

The local government continues to monitor and evaluate the situation to ensure religious harmony is maintained (Díaz et al., 2014). They provide recommendations and ensure that all licensing procedures are carried out correctly. The government stressed the importance of completing the licensing process in accordance with the law (Honka, 2019). They ensure that all administrative requirements are met before permission is granted. One of the main conditions is to obtain the consent of the surrounding community.

The local government, through FKUB, evaluates the completeness of the administrative requirements for the worship house construction. One of the main requirements that must be met is the support of 60 local residents authorized by the village head. In this case, these requirements have not been met. This is in accordance with PBM 2 Minister No. 9 and 8 of 2006. Delays and analyzes were carried out until the administrative requirements were met, and the process of worship building was postponed. FKUB conducts a hearing to analyze the situation on the ground and ensure that all conditions have been met before making recommendations.

In addition, as a controller in this conflict, the regional government is also trying to clarify the information spread by the media. They work closely with the media to ensure that the information presented to the public is accurate and does not lead to misunderstandings. The regional government and FKUB are trying to clarify incorrect or misleading information related to this conflict. They assure that the act of refusal is caused not so much by intolerance as by incompleteness of administrative requirements. The government also accepts criticism and reviews the processes already in place to ensure that all measures taken are in accordance with the rules and do not cause dissatisfaction in the community.

Discussion

The conflict over the construction of the HKBP Maranatha Church demonstrates that religious disputes cannot be understood solely as differences in theological beliefs. Instead, the conflict reflects structural inequalities in access to authority, public decision-making, and institutional resources. Dahrendorf (1959) explains that conflict emerges when authority and power are distributed unequally between dominant and subordinate groups. In Cilegon City, the religious majority possessed greater social and political influence in determining whether minority groups could establish a house of worship. This unequal position strengthened the perception that public policy could be shaped according to the interests of the dominant group. Nevertheless, Coser (1956) argues that social conflict does not always produce destructive consequences because it can reveal unresolved inequalities and encourage the renegotiation of social arrangements. Accordingly, the conflict may provide an opportunity to improve licensing procedures, strengthen minority participation, and establish more accountable governance. These measures are directly relevant to SDG 16, particularly its emphasis on inclusive institutions, equal access to justice, and participatory decision-making.

Interreligious distrust also played a central role in escalating the conflict. The competing groups interpreted the construction of the church through different symbolic frameworks. For the church community, the building represented the constitutional right to practice religion, collective identity, and access to a secure place of worship. Conversely, some members of the local community interpreted it as a possible challenge to local religious and cultural dominance. Coleman and Deutsch (2000) emphasize that distrust makes cooperation difficult because each group tends to interpret the actions of

others through suspicion and perceived threat. This condition was reinforced by accusations regarding the collection of community signatures and the provision of money, which further weakened confidence between the parties. Gurr (1970) also explains that perceived inequality and collective dissatisfaction can encourage resistance when groups believe that existing arrangements threaten their interests. Therefore, conflict resolution should not focus only on administrative requirements but must also address prejudice, misinformation, and damaged intergroup relationships through sustained interfaith communication.

The findings further indicate that local government institutions have a decisive role in determining whether the conflict develops toward reconciliation or further polarization. The involvement of the Religious Harmony Forum, the National Unity and Politics Agency, religious organizations, community leaders, and government representatives created opportunities for mediation and coordination. Similar studies demonstrate that local government leadership and adherence to transparent regulations are essential in resolving conflicts concerning the construction of houses of worship (Pambudi, 2017; Kusuma et al., 2022). However, mediation becomes less credible when public officials are perceived as supporting one group or applying regulations inconsistently. According to Lederach (1997), sustainable peace requires more than temporary agreements; it depends on rebuilding relationships, restoring trust, and creating continuous dialogue among conflicting groups. Sazali (2015) similarly emphasizes the importance of communication-based approaches in strengthening religious tolerance. Consequently, the government must act as an impartial mediator, ensure transparent licensing procedures, correct misleading public information, and provide equal opportunities for all religious communities to participate in decision-making. Such an approach would strengthen social cohesion and support the institutional objectives of SDG 16.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study demonstrates that the conflict over the construction of the HKBP Maranatha Church in Cilegon City was not caused exclusively by religious differences. It emerged from the interaction of prejudice, interreligious distrust, unequal power relations, political intervention, disputed administrative procedures, and inconsistent government responses. The conflict illustrates how houses of worship can acquire different social meanings for majority and minority groups. Although the dispute created social tension, it also opened opportunities to reconsider existing governance practices, improve dialogue, and establish a more equitable relationship between religious communities. Effective conflict resolution therefore requires transparent policies, impartial mediation, and inclusive participation consistent with the principles of SDG 16. **Implication:** The findings imply that local governments should move beyond procedural and administrative approaches when managing conflicts involving houses of worship. Government institutions must ensure that licensing requirements are applied consistently, transparently, and without discrimination. The Religious Harmony Forum, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and community representatives should be meaningfully involved in continuous dialogue rather than consulted only after conflict has escalated. Inclusive decision-making can reduce misinformation, rebuild public trust, protect religious freedom, and strengthen the legitimacy of local institutions. **Limitation:** This research focused on a single conflict case in Cilegon City and involved a limited number of informants from selected government, religious, and community institutions. The

findings are therefore closely connected to the historical, demographic, political, and religious characteristics of the study location. The study also relied on interviews, observations, media reports, and institutional documents that may reflect different interests and interpretations. Furthermore, the research did not employ a longitudinal design to examine changes in interreligious relationships after mediation and government intervention. **Future Research:** Future studies should compare conflicts over houses of worship across different regions to identify similarities and differences in government responses, majority-minority relations, and regulatory implementation. Longitudinal research is also needed to evaluate whether mediation, interfaith dialogue, and policy reform produce sustainable improvements in trust and social cohesion. Further studies may examine the perspectives of women, young people, minority congregations, and surrounding residents who are often underrepresented in formal conflict-resolution processes. Research combining qualitative analysis with social-network mapping, public-opinion surveys, or policy evaluation would provide stronger evidence for developing inclusive and non-discriminatory institutions under SDG 16.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Eva Hustri Sinaga contributed to the conceptual framework, research design, and validation process; **Ahmad Sihabudin** was involved in methodology development, data analysis, sourcing references, and drafting the manuscript; **Ail Muldi** handled data management, project coordination, and manuscript drafting. All listed authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

During the revision of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, solely to support English-language editing, grammatical correction, academic phrasing, and structural clarity. The artificial intelligence tool was not used to recruit participants, collect or fabricate data, conduct interviews, perform thematic analysis, determine the findings, or independently formulate the conclusions. All AI-assisted content was critically reviewed, revised, and verified by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, interpretation, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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