

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue Through Promoting a Culture of Peace

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Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world and demographically is the fourth most populous country after China, India and the United States, with 224 million people inhabiting an archipelago of 13,112 islands. Currently more than 200 million Muslims live in Indonesia. They constitute 84% of the country's total population and 13% of all Muslims worldwide. However despite the predominance of one single religion, Indonesia is essentially a multicultural society. Spread throughout the archipelago are more than 214 ethnic groups speaking distinct local languages. Among the 35 million Indonesians who are not Muslim, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, as well as various local indigenous religions, are commonly practised.

Indonesia protects all religious believers as stated in its 1945 Constitution. Such a situation came about because the founding fathers of Indonesia, they were prominent Muslims and Christians, did not choose religion as the foundation for the state. Rather they chose *Pancasila* as the state's philosophical foundation and at the same time as the guideline in establishing the state's political power. Certainly such a choice was not made without reason nor was it an easy thing to do.

The historical record has expressly displayed and borne clear witness to the fact that the debate of the Indonesian founding fathers, which tore the group into two severely opposing poles, the nationalists and the Islamists, was aggravated, bitter and tough. The former advocated *Pancasila*, and the latter wanted Indonesia to be based on an Islamic ideology. Such heated debates occurred in meetings prior to or in the wake of the independence proclamation, especially in the sessions held in parliament in 1945.

Historical Background of Islam and Christianity

Islam and Christianity are not the native religions of Indonesian people. In fact, both religions came from outside Indonesia. Islam is always understood as the Arabic or Eastern religion, meanwhile Christianity is considered as the European or Western religion; this misunderstanding leads to prejudice.

Islam came to Indonesia in the 13th century and was spread by traders and preachers who disseminated Islamic teachings throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The key to the success of Islamic propagation was not conquest. That is a fact. Rather it was the ability of Islamic preachers to adopt a cultural approach to the local traditions, beliefs and wisdom dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism prior to the coming of Islam.

Instead of forcing Shari'a (Islamic law) on the community, the preachers of Islam, who are known as the nine saints, especially in Java, developed a cultural Islamic approach by accommodating certain aspects of local traditions, beliefs and wisdom. As a result, there was a process of indigenisation of Islam in Indonesia. Throughout the history of Indonesia, Muslims were able to develop mutual respect, understanding and tolerance of others. It is obvious that the development of Islam in Indonesia is different when compared to that of Islam in the Middle East.

Meanwhile Christianity came to Indonesia in the 16th century with colonialism; especially Dutch and Portuguese colonialism. The population of Christianity in Indonesia now is approximately 24 million people. The close association of Christianity with Western imperialism and colonialism has made many Muslims consider Christians as colonialists.

In fact, despite the association of Christianity with colonialism, Indonesian Christians tend to be nationalistic. Most Indonesian Christians enthusiastically joined in the struggle for independence. It is important to note that in every general election, the Catholic Council of Bishops and the Indonesian National Association of Churches have jointly issued a political statement.

The statement or declaration praises God for the Indonesian nation-state and thanks God for accompanying the Indonesian people in their struggle to realise the ideals of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia; namely national sovereignty, justice, prosperity and peace. The declaration states that all Indonesian Christians are called by God to participate in the national elections to choose leaders who are committed to *Pancasila*, the Constitution and national ideals.

Our task as peace-lovers is to campaign and to make people realise that Islam and Christianity are two religions which carry the universal message of peace, freedom and salvation. Both are present in the midst of the peoples of the world conveying a new morality for social transformation.

Islam and Christianity are a moral force because of their metaphysical and humanist character. Islam and Christianity not only carry teachings in vertical aspect (between human beings and God) but also carry teachings which contain horizontal aspects (among human beings). So both religions respect humanity.

How to Understand Islam in Indonesia?

While many people commonly speak of Islam and Muslims in all-encompassing terms, there are many interpretations of Islam and many different Muslims. Muslims come from diverse nationalities, ethnic and tribal groups, and cultures; they speak many languages and practise distinct customs. The majority of the world's Muslims live in Asia, particularly in Indonesia, not the Arab world. Only about one in five of the world's Muslims are Arabs. The largest Muslim communities are in Asia, particularly in Indonesia. And millions of Muslims live in the US and Europe, including in Italy; they represent the second or third largest religion in all these countries.

Because of globalisation and emigration, today the major cities where Muslims live are not only exotic-sounding places such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Mecca but also London, Paris, New York and Milan. Religiously, culturally, economically, and politically, there are multiple images and realities of Islam and of Muslims.¹

Muslim women's dress, educational and professional opportunities, and participation in society also vary significantly. Women in some Muslim

societies cannot drive cars and are sexually segregated, but women in many other parts of the Muslim world, like in Indonesia, can drive cars, ride motorcycles, and even fly planes. Some Muslim women are required by law to cover fully in public, while others are not. A growing number of women are choosing to cover their heads, while others do not. In Indonesia, Muslim women make up the majority of university students. Indonesian Muslims are convinced that gender equality and women's empowerment are consistent with Islamic values.

In other parts of the world, Muslim women lag behind men in even basic literacy. In Indonesia, Muslim women serve in government and parliaments, and even have headed governments as the president, while in other Muslim countries, women are still struggling for the right to vote and run for office.

The Religious Commitment of the Founding Fathers

Indonesia is a unique case. Despite the fact that the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Indonesia's state ideology is not Islam, but is based on *Pancasila* (Five principles, namely belief in God, a just and civilised humanism, the unity of Indonesia, people's power, and social justice). These five principles are compatible with the universal values of human rights; they are also conducive to building peace within the community.

The choice of *Pancasila* as the foundation on which the state and national life is based, witnesses the victory of nationalistic Muslims and Christians; the victory of moderate Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This fact also proves that since independence, Muslim and Christian key figures have put into practice the importance of maintaining pluralist and democratic value in the shared life of the nation of Indonesia.

This fact of pluralism should always be manifested and may not be negated in the life of the state and nation. Also the active roles played by both Christian and Muslim leading figures, especially those of the founding fathers, in embodying peace, tranquillity, inclusivism and a respect for pluralism in Indonesia, should always be borne in mind and disseminated. These two ideas are of considerable utility and can serve to generate and inspire efforts to foster peace, justice and humanity in Indonesia.

***Pancasila* as the Common Ground in Overcoming Prejudice**

The founding fathers prepared the Indonesian constitution based on *Pancasila*. This constitution has been amended four times, yet the regulation concerning religion as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution has remained the same. The article reads: (1) The state is based on the Belief in One Supreme God (2) The State guarantees the freedom of each of its citizen to embrace their respective religion and to perform religious duties in accordance with their respective religion and belief. The provision of the article expressly indicates that the Indonesian state comprehensively guarantees the religious freedom of its citizens.

The thing worth underlining here is that Indonesian Christian and Muslim eminent leaders hold inclusive, moderate and tolerant dispositions. They believe in the importance of maintaining harmonious togetherness as a nation, as well as the significance of upholding human dignity and esteem regardless of differences of religion; and the importance of enforcing basic human rights, especially the right of religious freedom for all people including minority and vulnerable groups.

The endeavours made by both the Christian and Muslim communities to establish strong and solid civil society by upholding democracy, reinforcing human rights and promoting justice, including in it gender justice, have become ever more apparent. The strong inclination towards this tendency was made clear by the advent of a number of acts of legislation and public policies, such as Act Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. As far as religious life is concerned, this Act lays down (in Article 22): (1) Every individual is given a free choice for embracing his or her own religion and belief and for performing his or her duties in compliance with the religion or belief adhered to. (2) The state guarantees followers of any religion or belief with freedom to observe and perform religious duties in accordance with his or her religion or belief.

In addition, the commitment upheld by Indonesia has become stronger by the birth of Act Number 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of International Covenants concerning civil-political rights stipulating therein the assertion of freedom to advocate any belief.

The Problem of Law Enforcement

At the level of policy and legislation, the guarantee granted by the state for the freedom of advocating any belief in Indonesia is sufficiently adequate. The problem lies in the practical level of law enforcement. Law enforcement on all policies is to a considerable extent influenced by the socio-political situation and condition of the government within a certain period of time. Should the central government adopt strong and firm measures in the application of laws, then the implementation on all public policies will go as desired. On the other hand, if the central government adopts a weak and infirm disposition, the implementation of various laws will meet with barriers and handicaps.

In addition, other matters which have often hampered the enforcement of democracy, fulfilment of human rights, and promotion of peace and justice in Indonesia, have been related to the current economic and political gaps. The failure of the government in realising social welfare and in improving the intellectual life of the nation is the reason for certain Islamist groups resorting to committing destructive acts of vandalism. The community's desperate poverty and ignorance have often been exploited by certain groups in such a way for the pursuit of their own political and economic interests. That is indeed terrible.

It is this unfortunate condition that is alleged to have given birth to radical Muslim groups. The advent of radical Muslims is much influenced by a wide variety of factors, among others, by the failure of the government to advance the welfare of the society, especially in the development of public services, such as education and health. In the mind of this radical group, the best and most appropriate solution to step away from the prevailing problem is to bring an Islamic state into reality. Establishing an Islamic state is considered to be the only and most appropriate solution, which can bring the nation towards a better situation.

A number of conflicts related to religion and acts of violence prevailing in Indonesia are in essence not theological in nature rather they are economic and political in character. To state things firmly, those conflicts are the reflection of widespread discontent and negative reactions demonstrated by the members of a lower strata of society

towards social division and economic-political marginalisation looming large ahead of them. From a religious perspective, this condition is right. Why? Are not the biggest enemies of religion injustice exemplified in the form of poverty, backwardness, ignorance and narrow mindedness?

All religions are descended to the earth with the primary aim of providing solutions to various humanitarian problems. Those religious foes and enemies shall be terminated so as not to bring about disasters of greater magnitude and multitude in the life of society. Poverty and ignorance have made it easier to bring the less fortunate and underprivileged members of society to keep away from religion. The community's poverty and ignorance incline people to be easy prey for certain groups, from which they will take great advantage. Religious communities are always exploited in such a way that they may fight with one another and inter-religious conflicts will arise accordingly.

The Role of Islamic and Christian Organisations in Overcoming Prejudice

Every religion, no matter which it is, has four dimensions: spiritual, ritual, social, and humanist dimensions. Concerning the first dimension, spirituality is the relationship between an individual and God. Spirituality is also very private and can not be interfered with by others.

The ritual dimension usually has two aspects. First, the relationship between the individual and God, and at the same time, secondly, it is to develop a refined personality through noble acts. So there are worldly and spiritual elements. Regarding the social dimension, every religion consists of the same subject matter, but differs in the strategy and form used in promoting this subject matter.

All religions desire a peaceful, safe, prosperous, and equitable society. It is only the strategy to achieve this prosperity which is different. So between spirituality and rituals, a healthy and synergetic social element must be forged. This is like a pyramid structure. If healthy and synergetic social relations are not established, what we have is a pyramid turned on its head. All religions are almost the same with regards to human issues such as peace, justice, honesty, compassion, etc.

An interesting phenomenon from both Christian and Muslim religious communities in Indonesia is the presence of progressive or reformist groups. The groups come from the Islamic and Christian organisations, such as PGI (the Indonesian National Association of Churches), KWI (the Catholic Council of Bishops), NU and Muhammadiyah (the two big Islamic organisations in Indonesia). Besides that, there are many religious Muslim and Christian NGOs which voice the importance of peace, democracy, and human rights on behalf of religion, such as ICRP, ICIP, Wahid Institute, LSIK, LSAF, LKIS, and LP3S.

The most prestigious thing that progressive Muslims and Christians have done is the effort of reinterpreting religious teachings, despite the fact that the attempts of these groups have often received much opposition and resistance from radical groups or the groups who maintain the conservative religious values that very often make no accommodation to the reality of plurality and modernity in Indonesia.

In many cases, ICRP, an association of religious leaders of all religions and beliefs in Indonesia, which is actively involved in promoting religion for peace, demands that the government eliminate all regulations and public policies which are discriminatory against minority groups and cause ignorance of the civil rights of the citizen. Christian and Muslim prominent figures in ICRP always promote observance of civil rights for all citizens and observance of human rights, without taking account of religion, ethnicity, nationality or gender differences.

The endeavour to promote peace in the perspective of gender equality is put as the priority to be carried out by Indonesian Muslim and Christian women. They are, amongst others, associated in Islamic Women's organisations and NGOs, such as Fatayat NU, Muslimat NU, Mitra Perempuan, Perempuan PGI, Rahima, Puan Amal Hayati and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah. These organisations actively carry out training and advocacy for people, especially women. These institutions also train their cadres to develop women activists and thinkers who are progressive, inclusive and enlightened. There are also numerous Christian and Muslim women activists and intellectuals who are actively voicing democracy and gender equality in the bureaucratic state institutions and parliaments.

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue: Developing a Culture of Peace

In my experience, promoting interfaith dialogue must begin from the principle of acceptance of others. For me, this principle of acceptance of others is very important in promoting interfaith dialogue and must be instilled in society regardless of religion, ethnicity and race. Because of that, several steps need to be taken, among others:

- First, to reinterpret the religious teachings which are incompatible with the principles of humanity. Worship is no longer understood as praising God, but rather as having a profound concern for humanity's problems. Here, as much as possible, religion is pushed as a locomotive to free human beings from tyranny and all forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression.
- Second, to increase a moderate religious understanding. The moderate groups in every religion must disseminate a "humanist outlook." It is done in order to give a different perspective on religion which facilitates tolerance and dialogue.

The forms of dialogue show not only the variety of content and the scope of the dialogues but also the quality. Besides this, the participants involved in the dialogues often exhibit different views to the goals of the dialogues. Those involved in dialogues about social issues, for example, have certainly not yet been ready to enter into a spiritual dialogue.

Therefore, interfaith dialogues are an attempt to overcome all forms of prejudice in religious society. Dialogue participants believe that up to a certain point, faith can be discussed by human beings, among human beings and communicated by language. In short, faith is dialogical. Faith is dialogical first, between God and human beings; and second among human beings.²

In this context, I do believe that interfaith dialogue is not only possible, but also necessary to engender an appropriate understanding of other religions. Through dialogue, each side understands the problems faced by other religions and so there emerges a feeling of sympathy and empathy which motivates a desire to work together and to overcome their problems.

In the context of the international society, the term 'culture of peace' has been echoed since 1997. In that year, the United Nations declared the Year 2000 as the "International Year of Peace," and declared that the years 2001-2010 should be "The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World". So what do they mean by the culture of peace? The UN Resolution 1998 stated that the culture of peace is based on the principles established in the Charter of the United Nations and on respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance, the promotion of development, education for peace, the free flow of information and the wider participation of women as an integral approach to preventing violence and conflicts, and efforts aimed at the creation of conditions for peace and its consolidation.³

So the culture of peace is the integrated approach to prevent violent conflicts which in time will bring and maintain peace. Through the culture of peace, acts of violence can be reduced in order to establish peace between human beings and their surroundings.

In the context of developing the culture of peace, one of the basic points which should be considered is how religious communities can take active roles in building platforms for peace and tolerance. The values of universal peace and tolerance, taught in all religions, have the potential to enlighten leaders and lead followers of religions in establishing an everlasting peace, each in their own surroundings.

The problem which has to be considered is the fact that the relationship between people with different religious backgrounds is not always peaceful. Conflicts and violence related to religions can occur anywhere, including in Indonesia. However, we understand that conflicts between religions are not supported by any religion, but rather as an impact of religious identity mobilisation in the struggle between groups of people, including those who are speaking on behalf of a certain religion, in fighting for justice or in a struggle to win resources and power.

There are many forms of interfaith dialogue that can be carried out by multifaith communities. I propose a form of dialogue in action where the actions of supporters of interfaith ideologies are used to transform the community to become a more just and humanitarian society.⁴ In other words, enlightenment and transformation at a per-

sonal level is not enough. Dialogue participants have to make social transformations and this transformation must be carried out across all religions.

Therefore, we can still rely on religions, as a vehicle to govern someone's individual spiritual relationship with God and social relationship with other people, to use them as a force for transformation for individuals and communities in order to gain common progress in all aspects of life, including peace, justice and welfare.

The development of the culture of peace would only be effective if it is carried out basically in the framework of achieving peace and welfare in the future. Therefore, one of the strategic factors to which we must pay close attention is how the future generation, especially the children, can understand and apply the culture of peace in their lives.

The development of the culture of peace in children is closely related to the educational activities in which they engage in their home, school, and society. So far, education in many countries still indicates some difficulties in assisting students to become whole human beings. There are many factors involved; amongst others are weak educational infrastructure (funds, human resources, curricula, etc.), and overemphasis on cognitive ability while overlooking the impact of the culture of violence which is still strong in our everyday life.

To develop the culture of peace, I recommend several critical factors to which attention needs to be paid:

- An understanding of the necessity of resolving matters regarding peace and humanity at local, national and global levels in the future, and also the role of the culture of peace in the effort to establish peace. Included within this: how far could the culture of violence in society be reduced and converted into the culture of peace.
- An understanding of how crucial is the role of education in formatting the culture of peace that children receive in home, school and society.
- The preparation of infrastructure for peace education, including the quantity and quality of human resources, supporting institutions, funds and technology.

- More commitment from countries and societies participating in forming the culture of peace. In this matter, the range of varying potential possessed in religious communities, both at national and international level, must be delivered in full towards the establishment of the culture of peace.

Developing the Culture of Peace Through Religious Education

One of the ways to develop the culture of peace is to engineer an educational system that will underpin dialogue between religions. So far, education in religion taught in school tends to be more dogmatic and focussed on rituals. Such education in religion develops a sense of absolute truth, which will not only result in denial of other religions but also a different understanding of the religion itself.

This approach to educating about religion in school underlines a literal and formalist comprehension. Such an approach will only cause the followers to be unable to act critically and with appreciation towards her or his religion and other people's religion. Therefore it is not surprising that in many religions in different countries, religious differences have caused an inability to work together in creating a social world which is comfortable for everyone.

So far an appreciation of the plurality of religions has developed well among religious elites in many countries, including in Indonesia, because they have developed a dialogue tradition and used a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions. The dialogue tradition should enable each follower of religion to act openly and develop communication with other groups. Whereas the phenomenological approach should enable followers of certain religions to understand other religions from the viewpoint of the religion concerned. Such an approach will annihilate the sense of certain religious egoism which judges other religions by their own viewpoint.

Right now, the problem is how to spread such religious attitudes to the public so that an open attitude that respects other religions can be developed not only between elites but also for everyone. Our need is how to develop a pluralist attitude as a common attitude in society so that we can create a harmonious relationship, which will bring peace to different groups of people. In a broader sense, plural-

ity also means respecting other groups with their various differences in terms of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, social status and so on.

Strategically, such education in the plurality of religion must cover the following activities:

- Pedagogical activity, where a curriculum for plurality education will be researched, engineered and implemented.
- Dissemination activity, where a programme of education in religious pluralism will be communicated to stakeholders of education and wider society.
- Research and development activity, where the dynamic response by society toward violence, including relationship between religions, can be identified systematically and used for programme development;
- Policy advisory activity, where we shall make an effort to bring about a change in policies at different levels of society towards the reinforcement of plurality in religion, which in the end will bring peace, justice and welfare for all of God's creation.

As a conclusion, let me say that peace education is one of the ways to develop the culture of peace in promoting interfaith dialogue. Such educational programmes for pluralism in religion must be developed in the light of the fact that current educational systems for religion taught in schools are ideological, absolutistic and formalist.

Finally, the tradition to develop a dialogue between religions and to take a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions must be intensified. Why? Because it will enable each religious person to act openly and to develop communication with other groups and help them to understand constructively about other religions. Educational programmes for pluralism in religion will also intensify our appreciation of differences of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, social status and other differences that we find in our everyday lives.

Recommendations and Solutions

It can be concluded that Indonesia is unique. Indonesian Christian and Muslim communities are intensely influenced by local culture which is tolerant, open and inclusive, as well as respecting humanity.

The Indonesian Muslim community is different to those of other areas, especially the Middle East. The Indonesian Muslim community has a long experience of living together – side by side – with people with different religions. The founding fathers of this country respected humanity and were active in efforts to overcome prejudice and campaign for justice and peace.

Now, what should be done by all Muslims and Christians as their important contribution to the civilisation of peace? I propose three concrete actions as follows:

First, Muslims and Christians work together to continue the efforts of cultural reconstruction through education in its widest sense, particularly education in family life. These efforts need to be implemented because a culture of peace, respect, tolerance and inclusivity cannot emerge naturally and spontaneously in society, instead it must be arranged in such a way through the education system. Why is it important? To reduce prejudice in society, children must be taught to embrace multiculturalism. A few researches found that prejudice and bias are often learned in childhood. So education is a means to a harmonious multicultural society. Multicultural education can shield people from the negative effects of globalisation. Multicultural education promotes the universal values of religion which teach peace and justice, and promote human dignity. I believe that the implementation of multicultural education will be very useful for a diverse country like Indonesia.

Second, Muslims and Christians work together to continue the efforts of law reform. We have to reform some laws and public policies which are not conducive to the establishment of peace and justice as well as the upholding of human rights.

Third, Muslims and Christians work together to continue efforts for the renewal of religious interpretation. Current interpretation, as widely practised in the Muslim community, is not at all compatible with the principles of human rights, particularly women's rights and gender equality. So we have to propose a new interpretation of religion which is more conducive to promoting peace and justice, and upholding human rights. It is this type of interpretation which will lead us to eliminate all forms of prejudice, hatred and violence.

- 1| *John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? New York: Gallup Press, 2007, p.2.*
- 2| *Komarudin Hidayat, Dialog Antar Iman (Inter-faith Dialog), in Tragedi Raja Miras: Moralitas Agama dan Krisis Modernisme, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998, p.189.*
- 3| *The United Nations A/Res/52/13, 15 January 1998, paragraph 2.*
- 4| *B.J. Banawiratma, SJ, Bersama Saudara-Saudari Beriman Lain (Together With Brother and Sister in Faith), Dialog: Kritik dan Identitas Agama (Dialog: Criticism and Religious Identity), Yogyakarta: Dian/Interfidei, 1993, p. 26-7.*