

Islam of the Archipelago leads way to moderation

Tama Salim | Jakarta | Posted: Wed, May 11 2016 | 10:04 am

The moderate view of Islam that promotes tolerance, peace and an appreciation for local cultures has gained wide acceptance in the world's Muslim community, as Muslim leaders from 35 countries issued a joint statement on Tuesday on the global promotion of Islam Nusantara.

Islam Nusantara, or Islam of the Archipelago, a concept coined by Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, is one that promotes moderate views and religious tolerance.

NU concluded its two-day International Summit of the Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) by issuing the Jakarta Declaration, with the aim of disseminating Islam Nusantara's tenets for a global audience.

The 16-point joint declaration states that Islam Nusantara is a natural progression for Islam that has flourished amid the diverse cultures of Indonesia, but does not contradict the basic teachings of Islam (sharia).

NU central board chairman Said Aqil Siroj said that the declaration was only a call for the world to appreciate the peaceful nature of the Islam that has thrived in Indonesia.

"NU does not mean to 'export' Islam Nusantara to the rest of the world. We only invite other Muslim communities to appreciate the beauty and dynamism resulting from the amalgamation of Islamic teachings with the realities of local cultures," Aqil said on Tuesday, concluding the ISOMIL.

The declaration also called on Muslims to promote moderation, harmony, peace and justice, and stated that it was the dissemination of misinterpreted Islamic teachings that had contributed significantly to the rise of radicalism and violent extremism.

Throughout the two-day summit, Muslim leaders showed an interest in learning more about Islam Nusantara, NU secretary-general Helmy Faisal Zaini said.

Helmy said that a number of Muslim leaders expressed their interest in adopting the concept of Islam Nusantara and planned to set up grassroots organizations, much like the NU, to serve as a platforms for Muslim leaders to promote moderate teachings of Islam.

Helmy said that Muslim figures from 10 countries, including Russia, Lithuania and Lebanon, were among those seeking to emulate what has been done in Indonesia.

Earlier, Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan suggested that, as the country's largest Muslim organization, the NU could assume a key role in mediating conflict in the Middle East.

Luhut said that ongoing conflict in the region was a result of an inability to reconcile nationalism with religious affiliation, a point that was also made in ISOMIL's Jakarta Declaration.

Lebanese cleric Amin Kurdi said he would personally endorse the establishment of an NU-like organization in his country, seeing as NU has experience in promoting a moderate and tolerant view of Islam.

Amin, who is also the grand imam of the Lebanese State Mosque, drew parallels between Indonesia's diversity and the 18 different ethnic and religious groups in his country.

"We have something in common with what is promoted by Islam Nusantara — that we must care for other [groups]," Kurdi said.

Kurdi said that Islam Nusantara in Indonesia had been successful in protecting minority groups.

"This is an idea that originated in Indonesia, where the majority of Muslims in this world reside, so that's why we are also interested in joining — with its 230 million-plus population, Indonesia has never marginalized its minorities," he said.

NU first introduced the concept of Islam Nusantara in 2015 during its national assembly (muktamar) in Jombang, East Java. It aims to create a unique and genuine identity for moderate Indonesian Muslims that is different from Muslim societies in the Middle East.

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