

NU, foreign ulemas endorse Jakarta Declaration

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Members of the Nahdlatul Ulama join a mass prayer in Jombang, East Java, in 2015. (Kompas/Alif Ichwan)

Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and ulemas from 35 countries have endorsed the NU's Jakarta Declaration, asserting the importance of disseminating peaceful Islamic values internationally to end conflicts emerging from tensions between religion and state.

The NU promoted what it calls "Islam Nusantara" – a moderate form of Islam with a pro-Indonesian spirit to uphold values of peace, modesty and cultural respect – as a paradigm that could be adopted by the world, since it merged the concepts of Islam and nationalism as key factors to guard a country's unity, NU central board chairman Said Aqil Siradj said.

"We don't want to dictate to the world, but we want to inspire [other countries by showing that] our concept of Islam could maintain peace and harmony within the diversity of Indonesia," Siradj said on Tuesday.

The declaration was the outcome of the two-day International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL), organized by NU with the aim of presenting solutions to conflicts considered to have emerged from a misinterpretation of Islamic teachings.

According to the declaration, the misinterpretation itself is the cause of the prolonged conflict in the Middle East, where some governments use religious teachings as the base of their political legitimacy, which has given rise to religious extremism.

Besides, economic and political injustice that brought poverty to some Islamic countries had been used by extremist groups as one of their reasons for unleashing their terror, the declaration states, which then led to a wrong concept of jihad executed by these groups.

According to the Islam Nusantara perspective, Islamic teachings did not call for its believers to conquer the world, but instead for them to keep strengthening their faith to realize Islam as *Rahmatan lil alamin* (blessing for the universe), Siradj said.

"The conclusion of our two-day meeting is the core of jihad, namely to promote peace and do good deeds," Siradj said.

The declaration also urges the Indonesian government to play a constructive role as a mediator to find solutions for the multifaceted conflicts in the Middle East.

In addition, the NU would assist Middle Eastern countries in building mechanisms to connect the concepts of Islam and nationalism, if their governments were open and willing to build alternative bases for their political legitimacy.

NU secretary-general Helmi Faisal Zaini said the countries that took part in the summit were all surprised to learn that Islam in Indonesia could be highly tolerant of local culture, such as promoting Borobudur, the ancient Buddhist temple complex, as a historical site of Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Fazal Ghani Kakar, the founder of Afghanistan's NU, said Islam Nusantara provided the best solution for conflicts not only in Afghanistan, but the entire Muslim world, since the paradigm was neither too liberal nor too extreme.

The paradigm could even be adopted in non-Muslim conflict areas, since Islam Nusantara promoted five general principles, namely moderation, tolerance, justice, balance and participation, that could bring people together and guard a country's unity, Kakar said.

"It's the best solution to make everybody understand that moderation is the way for a better life and humanity in general," Kakar said.

The Jakarta Declaration is set to be submitted to the President, Vice President, the Coordinating Political, Legal, and Security Ministry as well as foreign embassies in Indonesia soon.

The next summit would be arranged by Indonesia's NU but would probably be held in another country in line with the hopes of other ulemas that had joined the summit, even though the details were not yet settled, Siradj added.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/11/nu-foreign-ulemas-endorse-jakarta-declaration.html>