

Muslim cleric visits Israel and meets Netanyahu, sparking anger among radicals

by Mathias Hariyadi

Yahya Cholil Staquf, a leader in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), travelled to Tel Aviv on a "private mission". According to extremists, he is undermining Indonesian support for a Palestinian state. Israel's decision to stop issuing tourist visas to Indonesians remains controversial.



Jakarta (AsiaNews) – The visit to Israel by an important Islamic cleric has sparked criticism from the radical movements in the world's most populous Islamic country.

Yahya Cholil Staqf, a leading figure in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's most important moderate Muslim organisation (with more than 60 million members), travelled to the Middle East last Thursday.

In Israel, he gave a presentation at a Jewish Forum and met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv (*picture*).

Radical groups have slammed Staqf's presence in Israel. He is a member of the president's advisory council. According to extremists, he is undermining Indonesian support for the creation of an independent state for the Palestinian people.

Reactions have also been exacerbated by the latest spat between the two countries over travel permits.

At the end of last May, [Israel stopped issuing visas to Indonesian visitors](#), as of on 9 June, which was later delayed to 21 June.

The decision came after Indonesia apparently began denying entry to Israeli citizens travelling to the Asian country in response to the violence in Gaza.

Indonesia had harshly criticised the killing of more than a hundred Palestinians during the protests that followed the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem.

Citing his meeting with Staqf, Netanyahu expressed satisfaction that more and more Muslim countries have good relations with Israel.

In a statement, Indonesian authorities said that Staqf's trip is unrelated to Indonesia's commitment to a Palestinian state.

NU secretary general Helmy Faishal Zaini issued a statement saying that Staqf is on a private mission and has nothing to do with the organisation. He added that in Israel Staqf echoed the Palestinian hope of independence. NU has always supported the Palestinians, Zaini stressed.

In 2000, the visit to Israel by another NU cleric also divided Indonesians. Before becoming the fourth Indonesian president, Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid accepted an invitation of the LibforAll Foundation and the Simon Wiesenthal Center to visit the Jewish state.

In December of that year, as a member of the Shimon Peres Foundation, Wahid also met with Peres himself.

At home, he was criticised for not being "tolerant" with the Palestinians.

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Muslim-cleric-visits-Israel-and-meets-Netanyahu,-sparking-anger-among-radicals-44201.html>