



Indonesian Muslims Protest Against Islamist Extremism: The Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam

Kent Hill | February 24, 2018

“If Muslims reject extremism, why don’t they say so?” This is a common refrain expressed by non-Muslims in the West.

The reality is that Muslims often do express their rejection of extremism. But those protests rarely attract much attention. Many in the West are not aware that most of the victims of Islamist extremism and terrorism are Muslims themselves, many of them deliberately targeted by the terrorists. Increasingly, Middle Eastern Muslims are concluding that Islamist terrorism is threatening their own societies and the well-being of Islam itself.

So much is at stake here for Muslims, including the credibility of their religion, their societies, and their very lives. Many Middle Eastern Muslim leaders are coming to understand that religious freedom is not the “Trojan horse” it has been thought to be—a plot by the West to destroy Islam.

The Marrakesh Declaration in early 2016 was a notable affirmation of the rights of religious minorities to live in safety in Muslim-majority lands. The Arab Muslim leaders who drafted the Declaration were convened by Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah and sponsored by King Mohammed VI of Morocco as well as the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies. The Declaration itself is a [call for development](#) of a new Islamic jurisprudence that more fully protects, in the context of modern nation-states, equal citizenship for all people. The Declaration has its critics, but there is no question that it represents an important step forward.

The Marrakesh Declaration emerges largely from Middle Eastern Islam. But four out of five Muslims are not from the Middle East. How do they respond to the threat of Islamist extremism?

One of the most remarkable answers to that question emerges from Indonesia. Gerakan Pemuda Anshor is a five-million-member-strong youth movement and is part of Nahdlatul Ulama, which, with an estimated 50 million members, is one of the largest Muslim lay organizations in the world. Last May, Gerakan Pemuda Anshor convened more than 300 religious scholars from throughout the world to address what they called “obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law” that call for “perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam.” This global gathering of *ulama*—Muslim theological leaders—resulted in the adoption of the 8,000-word [“Anshor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,”](#) which makes a case that reform in Islam is urgently needed.



**GERAKAN PEMUDA ANSOR DECLARATION
ON HUMANITARIAN ISLAM**

**Towards the Recontextualization
of Islamic Teachings,
for the Sake of World Peace
and Harmony Between Civilizations**

The emphasis of the Marrakesh Declaration is on affirming that Islam’s core traditions—especially the Charter of Medina created in the year 622—require the protection and equality of religious minorities in Muslim majority countries. The Anshor Declaration, in contrast, argues that there are certain elements within classical Islamic orthodox theology which are problematic and need to be changed.

There is, in other words, agreement among Muslim champions of peace and freedom that they must refute the supposed theological authorization claimed by Islamist terrorists. But there is disagreement over how to accomplish this vital task. Some are focused on exposing it as outside the mainstream of Islamic orthodoxy. Others, including the leaders who issued the Anshor Declaration, insist there are elements within orthodoxy that lend plausibility to an extremist interpretation and that those interpretations must now be declared invalid.

As religious freedom experts we believe this is an entirely necessary, if discomfiting, debate within Islam. It has roughly similar counterparts in other religions, such as the long Roman Catholic debate that led to the development of clear doctrine with respect to religious freedom. It is important for non-Muslims to know that Muslim leaders from across the globe, in Muslim-majority nations and in countries where Muslims are in the minority, are committed to defeating the extremist ideology that represents a profound threat to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The Marrakesh Declaration and the Anshor Declaration should encourage us all. At the same time, Muslims and non-Muslims must do a much better job communicating—particularly to the world’s Muslim youth—that leading Muslim scholars who defend freedom and justice are making powerful cases against the violent, destructive apologetic of the Islamist extremists.

<https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/blog/indonesian-muslims-protest-against-islamist-extremism-the-ansor-declaration-on-humanitarian-islam>