

## Archbishop Joseph D'Souza represents Indian and South Asian Christianity at Islamic Global Unity Forum

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**Organized by Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization of its kind, the Global Unity Forum gathered scholars and faith leaders from over 20 countries.**

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia — Muslim scholars, clergy and interfaith leaders from over 20 countries, representing North America, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, convened in Yogyakarta, Indonesia this week to issue a historic call for the worldwide promotion of the humanitarian principles inherent in Indonesia's historical approach to Islam — principles that embrace one's neighbor and celebrate religious freedom, diversity and human dignity.

The gathering, known as the Second Global Unity Forum, was organized by the largest Islamic organization of its kind in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama. Presiding over the gathering were Mustofa Bisri, chief advisor of Nahdlatul Ulama, and Yahya Cholil Staquf, general secretary to the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council.

Among the distinguished attendees was Archbishop Joseph D'Souza, president of the All India Christian Council. As one of the select Christians invited to represent the global Christian community at the gathering, D'Souza's presence, especially represented the voices of Christians in India and South Asia. He was one of the inaugural signers of the Nusantara Statement, released by the organization Thursday, Oct. 25. The statement reads:

“We call upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.”

“Between Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the majority of the world's Muslim population is represented in our part of the world. Though Islam's birthplace might be the Middle East, the center of the Muslim world now has become South Asia and

Southeast Asia, in the same way the center of Christianity has moved to the so-called 'global south.' As such the Muslim community here is rightly assuming its leading role in reclaiming Islam from those who wish to politicize and weaponize the faith to promote violence and division," D'Souza said. "There's no more logical place for a statement of this significance to emerge but from the ancient capital of the world's most populous Muslim country, a country that has historically represented the best of Islam."

The Second Global Unity Forum is the latest of a series of actions organized by Indonesian Muslims to promote religious tolerance by Muslims and between Muslims and their co-religionists. Over the years Indonesia has hosted similar summits on humanitarian Islam, convening scholars and faith leaders alike who oppose extremism.

D'Souza, known for his work to foster multifaith cooperation and promote understanding and cooperation between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs in India, hailed Nahdlatul Ulama's efforts to create a unified movement within Islam to oppose radicalism and promote humanitarianism.

"Every major world religion can agree on these two things: every human life is equal and has inherent dignity, and all violence is evil and not from God," D'Souza said. "These ideas, captured in the Nusantara Statement, are essential for a truly pluralistic society that acknowledges the uniqueness and identity of other faiths and provides the space for multifaith cooperation and dialogue. In the end, the vision is for religion to be a blessing to the world and not a curse.

"My hope is that important global events like this one will inspire the world's most populous Hindu nation and its religious leaders to similarly promote tolerance, peaceful coexistence and oppose all forms of violence and bigotry," D'Souza said. "The present, and previous, weaponization of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or any religion for political ends has led to hate, violence and division. And as it usually happens, the ones who suffer the most are the poor, marginalized and the outcastes. This must end."

Speaking of what the Nusantara Statement should mean for Christians, D'Souza said, "This is a timely moment to remember Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' Wherever there are Christians, they should be a force for peace and reconciliation. "

The Nusantara Statement is built on the legacy of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, who also served as president and founder of Nahdlatul Ulama. For his work in building Indonesian democracy and promoting peace through inter-religious cooperation, Wahid received the Magsaysay Award — often called "Asia's Nobel Prize" — and the Top Honor Prize by the World Peace Prize Awarding Council.

The late president Wahid was also the recipient of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's prestigious "medal of valor" for his historic work in promoting peaceful coexistence between religious communities.

The Rev. Johnnie Moore — also a Wiesenthal Center honoree — represented the North American Christian community at the historic Global Unity Forum alongside D’Souza, a fellow board member of the The Congress of Christian Leaders.

“There is a new spirit of friendship and cooperation emerging among the most influential leaders of the world’s largest religious communities in the active promotion of peaceful coexistence, in unrelenting opposition to extremism and with a determination to make the world a better place for our children,” Moore said. “It is always a privilege as a Christian leader to stand in solidarity with those who promote peace among the world’s other religions and to overtly and fearlessly defy those who aim to use religion as a means of promoting violence.”

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