JOMBANG, East Java, Indonesia: On 21 – 22 May 2017, over 300 religious scholars from South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America gathered to address problematic elements within orthodox Islamic teaching, which all-too-often alienate and prevent Muslims from harmoniously adapting to modern civilization. The event was held at Pondok Pesantren (Madrasah) Bahrul ‘Ulum in Jombang, East Java—birthplace of the Nahdlatul Ulama and its 5-million-strong youth movement, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor.

The event opened with an address by KH. A. Mustofa Bisri—the Chairman of Bayt ar-Rahmah and former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council—who prayed that the assembled scholars’ deliberations would constitute “a humble act of religious piety and a blessing for all humanity, like those of our noble predecessors… [and] the starting point of a movement that [God willing] may bring the rays of enlightenment to a desperate world.”

The two-day event concluded with the proclamation of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor’s Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, an 8,000 word analysis of the rapidly escalating crisis within the Islamic world, including the role of orthodox Islamic teachings—“weaponized” by state and non-state actors—in precipitating this crisis, and a detailed road map that calls for “a serious, long-term socio-cultural, political, religious and educational campaign to transform Muslims’ understanding of their religious obligations, and the very nature of Islamic orthodoxy.”

In the words of Ansor Chairman H. Yaqt Qoumas, which also appear in the Declaration: “No progress can be made towards neutralizing a threat, unless it is understood and identified. It is false and counterproductive to claim that the actions of al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam…” The Declaration goes on to state, “For more than fifty years, Saudi Arabia has systematically propagated a supremacist, ultraconservative interpretation of Islam among Sunni Muslim populations worldwide… [Legitimate] Saudi opposition to Iran[ian], ISIS and al-Qaeda [supremacism] does not and should not absolve it from responsibility for promoting the very ideology that underlies and animates Sunni extremism and terror…

“Muslims face a choice between starkly different visions of the future. Will they strive to recreate the long-lost ideal of religious, political and territorial unity beneath the banner of a Caliphate—and thus seek to restore Islamic supremacy—as reflected in their communal memory and still firmly entrenched within the prevailing corpus, and worldview, of orthodox, authoritative Islam? Or will they strive to develop a new religious sensibility that reflects the actual circumstances of our modern civilization, and contributes to the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal dignity and rights of every human being?”

The road map is divided into five sections, viz., “Identification and Containment of the Threat (points 40 – 66); Conflict Resolution (points 67 – 72); New Theological Discourse to Recontextualize Islamic Teachings for the Modern Era (73 – 87); Development and Adoption of New Educational Curricula Throughout the Islamic World (points 88 – 95); and Grassroots Movement to Build Societal Consensus and the Political Will Necessary to Resolve the Crisis” (points 96 – 112).