

## Govt tells NU to act as Middle East peacemaker

Marguerite Afra Sapiie | Jakarta | Posted: Tue, May 10 2016 | 03:30 pm



Vice President Jusuf Kalla (second right) talks with former President Megawati Soekarnoputri (second left), PBNU chairman Said Aqil Siroj (left) and chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Ma'aruf Amin (right) during the opening ceremony of International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders in Jakarta on Monday. (Antara/Muhammad Adimaja)

The government has urged Nahdlatul Ulama ( NU ), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, to play a role in disseminating peaceful Islamic teachings and acting as a peacemaker for conflicts in the Middle East.

Coordinating Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan said conflict in the Middle East was due to an inability to reconcile nationalism and religious affiliation.

However, so far the only party acting as an arbitrator in conflicts, such as that between Israel and Palestine, was the US, Luhut said, while in fact, Indonesia could take a strategic role as a mediator in the international conflict.

"At this point in time, NU should become a mediator to find solutions for creating peace out of the conflict, especially those in the Middle East," Luhut said on Monday evening as quoted by Antara news agency in Jakarta.

The statement was delivered during the International Summit of the Islamic Moderate Leaders ( ISOMIL ) organized by NU, a three day meeting running from May 9 to 11. More than 300 religious leaders from 40 countries are gathered at the meeting to discuss a joint solution to conflicts that they consider to have emerged from the misinterpretation of Islamic teaching.

NU deputy chairman Maksum Mahfoedz, who is also serving as the summit's chairman, previously said the summit would produce an outcome in the form of a joint agreement called the Jakarta Declaration, which would also articulate the real interpretation of jihad in accordance with prevailing conditions in today's world.

The declaration reportedly aims to end the misinterpretation of jihad, which some parties still define as killing infidels, basing their argument on Prophet Muhammad's war. In fact, the interpretation could not be applied in this era given that today's social and political circumstances are so different to those in the past, Mahfoedz said.

Vice President Jusuf Kalla opened the summit on Monday, where he asserted the important role of Islamic clerics in disseminating peaceful Islam in order to curb radicalism that led to terrorism, war and conflict.

Meanwhile, NU central board chairman Said Aqil Siroj said the concepts of religion and nationalism should be upheld alongside each other and were inseparable as both were key factors to ensure and guard the unity of a country.

Indonesian clerics have succeeded in bridging the principles of religion and statehood into their teachings, while in the Middle East, the concepts of Islam and nationalism are yet to be unified, which has prolonged conflicts there, Siroj said.

According to Siroj, the government has asked moderate Islamic organizations to promote the concept of Islam Nusantara, a tolerant form of Islam with an Indonesian spirit that upheld peace, modesty, and respected culture.

NU first introduced the concept of Islam Nusantara in 2015 through a campaign in Jombang, Central Java, aimed at creating a unique and genuine identity for moderate Indonesian Muslims that was different from Muslim societies in the Middle East.

"This is the right time for us to promote the concept of Islam Nusantara at the international level," Siroj said.

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