

Moderate Muslims interested in Islam Nusantara

Marguerite Afra Sapiie | Jakarta | Posted: Thu, May 12 2016 | 12:19 pm



Vice President Jusuf Kalla (second right) talks with former President Megawati Soekarnoputri (second left), PBNU chairman Said Aql 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)

A number of visiting foreign Muslim leaders have expressed their interest in the concept of Islam promoted by the Indonesian government, Islam Nusantara.

Introduced by Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Islam Nusantara is a tolerant form of Islam that upholds values of peace, modesty and cultural respect.

NU secretary-general Helmy Faisal Zaini said some of the foreign leaders wanted to adopt Islam Nusantara, since the paradigm could be adapted to other countries' local heritage.

Lebanese cleric Amin Kurdi, who is also a grand imam of the Lebanese State Mosque, said the attraction of Islam Nusantara were its teachings that told Muslims to be tolerant and spread love and peace.

"Personally, I'd like to push for the establishment of NU [in Lebanon], since the NU has experience in disseminating good, moderate and tolerant Islam," Kurdi said.

Beirut already has an NU special branch committee (PCI NU) to represent the Indonesian NU in Lebanon, as one of 40 countries around the world that have become special members of the NU's central board.

Lebanon is among 10 countries, including Russia and Lithuania, that have announced plans for the establishment of independent NU organizations following the International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL), recently organized by NU's central board in Jakarta.

More than 300 participants from 35 countries, including Muslim figures from Iran, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, attended the two-day meeting, where the clerics endorsed the NU's Jakarta Declaration.

NU central board deputy chairman Maksum Machfoedz said there were currently five countries that had own independent NU organizations, namely Afghanistan, Turkey, Tunisia, Malaysia and Thailand.

The Afghan NU was established in response to an initiative by the Indonesian NU when the NU's central board invited Afghan clerics to Jakarta in 2011 to assist in peace efforts in the war-torn country, Machfoedz said.

"We keep assisting them in the process [...] two years ago, we even have brought them to Gajah Mada University to learn about Pancasila (Indonesia's state ideology)," Machfoedz told thejakartapost.com on Wednesday.

Fazal Ghani Kakar, the founder of the Afghan NU, said the Afghan government had supported the organization since its establishment in 2011.

According to Kakar, there are currently 6,000 local ulemas in 22 NU representative offices across 34 provinces of Afghanistan registered with the Afghan Justice Ministry.

"We are running independently, however, we get support from the Indonesian NU and Indonesian Embassy in Kabul from time to time," Kakar said.

In Afghanistan, especially, the five general principles promoted by NU, namely moderation, tolerance, justice, balance and participation, served as effective elements in creating a change of mentality among different groups in the country that kept clashing with each other, Kakar said.

Afghanistan, home to radical militant group Taliban, has suffered from war for more than four decades, with millions of lives lost.

The NU central board hoped that more independent NUs would be established soon in the countries currently hosting NU special branch committees, Machfoedz added.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/12/moderate-muslims-interested-in-islam-nusantara.html>