



Yahya Cholil Staquf di Harlow Brasserie, Kuningan, Jakarta, Senin (25/6/2018). *Wisnu Agung Prasetyo/Beritagar.id*

Conversation

Kyai Yahya Staquf: “I still have ingrained prejudice against Jews”

**By Hero Triyono
Monday, 02 July 2018**

He doesn't care if others attack him. He had only one goal in visiting Israel: to continue Gus Dur's work.

The atmosphere wasn't crowded. The only noise was quiet laughter from several restaurant guests. We sat around drinking glasses of coffee with Yahya Cholil Staquf, who chatted and smoked with us. The room was dim. A painting by Andy Warhol hung on the wall and bottles [of alcohol] sparkled behind the bar.

"I can smoke a pack of cigarettes a day," said this advisor to Indonesian President Joko Widodo as our conversation began.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) *kyais* (religious scholars) should be humorous, and Yahya does indeed have a keen sense of humor. He talked about surreptitiously puffing on a cigarette in an American hotel that prohibits smoking throughout its property. He had to light his cigarette in the bathroom and smuggle the extinguished butt out of the hotel in a small suitcase to avoid being caught.

Unfortunately, he forgot to throw it away and brought the carry-on bag into the airport. "During the security inspection, the cigarette butt in my suitcase caught the attention of TSA (Transport Security Administration), ha-ha-ha," laughed Yahya. He was interrogated. A debate ensued among security personnel, and finally he was released when TSA staff concluded that someone possessing a cigarette butt would not pose a threat [aboard an aircraft]. He was safe, but cured of such behavior.

Lately, Yahya has attracted a different kind of attention. It has nothing to do with cigarette butts. Rather, it's because of his recent visit to Israel, which many perceived as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. He was cursed, bullied online and even denounced as a treasonous cockroach. "That's ok with me," he told the four journalists who interviewed him at Harlow Brasserie in Kuningan, Jakarta on Monday (25/6/2018): Fajar WH, Heru Triyono, Sorta Tobing and Wisnu Prasetyo.

Ten days after his return from Israel, a fierce debate continues to rage about Yahya's decision to address the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Global Forum in Jerusalem. The controversy he set in motion is not confined to Indonesia. [Hamas and] the Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemned his visit, while Israeli and Western media responded positively. In Israel, Yahya also met Benjamin Netanyahu. His photograph with the Israeli Prime Minister was spread far and wide [via print, broadcast and social media].

He's not the first Indonesian to have spoken at a Jewish organization's forum. Previously, Din Syamsuddin [former Chairman of the Muhammadiyah organization] addressed the World Jewish Congress in Hungary. The late Abdurrahman Wahid, or Gus Dur, did the same. "I'm simply continuing Gus Dur's work," said the General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) Supreme Council.

For over an hour, with a cigarette in his right hand and a coffee cup in his left, Yahya answered every question we posed, in a simple and straightforward manner. Questions about his meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu; his mission to foster peace; and his decision to risk being dismissed from the Presidential Advisory Council (*Wantimpres*), where he holds a position equivalent to that of a Cabinet Minister. Here is the conversation:



Yahya Cholil Staquf di Harlow Brasserie, Kuningan, Jakarta, Senin (25/6/2018). *Wisnu Prasetyo / Beritagar.id*

Was speaking at the American Jewish Committee (AJC) your first experience visiting Israel?

This was my second visit. I went to Israel in 2005 or 2006, after performing the minor pilgrimage to Mecca.

Did you anticipate that your presence at a forum organized by a Jewish organization would evoke such controversy?

I knew the risks. But this controversy also represents an opportunity to explain what we're facing. The world is in a state of chaos.

For the past 70 years, attempts to resolve Middle East conflict using military and political means have failed. That's why Gus Dur—16 years ago—offered *rahmah* (compassion) as a vital element of conflict resolution.

Gus Dur addressed the challenge [of fostering Middle East peace] by offering something that every religion can accept. This approach is consistent with the Qur'anic verse that states: "And We (God) sent you (Muhammad) for no purpose other than to be a blessing for all creation." Compassion is not just a matter of subjective emotions, but rather a mode of behavior that one deliberately chooses to embrace, if capable of doing so.

But some people consider your own behavior to have been insensitive to the struggle of the Palestinian people.

Sensitive or insensitive... if I'm the only [Muslim guilty of consorting with Israelis and] slammed by such criticism, that still leaves the question unanswered: What does the world want to do about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The issue was particularly sensitive because you arrived in Jerusalem in the midst of intense criticism directed towards Israel—for massacring scores of Palestinian demonstrators...

If you wait until your visit won't be "sensitive," when would you ever go [to Israel]? There is violence every day. Palestinians have been living with this problem for 70 years. How many more years should we tell them to wait [before we try to help them resolve this problem]?

But as a public figure and high-ranking government official, couldn't you express solidarity through other means, without causing controversy?

I've been engaged in a concerted effort [to address conflicts related to Islam and Muslims] for many years. It wasn't a question of my just hopping on a plane to Israel, ha-ha-ha, and then going home. This [visit to Jerusalem was simply one element of] a long-term, systematic campaign that involves many people.

I'm just a single "screw" within a vast network, and I don't limit my speaking engagements to Jewish audiences. I work with many influential parties in Europe, America, the Middle East and elsewhere.

(*Interviewer's note: Yahya is active in the U.S. – Indonesia Society's (USINDO's) Council for Religious Pluralism and Tolerance, and serves as Director of Religious Affairs at Bayt ar-Rahmah, a U.S.-based NGO that facilitates the global expansion of Nahdlatul Ulama operations.)

What gave you the inner strength to visit Israel, despite knowing all the risks?

I had no choice but to go. Because this isn't just about Israel and Palestine. It involves a truly global effort [to renounce enmity and reconcile Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide]. I used this opportunity to attract the world's attention and foster peace, that's all.

Do you hope that Indonesian Muslims will understand your actions?

Not really. Through my actions, I simply wish to pose a question: "What do you [Muslims] want? Do you wish to all die [fighting infidels], or live in harmony and prosper alongside the rest of humanity? That's all. Now think: how do you plan to defeat Israel [if that's what you want]? Israel has nuclear weapons. Even if the entire Islamic world were to unite against Israel, [we] could not defeat them [and survive the conflict without untold misery.]

By the same token, Israel cannot defeat the entire Muslim world. They face the same dilemma as Muslims. The only end game to a violent conflict is to attack each other and destroy everything. So what do you want? Do you want to kill Jews until there's none left, and encourage them to do the same to Muslims?

I'd like to pose a cliché question: is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a purely religious war?

We should be honest. Every religion contains theological elements that may be used to mobilize followers and wage a religious war. That's a simple fact. These elements exist within Islam, in Christianity and even Judaism. So what do we want? Does faithful obedience of religious teachings oblige us to slaughter others?

This is a matter of what we may call "degrees of sanity [or insanity]." It's not only Islam that teaches enmity towards Jews. [Historically], Christians have also despised Jews, which is why European nations often persecuted and expelled them. And how could [Christians] not have absorbed this prejudice, when they were taught that Jews had murdered the Son of God? Seriously, that's [Christian] theology.

Is there still any chance for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal?

There is, but not in the near future.

So what was the political impact on Palestine when you addressed the AJC?

What is clear is that we [at Bayt ar-Rahmah] learned what must be done next. It's not like I was invited to deliver a sermon in Taiwan and came home with an envelope full of cash. This is an enormous task we've undertaken. That is why, in my address to the AJC forum, I said: "Let us choose compassion."

Compassion is not a question of mere feelings. It's about an attitude that you may choose to adopt if you want to. Only by choosing to act with compassion will we have any chance of finding a way out [of the humanitarian crisis we face].

What was the world's response to your offer?

Try Googling. Almost all the Western media coverage has been positive, except for the web site *Palestine Now*. The others are positive. I'm even regarded as a hero by many in this illusory and perishable world, ha-ha-ha. And yes, on the other [Muslim] side, many are cursing and insulting me.

Did it hurt your feelings to be called a treasonous cockroach?

Let people say whatever they want. In fact, there are some who think I've become infatuated with Jews. When in reality, even though I've just come from Jerusalem and talking about compassion, I myself still have ingrained prejudice against Jews [from a lifetime of anti-Semitic conditioning].

If we look at history, Israel has done a lot of bad things. Who wouldn't be angry? Who wouldn't be heartsick? But, once again, I pose the question: what do we want to do about it?

Do you think the Palestinians have also done bad things to Israel?

Let's analyze this rationally. It's clear that Indonesian Muslims side with Palestine. That is our established mindset. But, what's the point? I know Israel did bad things, and I know the Palestinians did too.

So what do we want? Revenge? That's why I say: we can move beyond conflict by embracing *rahmah* (compassion), so that we can see things from each others' perspective and become more accommodating. With compassion, it is entirely possible that peace negotiations could succeed.

All these years, peace negotiations have always reached a dead end...

That's true, but all parties to this conflict need [a solution]. America needs peace talks; Israel too. Who wouldn't be stressed to endure rocket bombardments every day, even if no one's hit?

Not to mention that Israel is hard pressed in the court of international public opinion. They're regarded as felons because of the conflict at the border with Gaza.

Who else needs peace? Saudi Arabia and Palestine. Their economies depend on America, and even Israel. If financial aid is cut off, what can Palestine do?

Even Iran needs talks, because of complex issues related to its nuclear program. This indicates that [almost] everyone needs negotiations.

Did you convey your thoughts to [Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu and [Israeli President] Reuven Rivlin when you met them?

The meeting with President Rivlin was ceremonial. About 20 minutes. We discussed a number of abstract ideas, such as how to shift from conflict to cooperation and how religion can play a constructive role.

With Benjamin Netanyahu, we met for 45 minutes. But he spoke primarily about the benefits of economic cooperation, and [how Indonesia could benefit from] Israel's dairy cattle technology, water technology, etc.

What was Reuven Rivlin's opinion of your Message of Compassion?

He was very enthusiastic. He gave me a gift, which was a Hebrew translation of the Qur'an made by his father. Since I don't know Hebrew, I couldn't tell which was the front and which was the back of the book, ha-ha-ha.

It seems that you were are treated as honored guest...

As a matter of fact, they treated me like an official state guest. While other people had to go through security checks, I passed freely with all my things through a special door.

While we were meeting, there should have been flags on display of both the host and guest nations. Unfortunately, I didn't bring the Charred Eggplant banner, ha-ha-ha. Perhaps I should have, since this was a "state" visit by the President of *Terong Gosong*.

(Note from the interviewer: *Terong Gosong*, or "Charred Eggplant," is an informal network of *kyais* and *santris* [Muslim scholars and their disciples] established by Yahya Staquf and named after a vegetable dish commonly served to students at NU boarding schools. Its motto is "Taking Laughter Seriously").

What exactly did Israel expect from Kyai Yahya? Did they regard you as an important figure?

There is much that I need to digest from this trip. But one thing is certain: the Israelis need peace. They have a strong peace movement and also a movement that rejects compulsory military service. The aspiration for peace is growing there.

Did you request President Joko Widodo's permission prior to departing for Israel?

I was asked to create a letter requesting permission, which I sent.

So President Jokowi did not forbid you to leave [for Israel]?

If forbidden, I would have gone anyway. I've been pursuing this line of work since 2011. The visit to Jerusalem was just one activity out of many—all designed to foster peace.

Is your work always associated with the American Jewish Committee (AJC)?

My recent trip was related to the AJC, because they invited me. But I only spoke to their group one night. The rest of the week I was in Jerusalem, I was engaged with a network of friends devoted to peace. Not just the AJC.

So in fact: did the signals you received from President Jokowi suggest that he wanted to prohibit or allow you to go?

The relevant officials all knew about my trip to Israel, even before I was appointed to the Presidential Advisory Council. Wider circles within the government and the Nahdlatul Ulama also knew a great deal about my visit, including Kyai Said (General Chairman of the NU Executive Board) and Kiai Ma'aruf (General Chairman of the NU Supreme Council).

They did not forbid me to visit Israel as long as I did so unofficially, in my own name, rather than acting officially on behalf of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board.

So how do you get the blessing of Gus Mus [Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, spiritual leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama and former Chairman of its Supreme Council] for this visit?

He understands what I'm doing. In fact, I went to Jerusalem because of decisions he personally made [as spiritual leader of the NU and Chairman of Bayt ar-Rahmah]. I'm simply traveling the world delivering a message from Gus Mus. It's my responsibility to perform this work. Of course there are risks involved. Gus Dur [Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid] faced the same risks as me.

So your big mission to Israel was....

Basically, to follow in Gus Dur's footsteps and continue his mission. To seek a way out of the sectarian conflicts that haunt the world. If we think about it, these issues do not merely afflict Israel and Palestine. We're seeking to address issues that underlie and animate conflicts throughout the Middle East, in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, South Asia and elsewhere.

Do you feel isolated, not receiving official support from the NU and the Indonesian government?

No. Banser (a 2-million-member militia that is part of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, the NU young adults movement) is completely behind me. I'm still waiting for the President to call. He promised that I would be summoned [following my return from Israel].

Are you worried that your position on the Presidential Advisory Council might be revoked?

When [President Jokowi] offered me the position, I explained that I have this job [inspired by Gus Dur and Gus Mus. I said:] if that's not a problem, then okay, let's go ahead with the appointment. As it so happened, the President decided to administer the oath of office to me. If my work [set in motion by Gus Dur and Gus Mus] is now considered problematic, and the President wishes to dismiss me, that's not a big deal.

Why didn't you simply refuse to join the Presidential Advisory Council, so you would be free to pursue your global mission?

I would not have felt comfortable refusing the President. It would have been perceived, and portrayed, as if I were anti-Jokowi.

You are widely considered a representative of the NU, chosen to replace [the deceased former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama] Hasyim Muzadi as Presidential Advisor. Is that what was going on?

I don't know. Pak Hasyim was not appointed Presidential Advisor in the name of the NU, but rather, because of his involvement in securing the presidential nomination for Jokowi.

At any rate, since my appointment to the Presidential Advisory Council, I no longer have the luxury of publicly debating government policies, as it is the sole right of the President to determine policy.

So you can no longer speak freely?

That's what the law says. But I'm comfortable, they've given me a car, a driver and a home [in Jakarta]. This is the first time I've earned a salary since I was presidential spokesman, ha-ha-ha.

But, back when I was Gus Dur's spokesman [2000 – 2001], the position was not as exalted as it is now. I was just like the other staff in the Presidential Palace. Like a cook. The salary was also the same, ha-ha-ha.

In the media it was reported that the initial script of your speech to the AJC Forum was rejected by the American Jewish Committee. Why?

They didn't like the text. They were afraid their audience would be shocked and that the atmosphere would become "unconducive."

Who was in the audience?

[Over 2,000] members of AJC, an international Jewish organization based in the U.S. It's one of the oldest Jewish organizations in America, established in 1918 [sic]. Every year they hold a global forum. There were entrepreneurs, politicians and even the Austrian Chancellor. There were also participants from Indonesia.

Was the tone of your speech really all that trenchant? What was the AJC afraid of?

In the text I planned to deliver a message of peace to Israel and Palestine. I also emphasized my concern and support for the Palestinians.

The committee objected and asked that the speech be revised. Instead, we agreed that the format of my presentation would be changed from a speech to an interview. In the end, the speech I wrote for the AJC was delivered in a different forum, to the Israel Council on Foreign Relations.

What do Nahdlatul Ulama followers think about the steps you're taking globally?

People are fine with it. I've become an instant celebrity. After attending the AJC Global Forum, many people [in Indonesia] have been greeting me, asking to take their picture with me, and thanking me for the message of peace I brought [to the Middle East].

Various news reports suggest that [influential figures] are pushing for you to become General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU). What do you have to say about that?

Well, I would need to be pushed, and there is also a lot of desperate money floating around [seeking to buy influence with the Nahdlatul Ulama, which is the largest demographic within the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and democracy], ha-ha-ha.

After Israel, where else are you going?

Right now I'm headed to the NU headquarters building, to see whether a protest demonstration against me actually happens or not. Ha-ha-ha.



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<https://beritagar.id/artikel/bincang/kiai-yahya-staqf-sampai-detik-ini-saya-benci-yahudi>



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Bintang

Kiai Yahya Staquf: Sampai detik ini saya benci Yahudi

Ia tak peduli dimusuhi. Tujuannya ke Israel cuma satu:
melanjutkan pekerjaan Gus Dur.

[Heru Triyono](#) 02/07/2018 12:00 WIB

Suasana tak begitu ramai. Hanya terdengar tawa kecil sejumlah tamu resto. Kami duduk mengelilingi gelas-gelas berisi kopi bersama Yahya Cholil Staquf, yang berceloteh sambil merokok. Ruangnya temaram, ada lukisan wajah Andy Warhol dan bar dengan botol-botol berkilauan.

“Aku itu sehari bisa habis satu bungkus (rokok),” kata Anggota Dewan Pertimbangan Presiden (Wantimpres) ini memulai percakapan dengan kami.

Selayaknya Kiai Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) yang penuh humor, begitu pun Yahya. Ia bercerita pernah diam-diam merokok di sebuah hotel Amerika. Pihak hotel memang melarang rokok dalam ruangan. Ia pun terpaksa menyalakan rokok di kamar mandi dan memasukkan puntungnya ke saku koper agar tak ketahuan.

Celakanya ia lupa buang puntung itu. Tanpa sadar, koper tersebut terbawa masuk bandara olehnya. Konyol. “Nah, saat pemeriksaan, puntung rokok di koper itu jadi perhatian TSA (Transport Security Administration) *ha-ha*,” tutur Yahya. Ia pun diinterogasi, terjadi perdebatan, namun akhirnya dilepas karena puntung rokok dianggap tak bahaya. Aman, tapi ia kapok.

Belakangan, Yahya juga jadi perhatian. Bukan soal puntung, tapi karena sikapnya untuk datang ke Israel, yang dianggap mengkhianati Bangsa Palestina. Ia pun dimaki, dirisak, bahkan sampai disebut cecunguk. “Saya maklum dibilang begitu,” katanya kepada Fajar WH, Heru Triyono, Sorta Tobing dan Wisnu Prasetyo saat wawancara di Harlow Brasserie, Kuningan, Jakarta, Senin (25/6/2018).

Pro kontra Yahya jadi pembicara di forum American Jewish Committee (AJC) memang terus berlanjut. Dinamikanya bukan hanya di Indonesia. Kementerian Luar Negeri Palestina bahkan ikut komentar. Termasuk media Israel dan barat, yang justru menyikapi langkahnya dengan positif. Di Israel, Yahya juga bertemu Benjamin Netanyahu. Fotonya dengan Perdana Menteri Israel itu tersebar luas.

Ia bukan orang Indonesia pertama yang bicara di forum organisasi Yahudi. Sebelumnya, Dien Syamsuddin juga berpidato di World Jewish Congress di Hongaria. Hal yang sama juga pernah dilakukan almarhum Abdurrahman Wahid atau Gus Dur. “Saya kan melanjutkan pekerjaan Gus Dur,” kata Katib 'Aam Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) ini.

Selama satu jam lebih, sambil jepit rokok di jari tangan kanan dan gelas kopi di tangan kiri, ia menjawab lugas tiap pertanyaan. Tentang pertemuannya dengan Benjamin Netanyahu, misi perdamaian, hingga sikap pasrahnya dipecat dari posisi Wantimpres. Berikut perbincangannya:



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Jadi pembicara di acara American Jewish Committee (AJC) merupakan pengalaman Anda yang pertama ke Israel?

Ini yang kedua. Dulu saya ke sana (Israel) pas umrah, sekitar tahun 2005 dan 2006.

Sudah menduga kehadiran Anda di forum organisasi Yahudi itu akan menimbulkan kontroversi?

Saya tahu risikonya. Tapi kontroversi ini jadi peluang untuk menjelaskan apa yang kita hadapi. Dunia ini sudah enggak karuan.

Sejak dulu, penyelesaian konflik melalui militer dan politik telah gagal. Makanya Gus Dur, 16 tahun lalu, menawarkan *rahmah*.

Gus Dur menjawab tantangan dengan sesuatu yang bisa diterima semua agama. Hal ini sesuai hadis Nabi: *Wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan lil alamin*. *Rahmah* bukan soal perasaan, tapi sikap yang dipilih, jika mampu.

Tetap saja sikap Anda dianggap sebagian pihak tidak sensitif terhadap perjuangan rakyat Palestina?

Sensitif atau enggak, kalau cuma saya yang kena, memang mau apa dunia? Kan enggak kenapa-kenapa juga.

Sensitif karena kedatangan Anda itu di tengah kecaman atas Israel—yang menyerang puluhan demonstran Palestina hingga tewas...

Kalau tunggu enggak sensitifnya mau kapan? Setiap hari ada kekerasan di sana. Orang Palestina merasakannya 70 tahun. Kita suruh mereka tunggu berapa tahun lagi.

Tapi sebagai tokoh dan pejabat publik kan bisa menyuarakan solidaritas kemanusiaan dengan wadah lain, bukan dengan menimbulkan kontroversi?

Ini pekerjaan bertahun-tahun yang sudah saya lakukan. Ini bukan soal datang, *ha-ha he-he*, lalu pulang. Ini pekerjaan berkelanjutan dan melibatkan banyak orang.

Saya ini hanya sekrup dari jaringan luas, bukan hanya bicara di tempat orang Yahudi. Saya bekerja dengan berbagai pihak di Eropa, Amerika, Timur Tengah dan lainnya.

(*Yahya aktif dalam Konsil Pluralisme Beragama dan Toleransi Amerika-Indonesia (USINDO) dan menjabat Direktur Hubungan Antar Agama Bayt ar-Rahmah, sebuah LSM yang fasilitasi ekspansi global NU).

Apa yang menguatkan hati Anda untuk tetap datang meski sudah tahu risikonya?

Saya enggak punya pilihan selain berangkat. Karena ini bukan hanya soal Israel dan Palestina, ini soal pekerjaan besar global. Kesempatan ini saya pakai untuk dapatkan perhatian dunia dan mewujudkan perdamaian, itu saja.

Anda berharap muslim Indonesia paham soal sikap Anda?

Enggak juga. Dari sikap saya ini, saya hanya mau tanya, kalian mau apa? Mau mati semua atau mau selamat bersama-sama? Itu saja. Sekarang pikir, kalian mau kalahkan Israel dengan cara apa? Israel punya nuklir. Walau seluruh dunia Islam bersatu enggak akan bisa.

Sebaliknya, Israel juga enggak mungkin menang lawan Islam. Sama. Satu-satunya *end game* ya saling serang dan hancur semua. Terus mau apa? Mau bunuh-bunuhan sampai habis?

Pertanyaan klise, apakah konflik Israel-Palestina murni perang agama?

Kita harus jujur, di setiap agama ada seruan-seruan yang memang seperti itu (perang). *That's the fact*. Di Islam ada, Kristen ada, di Yahudi pun begitu. Lalu kita mau apa? Apakah dengan taat kepada agama berarti harus membunuh?

Ini soal tingkat kewarasan saja. Yang benci sama Yahudi kan bukan cuma Islam. Kristen juga benci sama Yahudi, makanya dulu diusir-usir dari Eropa. Bagaimana enggak, orang Yahudi dianggap bunuh anaknya Tuhan. Serius, itu teologi.

Masih ada peluang bagi kesepakatan perdamaian Israel-Palestina?

Ada, tapi enggak dalam waktu dekat.

Jadi apa dampak politiknya untuk Palestina ketika Anda jadi pembicara di AJC?

Yang jelas, kita jadi tahu apa yang harus dikerjakan berikutnya. Ini kan bukan seperti saya diundang pengajian ke Taiwan lalu pulang dapat amplop. Ini pekerjaan besar untuk memilih. Maka itu saya bilang di forum AJC itu bahwa mari memilih *rahmah*.

Rahmah ini bukan soal perasaan. *It's not about feeling, it's about attitude that you can choose if you want to.* Hanya dengan memilih *rahmah* itu kita akan punya peluang untuk menemukan jalan keluar.

Apa respons dunia dengan yang Anda tawarkan itu?

Tinggal di-*googling*. Hampir semua media barat positif, kecuali media *online* Palestina Now. Yang lain itu positif. Bahkan saya dibilang pahlawan dunia fana ini *ha-ha*. Ya di sisi lain juga ada yang memaki-maki.

Sakit hati enggak dibilang cecunguk?

Saya maklum saja. Bahkan ada yang anggap saya jatuh cinta dengan Yahudi. Padahal, meski baru dari Yerusalem dan bicara soal *rahmah*, tapi sampai detik ini saya benci Yahudi.

Kalau kita perhatikan sejarah, banyak hal buruk dilakukan Israel. Siapa yang enggak marah? Siapa yang enggak sakit hati? Tapi lagi-lagi, mau apa kita sekarang?

Menurut Anda apakah Palestina juga melakukan hal buruk kepada Israel?

Begini, kita buat analisis rasional ya. Pastinya kan muslim Indonesia itu bela Palestina, itu sudah *settle mindset*. Tapi, *what's the point? I know Israel did bad things, and I know the Palestinians did too.*

Terus, kita mau apa? Dendam? Makanya saya bilang, kita bisa abaikan semua itu dengan *rahmah*. Supaya kita bisa saling memberi dan sangat mungkin dengan *rahmah* maka perundingan terlaksana.

Rencana perundingan kan selalu berakhir buntu selama ini...

Benar, tapi semua pihak butuh. Amerika butuh perundingan, Israel juga. Siapa yang enggak stres dihujani roket setiap hari, meski enggak kena.

Belum lagi Israel terdesak opini publik internasional. Mereka seperti pesakitan gara-gara insiden Gaza.

Siapa lagi yang butuh? Ya Arab Saudi dan Palestina. Ekonomi mereka bergantung dari Amerika, bahkan dari Israel juga. Kalau diputus, Palestina dapat apa.

Iran pun butuh perundingan, karena Iran punya peluang untuk menitipkan negosiasi program nuklirnya. Itu menunjukkan semua orang butuh perundingan.

Anda menyampaikan pikiran Anda itu saat bertemu Benjamin Netanyahu dan Reuven Rivlin?

Bertemu Presiden itu seremonial saja. Bangsa 20 menit. Kita bicara soal gagasan-gagasan abstrak, bagaimana menggeser konflik jadi kerja sama dan bagaimana agama bisa berperan.

Kalau dengan Benjamin sih selama 45 menit. Tapi dia kebanyakan presentasi soal teknologi ternak sapi perah, air dan teknologi rumah.

Apa pendapat Reuven Rivlin soal konsep *rahmah* Anda?

Dia sangat antusias. Dia kasih saya hadiah terjemahan Quran bahasa Ibrani. Itu adalah terjemahan bapaknya. Saya lihat, ini terjemahan, yang atas mana, yang bawah mana, saya enggak mengerti *ha-ha*.

Sepertinya Anda diperlakukan sebagai tamu terhormat di sana ya...

Saya diperlakukan seperti tamu negara. Kalau orang-orang disuruh lewat pemeriksaan sekuriti, saya enggak. Ada pintu khusus.

Harusnya saat bicara ada bendera tuan rumah dan tamu ya. Sayang, saya enggak bawa bendera Terong Gosong *ha-ha*. Ini kan kunjungan Presiden Terong Gosong.

(*Terong Gosong adalah komunitas silaturahmi kultural para santri yang punya semboyan Ketawa Secara Serious bikinan Yahya).

Apa sebenarnya yang diharapkan Israel dari seorang Kiai Yahya—kalau dianggap sebagai sosok yang penting?

Banyak hal harus saya cerna juga. Tapi satu hal pasti, mereka butuh damai. Sebab gerakan perdamaian di sana menguat. Di sana juga ada gerakan tolak wajib militer. Aspirasi untuk perdamaian itu mulai berkembang.



Yahya Cholil Staquf di Harlow Brasserie, Kuningan, Jakarta, Senin (25/6/2018). *Wisnu Prasetyo / Beritagar.id*

Sebelum berangkat ke Israel, Anda minta izin ke Presiden Joko Widodo?

Saya diminta untuk membuat surat izin, lalu saya kirim.

Presiden Jokowi tidak melarang keberangkatan Anda?

Kalau melarang saya akan tetap berangkat. Karena ini pekerjaan saya sejak 2011. Yerusalem cuma satu kegiatan saja dari banyaknya pekerjaan saya yang terkait dengan perdamaian.

Pekerjaan Anda itu memang selalu berhubungan dengan American Jewish Committee (AJC)?

Acara kemarin memang iya. Kan saya diundang. Tapi kan cuma satu malam saja. Sisanya saya berkegiatan dengan teman-teman jaringan (perdamaian) saya di sana. Bukan cuma AJC.

Sebenarnya gelagat Presiden Jokowi itu melarang atau mengizinkan?

Yang pasti pejabat-pejabat yang relevan tahu kepergian saya, bahkan sebelum saya dilantik jadi Wantimpres. Kalangan NU dan Pemerintah juga sudah banyak yang tahu, termasuk Kiai Said dan Kiai Mahrus.

Mereka tidak melarang, asalkan tidak atas nama NU, dan saya ke sana memang atas nama pribadi.

Kemudian, bagaimana Anda dapat restu dari Gus Mus?

Beliau paham yang saya kerjakan. Saya pergi pun karena keputusan beliau. Pesan Gus Mus, pekerjaan ini adalah sesuatu yang harus dilakukan. Bahwa ada risikonya ya memang dari dulu ada. Gus Dur juga mendapat risiko yang sama ketika itu.

Jadi misi besar Anda ke Israel adalah...

Pada dasarnya meneruskan misi Gus Dur. Mencari jalan keluar dari konflik antaragama yang membayangi dunia. Kalau kita berpikir tentang itu, bukan hanya soal Israel Palestina, ini soal seluruh peperangan yang terjadi di Timur Tengah, di Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India dan tempat lain.

Merasa sendiri ketika tidak dapat dukungan dari NU dan Pemerintah?

Enggak. Banser ada di belakang saya semua. Saya masih menunggu Presiden untuk memanggil, kan janjinya saya akan dipanggil.

Khawatir enggak posisi Anda sebagai Wantimpres dicabut?

Ketika ditawari sudah dijelaskan bahwa saya punya pekerjaan ini. Kalau enggak masalah ya mari. Kan yang terjadi saya tetap dilantik. Kalau sekarang dianggap bermasalah, ya enggak apa-apa.

Kenapa dulu Anda enggak menolak saja tawaran itu, sehingga bebas melakukan misi Anda?

Enggak enak, masa ditawar jadi Wantimpres enggak mau dan menolak. Seolah-olah saya enggak butuh apa-apa, seolah-olah saya ini anti-Jokowi.

Anda kan dianggap representasi NU untuk gantikan Hasyim Muzadi. Itu pertimbangannya *toh*?

Saya enggak tahu juga. Pak Hasyim juga bukan atas nama NU, tapi karena keterlibatannya dalam proses pencalonan Jokowi.

Nah, semenjak jadi Wantimpres ini saya enggak boleh berpendapat tentang Pemerintah, kan sudah jadi haknya Presiden.

Enggak bebas lagi bicara?

Ya jadi diatur di undang-undang. Tapi saya nyaman, dapat mobil dinas dan rumah. Ini pertama kalinya saya dapat gaji sejak lengser dari jubah *he-he*.

Tapi, jadi jubah Gus Dur ketika itu kan belum ada nomenklaturinya, sehingga sama dengan juru-juru yang lain di Istana. Seperti juru masak. Gajinya ya juga sama *ha-ha*.

"Saya maklum dibilang cecunguk"

Gus Yahya

Di media ditulis kalau naskah pidato Anda itu awalnya ditolak di forum American Jewish Committee (AJC), kenapa?

Mereka tidak suka teksnya. Takut audiens kaget dan suasana jadi tidak kondusif.

Siapa memang audiensnya?

Ya para anggota AJC, organisasi yahudi internasional yang berbasis di Amerika. Paling tua sejak 1918. Setiap tahun mereka buat forum global. Ada pengusaha, politisi, bahkan ada Presiden Austria hadir. Dari Indonesia juga ada.

Memangnya naskah itu setajam apa kok forum AJC sampai takut?

Dalam teks itu saya berencana menyampaikan pesan perdamaian untuk Israel dan Palestina. Saya juga mempertegas dukungan kepada Palestina.

Panitia keberatan dan minta diubah. Kemudian, format acara yang awalnya pidato, juga diubah jadi wawancara. Akhirnya, saya menyampaikan naskah pidato aslinya di forum lain, yakni Israel Council on Foreign Relations.

Apa pendapat santri-santri dengan langkah-langkah Anda ini?

Baik-baik saja. Ya saya sih jadi selebriti instan. Setelah hadir di AJC banyak orang menyalami saya, foto bersama, dan mengucapkan terima kasih atas pesan perdamaian yang saya bawa.

Kabarnya sedang didorong menjadi Ketua Umum Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU)?

Ya yang butuh didorong ada, yang modal nekad juga banyak. *Ha-ha*.

Setelah Israel, ke mana lagi Anda akan pergi?

Saya mau ke gedung PBNU nih, mau lihat demo terhadap saya jadi apa enggak. *Ha-ha*.