News focus - Presenting justice and forgiving the flag burners

By Rahmad Nasution | 27th October 2018

Thousands of people take to the street in Bandung, West Java, on Friday (Oct 26, 2018) to protest against the burning of a black flag bearing an Arabic writing of "Tawhid" in Garut, West Java, on Oct 22, 2018 (ANTARA FOTO/M Agung Rajasa/foc).

Bogor, W Java, (ANTARA News) - The commemoration of this year`s National Santri Day, held across Indonesia on Oct 22, has left an irony.

It is called an irony because on the day it was celebrated, a black flag bearing an Arabic writing of "Tawhid" was burned in Garut, West Java Province.

Those committing the act are several members of the Nahdlatul Ulama`s Barisan Ansor

Serbaguna (Banser) youth wing since, as quoted by local media, they said the flag was that of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an Islamic organization that the government had banned.

The police have summoned three Banser members for investigating the flag-burning incident, which was condemned by various Islamic clerics arguing that the flag bearing the basic creed of Islam was commonly used by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In response to this flag-burning incident, Coordinating Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Minister Wiranto has called on the people across Indonesia to stay calm and to not become provoked by any misleading information on it.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Secretary General Anwar Abbas urged Banser to apologize for the flag-burning incident.

For billions of Muslims around the world, Tawhid is accepted as an absolute monotheism and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the messenger of Allah (Almighty God), so it holds an important position that differentiates them from those not embracing Islam.

The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, edited by John L.Esposito (2003: 317), defines Tawhid as "the defining doctrine of Islam. It declares absolute monotheism - the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe."

All true Muslims, including santri, the students of Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia who celebrated National Santri Day, are keen to continue living with Tawhid until their death.

Hence, the burning of the flag cannot then be accepted by so many Muslim community members in the country, as the Tawhid written on the flag belongs to all Muslims.

Chief of the National Police`s Criminal Investigation Division Commissioner General Arief Sulistyanto opined that the flag burning incident would not have occurred if Uus Sukmana had not attended the commemorative event of the National Santri Day Detective Division.

The incident would have neither occurred if Sukmana, who had attended the event, did not wave the black flag that the Banser members believed to be that of HTI, he pointed out.

Sukmana is the man, who brought the black flag bearing the Arabic writing of Tawhid to the commemorative event and waved it before a Banser member seized it, and has been named a suspect by the local police after being questioned, but he has not been detained.

The three Banser members, who burned the flag and had earlier been summoned by the Garut police for an investigation, were also released since, as Arief Sulistyanto revealed, they did that spontaneously and harbored no bad intentions.

Following the Banser members` release, Nahdlatul Ulama`s top leader, Said Aqil Siroj, was quoted by the country`s popular news portal, Detik.com, on Thursday (Oct 25) as lauding the police`s decision.

Calls for the community members to stay calm and to not get provoked by the flag-burning incident have repeatedly been echoed by the government, police, MUI, and several influential individuals for preserving the nation`s unity in diversity.

Apart from this endeavor, the burning of the flag bearing the Arabic writing of Tawhid that numerous Muslims highly respect and believe it had been used by Prophet Muhammad and his companions has triggered massive protests in various towns and cities.

This week, the peaceful rallies for protesting the flag-burning incident, whose video went viral on social media, were staged in Garut, Bogor, and Yogyakarta.

On Friday (Oct 26), the rallies, called "Act of Defending Tawhid," had also been staged simultaneously in various cities and towns, including Jakarta, Medan, and Bandung, during which the demonstrators demanded justice in resolving the case.

In Jakarta, for instance, some one thousand Muslims coming from the capital city and its surrounding areas staged a peaceful rally in front of the Coordinating Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Ministry office in Central Jakarta after the Friday prayer.

Carrying tens of "Ar-Rayah" and "Al-Liwa" flags bearing the Arabic writing of Tawhid as well as Indonesia`s national flags, the demonstrators marched from the Patung Kuda (Horse Statues) traffic circle on Jalan Merdeka Barat to the ministry office.

Several representatives of the demonstrators, keen on expressing their aspirations, were received by the ministry`s top officials representing Coordinating Political, Legal, and Security Affairs Minister Wiranto, who was on an official visit to Palu.

Apart from how the government and law enforcers resolve this sensitive case, the flag-burning incident that occurred during this election campaign period should be handled fairly and transparently to enable the people to feel a sense of justice.

Offering a sense of justice in resolving the case will help pacify the fury of those, who are unable to accept the burning incident. However, for the sake of maintaining unity among Indonesian Muslims and the Muslim brotherhood, forgiving those responsible for the incident is also necessary.

Like Prophet Muhammad says: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, was upon the pulpit and he said: "Be merciful to others and you will receive mercy. Forgive others and Allah will forgive you" (Islam.ru, 2018).

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