



Leader of World's Largest Muslim Organization Meets Netanyahu, Wants Closer Ties with Israel

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The leader of the world's largest Muslim organization, Yahya Staqf, said he wants to see closer ties between Israel and Indonesia in a surprise meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday, [The Times of Israel reported](#).

The Muslim cleric from Indonesia, who is the secretary-general of the 60 million-member Nahdlatul Ulama, is visiting Israel at the invitation of the American Jewish Committee.

Staqf, a strong advocate of interfaith dialogue, met with several religious leaders this week. His meeting with Netanyahu, however, was not officially on the agenda. After talks with the cleric, Netanyahu spoke of Israel's warming ties with Muslim countries, and expressed his hopes "that we have some movement with Indonesia."

In Indonesia, social media has been filled with negative comments about the visit. Israel and Indonesia do not have diplomatic relations, and the visit has prompted protests in the country.

In an exclusive [interview](#) with The Israel Project, Staquf responded to the criticism, saying he needed to reach out “because I want peace” between Israel and the Palestinians. “If you want peace, then you have to talk to everyone,” he said.

Staquf urged different communities of faith and no faith to embrace the concept of “rahma,” meaning compassion and caring about others.

He explained one reason why people in Muslim countries have a negative perception of Israel is because they “haven’t thought about it deeply.” Instead, Staquf urged people to “think towards peace.”

The cleric said while he knows that “Israel did bad things in the past” and “Palestinian people did bad things in the past,” what is needed now is a dialogue about “what we want for our future, together.” When asked if he’s hopeful for the future, Staquf replied: “This is why I came here. I want the hope of peace to be alive.”

In a final message, he once again pleaded for people to embrace “rahma.”

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