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Remarks by Secretary Pompeo on Unalienable Rights and Traditions of Tolerance



SPEECH

MICHAEL R. POMPEO, SECRETARY OF STATE
NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND GERAKAN PEMUDA ANSOR EVENT
FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, JAKARTA, INDONESIA
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SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: (In Indonesian.)

Ladies and gentlemen, Honorable Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo, the Archbishop of Jakarta, Honorable H. Yaqut Qoumas, the chair of Ansor Advisory Board, your Excellencies, Ambassador Kim, Ambassador Lutfi, Ambassador Glendon. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us here today. This is a big day like never before for Ansor, for Nahdlatul Ulama. Ladies and gentlemen, and also – I'd be happy to let you know that together, us physically gathering in this room, we have also our members of Ansor all over the country joining us virtually in this occasion. We have like 35 points of gathering all over the country in every capital of provinces in this country for the leadership of provincial Ansor leadership to join our event today.

Ladies and gentlemen, like I said, this is a big day like never before. We are honored today with an exceptionally special guest, a man whose value exceeds the job title and even exceeds his whole political achievement, a man of vision. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Secretary of State of the United States of America Mr. Michael Richard Pompeo. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you for that kind introduction. *Selamat siang* to you all.

Mr. General Secretary, it is wonderful to be here. I have been looking forward to this since the day that we found a date that worked and were able to accept the invitation. It was most gracious of you to invite me here and I am ecstatic to be part of this event today.

I want to make sure and thank all the people who made this happen. I want to thank and acknowledge the leaders of the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah, those of you who are present. Thank you.

A special welcome also to the other faith leaders and members of the diplomatic corps who are here and those who are watching via livestream as well.

And of course, a warm hello to the people of Indonesia. From the beaches of Bali to the volcanoes of Sumatra, this is truly an extraordinary nation.

I'm confident that that's not a unique statement, that you've heard that a lot before. It's a very special place.

For now, of course, we're all focused on beating the virus that was born in Wuhan.

And before I begin, I want to express my condolences to all the Indonesians who have lost their lives or suffered economic hardship as a result of that virus.

You should know that the United States of America is with you.

And as I told President Widodo today and Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, I am very confident that we will emerge stronger because of the very nature of our two countries.

It was almost one year ago, almost one year ago that our nations mourned the passing of the great Muslim scholar Bahtiar Effendy. He gave voice to our shared commitment to democracy, to tolerance, and to open dialogue.

His work aligned with a deep respect for what we often refer to in the Americas as “unalienable rights.”

I’ve spent a lot of time as the Secretary of State talking about this subject, and I know you hosted a conference just yesterday to discuss the report of the State Department’s Commission on Unalienable Rights, which I created. And I want to also mention I am pleased to say the Chair of the Commission, Professor Mary Ann Glendon, is with us today. Mary Ann, thank you for being here. I understand that it was a great day yesterday. Thank you. (Applause.)

So we unveiled our report in July of this year, and it created something of a stir. Secretaries of State don’t usually spend time on what critics call an “obscure” subject. But it’s not obscure, and it shouldn’t be obscure, and it can’t be obscure. It is foundational to human dignity and to freedom.

The founding principle of the United States is very, very simple. America’s Declaration of Independence affirms that governments exist – governments exist to secure the rights inherent in every human being.

Indeed, as the commission’s report argues, the United States was the first nation founded on a commitment, a deep commitment to universal rights for all human beings.

Now, the most fundamental of these rights is the right to freedom of conscience, including religious freedom. It’s the basis for the most important conversations about what conscience tells us and about what God demands of each of us.

It’s one reason that religious freedom is the very first freedom enumerated in our Constitution, in the American constitution. As an evangelical Christian, my faith informs how I live, how I work, how I think.

And it is exceedingly rare in the scope of human history for a nation to make those promises to its citizens. It is rarer for nations even to keep them.

Our respect, America’s respect for God-given rights, is the defining feature of our national spirit. It’s why America stood tallest among Western democracies in supporting your independence from colonial rule and has been a stalwart supporter of Indonesia’s transition to democracy over these past two decades. The fact that our people embrace freedom and uphold a tradition of tolerance is very special. We should never lose it.

We must continue upholding our traditions, and we must do so very actively. We can’t assume our freedoms and our faith will live on. We must stand for what we believe.

And that’s what I want to talk about today. That’s my message.

I'm here – I'm here in Indonesia because I believe that Indonesia shows us the way forward. There is literally no reason that Islam can't co-exist peacefully alongside Christianity or Buddhism. And I know – I know this is something that is sometimes hard to grasp for those few who twist Islamic teachings to justify violence in the name of this faith.

Indonesians and Americans know that this is wrong. We know that peaceful co-existence and mutual respect is possible.

Indeed, Indonesia's national motto, translated into English, is, "Unity Amid Diversity." Now that's not so different from America's which is: "Out of many, one." If you think about them, they have much in common, much that overlaps.

Indeed, your Constitution from 1945 clearly declares that every person shall be free: "Every person shall be free to...practice the religion of his [or] her choice." Thomas Jefferson could not have said it better.

And just as the American founders looked to the Western tradition as inspiration for the structure of our free society, your founders too found inspiration in your traditions, your own traditions, and established *Pancasila* – foundational principles that enshrined the importance of faith in the life of your country.

It determined that Indonesia's embrace of diverse religions, people, and cultures would become a core pillar of your country's success.

The flexible, inclusive, and tolerant democratic culture that has emerged since the Reformasi of 1998 has defied the skeptics, the skeptics who believed that Indonesia could only be governed by a strongman restricting the rights of its people. Indonesia has since then given the whole world a positive model of how different faiths, different ethnic groups —

(Applause.)

You've given this model of how different faiths and different ethnic groups and political ideologies can co-exist peacefully and settle their disagreements through democratic means. This is glorious.

And you should know, too, that I accept the core problem that democracies aren't perfect either. We get it wrong sometimes, too. And as the commission's report documents, most of American history can be understood as a struggle, a struggle to realize the Declaration of Independence's beautiful promises.

But we must always distinguish – this is central – we must always distinguish between free and democratic nations that inevitably fall short of their principles and those regimes that reject the very idea of human rights, the very idea of religious freedom, the very concept of self-government as a possibility.

The former – democracies – the former can progress; the latter can only oppress.

We stand, all of us, for a tradition of tolerance.

I want to say, too, certainly, your national leadership has played an important role in fostering the harmony that we all seek.

But in any free society, it's a nation's citizens who ultimately sustain and propagate its core ideals.

In that respect, your remarkable organizations, all of you sitting here today, have been powerful forces in the defense of unalienable rights.

N.U. helped spur independence.

You provided a voice and a conscience for the nation during more than three decades of authoritarian rule.

Your very own Gus Dur helped to lead Indonesia's transition to democracy.

His profoundly humane vision and teachings inspired the birth of the Humanitarian Islam movement.

His legacy lives on today in the current generation of leaders who, in 2014, launched the Islam Nusantara campaign to repudiate ISIS – hateful and violent brand of Islam. And it lives on in the Movement for Shared Civilizational Values as well.

Every day, groups like N.U. and the Muhammadiyah represent tens of millions of Indonesian Muslims who believe in a tradition of tolerance within a thriving democracy. (Applause.)

I want to remind all of you here today that your work is now more important than ever. Blasphemy accusations, which destroy lives, have become more common. Discrimination against non-official religions renders their practitioners second-class citizens who are subject to abuse and deprivation.

I know I have great confidence in you all. I know you'll keep speaking out against such blows to pluralism.

I know too that you'll encourage your leaders to strengthen both Indonesia's proud traditions and its newer democratic institutions.

And I know too that you'll draw on your faith to advocate for the human dignity of your fellow human beings when you know that they are being mistreated.

To that end, I think it's worth taking a moment to consider something else.

As the Secretary of State, I've had the incredible privilege to see what happens when Indonesia leads. From our work together in ASEAN, the G20, the Security Council, I

know that Indonesia has an incredible reach and potential as a force for good in the region and indeed throughout the entire world.

And today I want to urge you – I want you to urge the same actions I asked the Catholic Church’s leaders to do in the Vatican.

We need more religious leaders to speak out on behalf of people of all faiths wherever their rights are being violated. We need more religious leaders to be a moral witness. We need more religious leaders to support principles of “humanity and justice,” as your founders wrote, and as our respect for unalienable rights demands.

The Burmese military’s violent oppression of Rohingya and other minorities is one area where Indonesia has pushed ASEAN to live up to the humanitarian ideals, but where progress on justice remains stalled.

Likewise, today, the Iranian regime’s persecution of Baha’is, Christians, Sunni Muslims, and other minority groups has failed to galvanize a proper denunciation from that country’s diplomatic partners or the religious leaders in many Muslim-majority countries.

But in fact, the gravest threat to the future of religious freedom is the Chinese Communist Party’s war against people of all faiths: Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners alike.

The atheist Chinese Communist Party has tried to convince the world that its brutalization of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang is necessary as a part of its counterterrorism efforts or poverty alleviation, depending on which audience that they are speaking to.

But you know – you know; we know – we know that there is no counterterrorism justification for forcing Uyghur Muslims to eat pork during Ramadan or destroying a Muslim cemetery.

There is no poverty-alleviation justification for forced sterilizations or taking children away from their parents to be re-educated in state-run boarding schools.

I know that the Chinese Communist Party has tried to convince Indonesians to look away, to look away from the torments your fellow Muslims are suffering.

I know that these same CCP officials have spun fantastic tales of happy Uyghurs eager to discard their ethnic, religious, and cultural identities to become more “modern” and enjoy the benefits of CCP-led development.

When you hear these arguments, I’d just ask you to do this: search your hearts. Look at the facts. Listen to the tales of the survivors and of their families.

Think about what you know of how authoritarian governments treat those who resist its rule.

There are now dozens – maybe hundreds – of credible academic and research reports documenting what is taking place in Xinjiang.

I personally had the chance to hear the stories of that immense human suffering first-hand when I met in Kazakhstan with relatives of ethnic Kazakhs that had been held in camps in western China. Their tears filled my heart – first with anger and then with resolve.

That meeting underscored to me how precious God-given freedoms are and the responsibility that each of us has to defend them. And indeed, my faith teaches me the same thing:

It teaches me that human beings have a basic dignity because they are made in God's image, and that as people of faith we have an obligation to honor that truth by protecting the weak and comforting the afflicted.

My holy book teaches me that "faith without works is dead."

It teaches me that of those to whom much is given, much is expected.

I'm sure you know the ways that the Islamic tradition – and the Indonesian tradition – demand that we speak out and work for justice.

Look, I know you'll do that. I'm excited to have a very robust discussion with the General Secretary on all of these ideas, so I'll stop here.

And I want to remind you that democracies all have very different cultural heritages, but in spite of that we have tremendous amount in common. All of our countries have struggled with crises, with injustice, and threats – both internal and external – but we continue working towards that more perfect union.

We all do this because our people have the same yearning for God-given unalienable rights as people everywhere do.

Free people of free nations must defend those rights. It is our duty. Even as we each do this – and even as we do this in our own and often different ways, we should recognize that we have strength in numbers. We should recognize that we can turn to each other for support in difficult times, and that our cherished rights and values are absolutely worth defending at every moment, as the birthright of every people.

Many leaders of your organizations have nobly helped Indonesia do that for decades and earned a respected place in Indonesia's democratic pantheon.

I hope that everyone here today will add to this legacy in the days and months and years to come.

May God bless you.

And God bless your democracy.

And God bless Indonesia and the United States of America as well.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Well, Excellencies, thank you very much for such enlightening remarks. Thank you for acknowledging the value of our civilizational aspirations, the civilizational aspirations of Islam. *Rahmatan lil-'alamin* in Islam is the source of universal love and compassion – the civilizational aspiration of *Pancasila*, which are – correspond to your vision of unalienable rights. And again, thank you for your gracious (inaudible), gracious response to our invitation, and your gracious offer for a future working together, correspond to each other. Hopefully this will be the beginning of our great work that we possibly will be able to put together. This will be a very important endeavor for us, and we believe this is the thing that the whole human civilization is really need to have.

But Excellency, we have this problem of concern about the situation which, in the recent years – well, some – maybe longer years – that in many parts of Middle East, in those parts of Middle East, is – are composed with religious extremism and violence. What steps can be taken to address that situation?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it's a fantastic question. Let me just say again, too, how much I welcomed your invitation and how glorious it is to be here. Look, I talked today about our two countries and our democracies and our capacity to protect unalienable rights for all peoples. In many of these countries in the Middle East – aren't democracies, but it doesn't mean that the people of those nations don't deserve the human dignity and these unalienable rights in the same way that every human being does. And so your question is what can we do. So as the Secretary of State, we work on the diplomatic component of this, right. We try to create less risk from extremism, so that's our efforts at counterterrorism, our efforts that extend broadly to making sure that there is a shared set of common understandings between these countries that extremism is simply unacceptable.

We've made some progress to try and develop a model for Middle East peace that we think is grabbing hold in the region. We think that will reduce the risk of extremism as well. And then finally, I'd be happy to be in one of those countries giving a – having this same conversation today that we're having. And while they come from backgrounds that are deeply different, cultures and traditions that are deeply different from America's or from Indonesia's, I am confident that they have a shared set of understandings about these rights as well.

And so we have an obligation when we're in those places to talk about them, to share with them why it is we believe this and why it is that we ask every nation to respect those rights. And when we do that, I am confident you'll see leaders of conscience come together and the people in those countries come together to demand that their

governments secure those rights for them as well. I've seen real progress towards this. We have a long way to go in many parts of the world for sure. The struggle continues. But it is a struggle that is worthy and noble, and I'm thrilled to be here today to continue the conversation, to articulate why it is the United States believes that we should be at the center of having this conversation every place that we go.

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Thank you, sir. Well, we have also some questions that are submitted to me from the audience. This question is from Christopher Nugroho. He's general secretary of the Roman Catholic youth organization here in Indonesia. If you would stand – this is the guy – Christopher Nugroho, he ask: What role do you see for Indonesia and its mass Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in supporting religious freedoms throughout the world?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I talked about it a little bit in my remarks. You've already demonstrated your capacity to impact nations. Your consistent message, your capacity to share these central understandings with the people here in Indonesia have led this country to the place that it is. You've been an important component of that.

But two other thoughts: One, this struggle for the protection of these rights is forever a process, and so as you make steps along the way, and as Indonesia does and other countries in the region that you're urging join in this way, don't ever back off. Stay strong. Continue to talk about this. Continue to build on the things that you have done, because the risk of backsliding is very real. Authoritarian regimes can pop up in places that no one would expect them, and it – as I said in my remarks, it is the people of these nations, the demanding that these governments secure their rights, that will ultimately lead. And that's what these organizations do. They're people banding together to demand that nations respect these fundamental human rights that each of us is entitled to.

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Great. (Applause.) So now, the next question is from Mrs. Anggia Ermarini. He's – she is the chair of Nahdlatul Ulama, its 8 million members of young women's movement. There's the lady there. (Applause.) She ask: Last week, you signed the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which was cosponsored by the Republic of Indonesia and the U.S. Government. What is it that united our two governments in support of this declaration?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. This was really, from America's perspective, important, and we were thrilled to have Indonesia sign it as well as several dozen other countries. If you go read what's in that consensus declaration – we'll call it the Geneva Consensus Declaration – it simply acknowledges what we've been speaking about, this set of rights. And it protects the unborn. We've seen this even in international organizations where they're actively hostile to some of the basic human rights that we've been speaking about here today. Indeed, we have at the UN a Human Rights Commission that doesn't always get it right on these things that we care about so deeply.

And so this Geneva Consensus, which I hope many other nations will join in the months ahead, simply was a declaration of the very ideas that we've been speaking about that our Unalienable Rights Commission spoke to, and the way that the international community must join hands to assist people in demanding that their governments respect this set of rights. If you read it, it's a very – I think very elegant. It was a group effort by many, many countries all across the world, and an important moment, I think, in history where a group of countries came together to say that as we together work inside of international organizations, we will never walk away from these fundamental protections for humanity and for human dignity.

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Thank you, sir. A question —

(Applause.)

A question from Agus Herlambang, chairman of Indonesian Islamic student movement or PMII. It's a large student movement, actually related to Nahdlatul Ulama also. And he ask: In recent months, several Arab states have signed peace agreements with Israel. You are in close contact with these governments. How do you and these Arab states plan to address the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Where – is the young man here who asked this?

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Will you – ah, that's the guy, yeah.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, very nice to see you. Thank you. Is your school back – are schools back open? We've got to get everybody back in class in America.

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: (Laughter.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Professor Glendon would concur. Get the kids back in school. Look, we think what we have done with the President's Vision for Peace, and the Abraham Accords as a component of that, enhances the capacity for the Palestinian people to have a state in the way that we laid out in the Vision for Peace, and to make the lives better for people all across the Middle East, certainly including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the Palestinians living there. There are some who think these are at odds, that somehow the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and now Sudan, acknowledging that Israel has the right to exist and is the Jewish homeland, and opening up economic ties and diplomatic relationships, that that somehow takes away from the capacity for the Palestinians to get what they ought to be accorded.

We think just the opposite. We believe that this now sets the conditions in – consistent with what President Trump laid down in the Vision for Peace for the Palestinians, to enter into a conversation to deliver good outcomes for the Palestinian people. If you go back to the Vision for Peace, it's some time ago now, we laid out a path towards a two-state solution. We offered real economic benefits and assistance for the people living in the West Bank. We think it is the basis for an intelligent, important set of conversations, and we think the Abraham Accords sets the conditions where Arab states have now recognized that Israel has this right to exist. We hope the Palestinians will acknowledge

that in the same way, the same fundamental way, and so that this conversation can begin to be had.

For an awfully long time – and I’ll finish with this thought – for an awfully long time, there was this idea that somehow the Palestinians had a veto which would prevent any conversation about stability and peace in the Middle East. We didn’t accept that premise. We believe that you can push back against extremism, you can push back against terrorism, you can build out diplomatic relationships between Israel and Arab states, and at the same time work diligently to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We’re hard at that. We hope the Palestinian leadership will find a way to join us in that conversation.

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Thank you. Now, the next question is from the chairman of Hindu’s youth organization. There is the person. And he ask: How can America and Indonesia work together to ensure that universal principle of UDHR become a lived reality and not mere words on paper that in many parts of the world are simply ignored?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So it’s a fantastic and fundamentally important question. I spoke to the fact that not only our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution, but the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well, were aspirational documents. That doesn’t let any of us off the hook. We need to deliver on those commitments and we need to call out those who are rejecting those fundamental ideas. If you take just the 30 minutes – or maybe if you read like me, 45 minutes – to go read the work that Professor Glendon and her commission did on my behalf, you’ll see lots of discussion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its history and why it mattered.

But it also acknowledges that the human rights tradition is in crisis in the 21st century, that there became an unmooring from these rights traditions that I think the human rights community has at risk of losing of its way. And we talk about it. The reason I asked this Unalienable Rights Commission to do its work was to take the American tradition and ground American foreign policy to re-embrace the history of the American rights tradition. When you go read our report, you’ll see that we acknowledge – and I heard Professor Glendon and you both talked about this – Indonesia has a different tradition upon which it bases its human rights. But if you see where they come together, you see the rights, they are remarkably, remarkably similar, and that’s what we speak to.

So the obligation that we all have is to do far more than talk. It is to build out institutions that will protect these rights, it is to call out those institutions that reject these rights, and it’s to praise and thank individuals who engage in this important work to build out a community that respects the most fundamental rights that every human being is entitled to, that are laid out not only in the traditions of Indonesia and the United States, but you can see so clearly in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY GENERAL STAQUF: Well, thank you very much, Excellency. And now, the chairman of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor will present to you a plaque of – a plaque of acknowledgement from the organization to the report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

MR QOUMAS: Gerakan Pemuda Ansor has created this plaque in honor of your visit. It reads: As heir to the civilizational aspiration of *Islam Rahmatan lil-'alamin*, *Pancasila*, and the 1945 Constitution, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, the Nahdlatul Ulama (inaudible) acknowledges and shares the aspiration expressed in the report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights. Hence, we stand ready to strife alongside people of goodwill of every faith and nation to foster the emergence of truly just and harmonious world order founded upon respect for the equal right and dignity of every human being.

(Applause.)

(The plaque is presented.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

(Applause.)

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