



## **Speech for Closing Ceremony G20 Interfaith Forum, Bologna, Italy**

**By the Honorable H. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas  
Minister of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to speak with you today in the heart of a city whose artistic, intellectual and economic achievements epitomize the greatness of European civilization. In other words: from the heart of a city built upon shared civilizational values, whose dynamic nature has enabled its inhabitants to build upon ancient traditions while continuously adapting to change.

Next year the G20 and its Interfaith Forum will be held on the far side of the earth, in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and democracy, Indonesia. The following year, in 2023, the world's largest democracy, India, will host the G20.

Indonesia lies astride the maritime crossroads that historically linked the Indian Ocean and the Sinosphere, becoming the crucible of a unique civilization of its own. Our ancient links to Europe may also be seen in the discovery of gold coins from Rome, which travelled along these sea routes to purchase spices from our ancestors nearly 2,000 years ago.

During the long course of history, innumerable kingdoms, empires, cultures and civilizations have risen to wealth and prominence, only to decline and eventually vanish. Their collapse was often heralded by a period of acute crisis and widespread human suffering, prior to a new order emerging from the ruins of the old.

For example, the immense horrors of the First and Second World Wars ultimately led to the establishment of the United Nations and a rules-based post-war order, whose benefits we continue to enjoy today. Yet I am confident that few of us would wish to experience the cataclysmic events that preceded the emergence of this order.

Viewed from an historical perspective, our current rules-based order is an anomaly. It remains fragile and is threatened by numerous forces, including authoritarian states and transnational ideologies that reject its basic tenets, in whole or in part. Among these core tenets are human rights, the rule of law, democracy, the existence of nation states, respect for international borders and the sovereignty of other nations.

The chaos on display in many parts of the world — including discrimination, persecution and outright violence perpetrated against ethnic and religious minorities — remains a profound threat not only to those directly affected, but also to the future of humanity, and civilization, itself.

Disdain for the rule of law and denial of the inherent value and dignity of human life threatens the entire framework of our current world order, which has produced the greatest expansion of economic well-being in the history of humanity and unprecedented technological achievements. Yet these very achievements render us vulnerable on multiple fronts.

Our inter-connected global economy, combined with massive urbanization, could produce starvation on a vast scale in the event of a global economic collapse. Similarly, the nexus of political and economic power and technology threatens to create a dystopian future in which multinational corporations and governments surveil and control individuals to a degree previously unimaginable. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and other military technologies poses a correspondingly grave threat.

In contemplating the agenda of next year's G20 Interfaith Forum, which Indonesia will host, we believe it is essential to acknowledge and address these and other threats to our current world order. We also believe it is essential to reflect upon the fragility of our current world order and abstain from placing further stress upon its intricate and highly complex social, economic and political infrastructure.

Religion has a vital role to play in this regard, for it has the potential to help block the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; promote solidarity and respect among the diverse people, cultures and nations of the world; and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

Yet to realize this potential, we must wisely manage the inevitable struggle between competing values, as globalization brings highly diverse peoples, cultures and traditions into ever closer contact.

It will also require establishing a global platform for religious, political and intellectual leaders to gather and jointly address the challenges that lie before us.

And, of course, it will require that religious leaders act decisively to ensure that religion is no longer "part of the problem," and instead becomes "part of the solution" to the multitude of crises that threaten to unravel our current world order.

One major task that lies before us is to identify, and conscientiously observe, those universal values that a majority of the world's inhabitants already acknowledge, such as the virtues of honesty, truth-seeking, compassion and justice. Another, parallel task, is to develop a global consensus regarding shared values that the world's diverse cultures will need to embrace if we are to co-exist peacefully.

It is also necessary for us to acknowledge that many traditional communities continue to embrace certain values that may prevent peaceful coexistence with others.

These considerations explain why, in February of 2019 — at a gathering of over 20,000 Muslim religious scholars — Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama adopted an official ruling that the legal category of infidel is neither relevant to, nor applicable within, the context of a modern nation state.

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In addition, our religious scholars ruled that the nation state and laws derived from modern political processes are legitimate. They also affirmed that it is a religious obligation for Muslims to foster peace rather than wage war on behalf of our co-religionists, whenever conflict erupts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations anywhere in the world.

As Kyai Haji Mustofa Bisri, a prominent Nahdlatul Ulama spiritual leader, wrote in a poem titled "Religion":

Religion  
is a golden carriage  
prepared by God  
to convey you along the path  
to His Divine Presence.  
Don't become mesmerized by its beauty,  
much less enchanted to the point  
that you come to blows with your own brothers and sisters  
over who occupies the front seat.  
Depart!  
He has been waiting for you  
ever so long.

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

May the peace and blessings of God be upon you.