

**2014_12_09_Bayt ar-Rahmah
(Home of Divine Grace)**

**Leaders of the World's Largest Muslim Organization Launch Global Effort to
"restore the majesty of Islamic teachings as a source of universal love
and compassion (*rahmatan li al-'alamin*)"**

WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina, USA: On December 9, 2014, Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Supreme Council and KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf—the NU's Secretary for International and Political Affairs—joined with American businessmen C. Holland Taylor and F. Borden Hanes, Jr. to establish Home of Divine Grace for Revealing and Nurturing Islam as a Blessing for All Creation (*Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da'wa al-Islamiyah Rahmatan li al-'Alamin*), a U.S.-based religious corporation that will serve as a hub for the expansion of NU operations worldwide. Nahdlatul Ulama is the world's largest Muslim organization, with over 50 million members and 14,000 Islamic boarding schools, or *madrassahs*.

Bayt ar-Rahmah is part of a global effort conceived by Indonesia's first democratically-elected head of state, H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid (1940 – 2009), to help realize Indonesia's strategic potential as an engine of civilizational progress for all humanity. In 2003, President Wahid established LibForAll Foundation with his close friend and associate, North Carolina native C. Holland Taylor, to help meet international peace and security needs in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the first Bali bombing. Under President Wahid's and Mr. Taylor's leadership, LibForAll quickly became "a model of what a competent public diplomacy effort in the Muslim world should look like" (*Wall Street Journal*), achieving a string of notable successes that would ultimately result in the foundation of Bayt ar-Rahmah.

In the spring of 2009, LibForAll Foundation, the Wahid Institute and Maarif Institute published a landmark extremist exposé that dramatically influenced Indonesia's 2009 national elections and derailed the political aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated party PKS and other transnational Islamist groups hostile to Indonesia's tradition of religious pluralism and tolerance.

Edited by President Wahid, with a Prologue by Dr. Syafii Maarif and Epilogue by KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, *The Illusion of an Islamic State* provided a robust theological defense of Indonesia's largely secular constitution and exposed the degree to which Islamist extremists were infiltrating Indonesian Muslim organizations—including the Muhammadiyah and NU—while seeking to determine the results of national elections. These sobering revelations helped to prevent PKS from merging its political platform with that of incumbent president and winner of Indonesia's 2009 presidential elections, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and blocked PKS Central Committee member Hidayat Nur Wahid from become SBY's vice-presidential running mate.

“LibForAll constitutes... an interesting phenomenon in terms of bridging the gap against extremism both within and between regions. The organization has also, in an experimental manner, used various means and forums to reach out to as large a segment of society as possible by using credible messengers and new technological platforms. LibForAll’s coordinated media strategy has had a decisive political effect in terms of curbing political parties with an extremist agenda. Exposing the true nature of the parties has enabled marginalization of corrosive, subversive forces.”

[“Preventing Violent Radicalization and Terrorism: The Case of Indonesia”](#)

~ Dr. Magnus Ranstorp,
Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS)
Sweden’s National Defense College

Shortly before his death, President Wahid, Mr. Taylor and other prominent Muslim figures launched a multi-pronged initiative to reinvigorate Indonesia’s unique traditions of religious pluralism and tolerance and bring its profound “civilizational wisdom” into constructive dialogue with the world at large. Specifically, President Wahid hoped to mobilize the concentrated energies of the West to “help Islam,” by inviting people of good will of every faith and nation to join in developing and operationalizing a comprehensive strategy to marginalize and discredit Islamist extremism among Muslim populations worldwide.

Central to this “big idea” are certain fundamental insights characteristic of *Islam Nusantara* (“East Indies Islam”), including: i) the primary message of Islam is *rahmah* (universal love and compassion); ii) in order to manifest as *rahmah*, Islamic teachings must be contextualized and adapted to the ever-changing realities of space and time; and iii) Islam should not be viewed as a supremacist ideology or vehicle for conquest, but rather, as one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfection.

To realize Indonesia’s “big idea,” President Wahid set in motion a number of interrelated endeavors. One of these, LibForAll’s International Institute of Qur’anic Studies (IIQS), seeks to facilitate an intellectual, cultural, social, political, legal and spiritual transformation of the Muslim world, so that Islam may truly function as *rahmatan lil ‘alamin*, or a blessing for all creation.

A second, closely related endeavor consists of a systematic effort to help educate and mobilize Western governments, civil society and public opinion at large, to address the complex array of threats posed by Islamist ideology, terrorism and a rising tide of Islamophobia in the West.

Founded in 2004 by renowned NU clerics including H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, KH. Sahal Mahfudz, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, KH. Dimiyati Rois and KH. Muadz Thohir, *Majma’ al-Buhuts an-Nahdliyyah* (The Forum for Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Teachings, or “MBN”) seeks to mobilize the NU in vigorous defense of its basic values, which are under threat from transnational Islamist groups that reject its profoundly spiritual, pluralistic and tolerant view of Islam. MBN is committed to preserve the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and its 1945 Constitution, which enshrines Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Oneness Amid Diversity) as foundational values of the largely secular Republic of Indonesia.

In late 2012, MBN and LibForAll/IIQS initiated a vigorous campaign of “spiritual gatherings” across Indonesia, designed to unify the NU’s regional and grassroots leadership behind President Wahid’s and Mustofa Bisri’s vision, and mobilize government to resist the

infiltration of transitional extremist groups that seek to undermine and destroy Indonesia's multi-religious and pluralistic democracy. In 2013 and 2014, over 106 such gatherings were held, whose total number of participants exceeded 175,000.

As part of this campaign, Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri and Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf initiated the *Islam Nusantara* movement in February of 2014, in conjunction with the Festival of East Indies Saints (*Mahrajan Wali-Wali Jawi*)—a series of mass events held over a six-week period at multiple pilgrimage sites across Central and East Java, during a time of enormous upheaval and bloodshed in the Middle East. Festivities culminated with a mass celebration in the historic Indonesian port city of Demak, a focal point for the spread of Islam throughout the Malay Archipelago.

The idea for the Festival arose from the NU Chairman's concern that:

“in recent years, Islamic proselytism (*da'wah*) has been violating the principles advocated by the noble Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him. The Prophet advised those who proselytize to make things easy for other people, not cause them to flee in terror. And yet lately, it is precisely *da'wah* that makes people feel horrified and appalled by Islam. Genuine Islam: Islam Nusantara, Indonesian Islam, the Islam taught by the Messenger of God (saw.) has been supplanted by Saudi Islam—a grasping and materialistic Islam—coarse, cruel and savage. I am absolutely certain that our understanding of Islam is shared by the majority of Muslims worldwide, and that [the Wahhabi/ISIS] view is just a ghoulish nightmare that keeps the world awake in the dead of night, trembling in horror.”

~ Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, addressing the Festival of East Indies Saints in Demak, Central Java, on February 22, 2014

Mahrajan Wali-Wali Jawi was designed to commemorate the historic role of the 15th century *Wali Songo* (“Nine Saints”) movement, whose wisdom, respect for pre-existing cultures and profoundly spiritual modes of *da'wah* (proselytism) precipitated the emergence of a great Islamic civilization in the Malay Archipelago, rooted in the principle of *rahmah* and other noble values of religion. These saints' legacy inspired the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926, in direct response to the Wahhabi conquest of Mecca and Medina and played a decisive role in guiding the founders of Indonesia to establish their newly-independent nation as a multi-religious state, rooted in the principles of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

NU *ulama* (religious scholars) endowed the Indonesian nation state with profound theological legitimacy, by advancing a number of strong religious arguments in its favor. The theological rationale that Indonesian *ulama* employed to legitimize NKRI were the product of new *ijtihad*, which cannot be found within the authoritative texts of *fiqh* from the canon of classical Islamic thought. Aware of this fact, Nahdlatul Ulama explicitly acknowledged that the changing context of reality necessitates the creation of new interpretations of Islamic law and orthodox Islamic teaching at the 1992 National Gathering of Religious Scholars held in Lampung, under the leadership of H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid.

The Islam Nusantara campaign had far-reaching and immediate effects throughout Indonesia, attracting viral coverage from the nation's print and broadcast media, while stimulating renewed awareness of the unique and precious legacy of the *Wali Songo* among Nahdlatul Ulama, its followers and society at large, at a time when *jihadi* terror movements were ascendant in much of the Arab Muslim “heartland.”

Inspired by the success of the Islam Nusantara campaign, and a desire to realize President Wahid's "grand vision," in the fall of 2014 KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, F. Borden Hanes, Jr. and C. Holland Taylor resolved to formally incorporate Home of Divine Grace (Bayt ar-Rahmah) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which is also the home of Bayt ar-Rahmah's sister organization, LibForAll Foundation.

Bayt ar-Rahmah will facilitate the global expansion of Nahdlatul Ulama operations, and leverage the practical and civilizational experience of the world's largest Muslim organization to "eliminate the widespread practice of using religion in order to incite hatred and violence towards others."

"The primary reason we must oppose hardline movements is to restore honor and respect to Islam, which the extremists have desecrated, while at the same time preserving Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Victory in the struggle against extremists will restore the majesty of Islamic teachings as *rahmatan lil-'alamîn*—a blessing for all creation—and this represents a vital key to building a peaceful world."

~ H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, "*The Enemy Within*"
Editor's Foreword to The Illusion of an Islamic State