



## 2019\_03\_22\_Nahdlatul Ulama-Based PKB Joins Centrist Democrat International

### Indonesia's Largest Islamic Political Party, PKB, to Project "Soft Power" Globally

JAKARTA, Indonesia: On March 22, 2019, a delegation representing the world's largest political network—Centrist Democrat International (CDI), with over 100 affiliated parties in more than 70 nations—visited Jakarta, where they met with the Central Board of Indonesia's largest Islamic political party. H. Muhaimin Iskandar, Chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB) and Deputy Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), greeted the delegation, headed by César Rosselló, CDI's General Coordinator for Asia Pacific and Latin America. CDI—originally, an exclusive coalition of Christian Democrat parties—approved PKB's accession unanimously and in record time at a meeting of its Executive Committee in Cape Verde on November 27, 2018.

Indonesia's print and broadcast media heavily covered the event, providing widespread favorable publicity for PKB in the midst of a national election campaign. The nation's presidential and legislative elections will be held on April 19, 2019. PKB is allied with President Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") of Indonesia and the party controls four cabinet posts in the current Jokowi administration. The nation's leading newspaper, *Kompas*, reported that PKB—the first Indonesian political party to join an international network—was swiftly granted full membership status by CDI "due to its party ideology, which is based on democracy, moderation and anti-radicalism."

At a board meeting and press conference held in conjunction with the CDI delegation's visit, PKB Chairman Muhaimin Iskandar said, "Our party was founded by the spiritual leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, which views the primary message of Islam as *rahmah* (universal love and compassion). This message is an antidote to extremist ideology and violence... PKB has joined CDI in order to foster economic growth for our nation and to exercise soft power, by ensuring that *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a compassionate Islam that nurtures all creation) becomes the primary trend within Islam globally. This will position Indonesia as a world power, for our understanding and practice of [Humanitarian] Islam frightens no one, and threatens no one, except those who wish to politicize religion for worldly purposes."

Mr. Rosello told members of the press that Centrist Democrat International "is fortunate and considers it a great honor that PKB chose to join our global network. PKB is the tip of the spear in efforts to oppose radicalism" and "will help CDI member parties address a number of threats to international peace and security."

KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama, senior advisor to Indonesian President Joko Widodo and PKB's Emissary to CDI, joined Muhaimin Iskandar in welcoming the delegation. Mr. Staquf remarked, "CDI's European division, EPP, is currently the largest political party in Europe and includes many of its heads of government. Our

engagement with CDI provides an unparalleled, multi-faith platform from which to deliver the message of Humanitarian Islam to a global audience, in order to ‘block the political weaponization of Islam and curtail the spread of communal hatred, by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.’” Mr. Staquf was quoting the *Nusantara Statement*, adopted by the NU young adults movement, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, on October 25, 2018.

In recent years Mr. Staquf has emerged as a significant international figure, shaping public debate on issues related to Islamist extremism and terror. In January 2019, he [addressed the European Parliament’s](#) center-left and center-right political groupings—at the invitation of Portuguese Socialist Party MEP Ana Maria Gomes and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)—and spoke at the European People’s Party think tank, the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. In December 2018, he [addressed the Slovenian nation](#) on the topics of “Migration, Terrorism and Freedom of Speech,” at the invitation of its former Prime Minister, Janez Jansa, who serves on the CDI Executive Committee. Interventions by Mr. Staquf helped [shape public discourse](#) amid the heat of Germany’s 2017 national election campaign and aided the Belgian government in stripping Saudi control of a [Brussels terror mosque](#) linked to Islamic State attacks in the Belgian capital as well as Paris. In 2017, the Rotating Presidency of the EU Council introduced [policy recommendations](#) by Mr. Staquf via the EU Council Terrorism Working Party to help reconcile severe policy differences—triggered by mass migration—that have strained relations between EU Member States in Western and Central Europe.