



2019_07_18_African American Muslims Welcome Nahdlatul Ulama and Humanitarian Islam

NU General Secretary Delivers Nationwide Address to U.S. Muslims from Historic Mosque in Washington, DC

WASHINGTON, DC: On the evening of Thursday, July 18, 2019, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf—General Secretary of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama, the world’s largest Muslim organization—delivered a sermon that was live-streamed to members of the African American Muslim community gathered in mosques, Islamic centers and homes throughout North America and abroad. Mr. Staquf spoke from the hallowed precincts of Masjid Muhammad, [The Nation’s Mosque](#), home to the oldest Muslim community in Washington. Masjid Muhammad was the first mosque built from the ground up in America’s capital city by its citizens, and also the first in the U.S. built by descendants of enslaved African Americans.

The Nation’s Mosque belongs to the community of [Imam Warith Deen Mohammed](#), whose father Elijah Muhammad led the controversial black separatist movement, Nation of Islam, from 1934 until his death in 1975. W. Deen Mohammed was himself a progressive African American Muslim leader, theologian, philosopher, Muslim revivalist and Islamic thinker, who disbanded the original Nation of Islam in 1976 and transformed it into an orthodox mainstream Islamic movement, which continues his legacy of compassion and forgiveness to this day.

Leaders of the W. Deen Mohammed community visited Indonesia in October of 2018 to participate in the [Second Global Unity Forum](#), where a multi-faith vanguard of international religious and political figures joined Nahdlatul Ulama leaders in signing the [Nusantara Statement](#), and affirming their support for the global Humanitarian Islam movement. These visitors included Imam Talib Shareef and Imam Albert Sabir of The Nation’s Mosque, and Imam Abdul Rahman Shareef, leader of the Tauheed Islamic Center in Wilmington, North Carolina.

The NU General Secretary delivered his address following the *salat al-maghreb*, or sunset prayer. The full text of KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf’s sermon, as revised and edited for publication, may be read below:

Greetings to all of you, from your Indonesian brothers and sisters of Nahdlatul Ulama. Praise be to God for having revealed Islam to us, and for granting us this precious opportunity to be together! For Allah has bestowed upon us the gift of Islam, and the ability to perceive its effect in our lives and, indeed, our very souls. But God did not guide us to Islam merely for our own, personal benefit. Rather, He has entrusted Islam to us, that we may share its precious, transformative effect with others. And He has placed us in the midst of society, that we may strive to foster the spiritual and material well-being of everyone around us. Brothers and sisters, it is only possible to do this—to fulfill this noble mission—if we absorb the spiritual teachings of Islam in the very depths of our hearts and souls.

We are all aware of the problems that afflict our societies, and of those engulfing the Islamic world in particular. All of us, as Muslims, are concerned by this. Rather than sit idly on the

sidelines, it is our responsibility to demonstrate how Islam may help solve the problems that affect our societies, and those that plague the Muslim world at large.

A careful study of history reveals that religion may have either a positive or negative effect upon humanity and civilization at large, depending on how it is understood and practiced. The annals of history are full of savage wars fought in the name of religion. For thousands of years, humanity has witnessed every form of cruelty and destruction committed in the name of God.

Brothers and sisters, whether religion becomes a force for good or ill depends on how deeply we absorb its message. If we adopt a superficial understanding of Islam, then religion will manifest as a tribal identity devoid of spiritual depth. The Messenger of God warned us about this: “Are you going to tell others to perform good deeds, and yourself forget to do so, while you recite from the Scripture? Can you not think logically?” (Qur’an 2:44).

If Islam is to have a positive effect on others, we must manifest its spiritual power in our own lives. We need to absorb Islam as deeply as possible within our souls, so that it becomes our *spiritual*—rather than superficial—identity, uncorrupted by the supremacist and often violent lures of religious tribalism.

If we stray from this path—and adopt Islam merely as a tribal identity—then the temptations for us to wield religion as a weapon against anyone we perceive to be different from ourselves are endless. Islam should not be used as a weapon to destroy others. To prevent this from happening, we need to understand and embrace Islam’s spiritual wisdom. We need to recall that the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, warned us about people who recite the Qur’an and claim to follow Islam, although its teachings do not pass beyond the throat to penetrate their hearts. Such people often use the Qur’an to justify many kinds of evil. This corruption of Islam’s essential teachings is still occurring today.

We should never take that path [of hatred and corruption]. Instead, we should absorb the teachings of Islam in our souls, so that religion manifests as genuine love and compassion. For God (swt.) sent his Messenger (saw.) for no purpose other than to manifest *rahmah* (universal love and compassion). The Qur’an does not say “*rahmah* for all believers,” or “*rahmah* for all Arabs.” It does not even say “*rahmah* for all humans.” The Qur’an says that God sent the Prophet Muhammad as an expression of His love and compassion for *all* creation (*rahmatan li al-‘alamin*) (Qur’an 21:107).

Islam can only manifest as love and compassion when it emanates from a soul that is truly Islamic [i.e., immersed in a state of self-transcendent awareness of, and surrender to, Divine Will]. Islam will not manifest as *rahmah* when it is conveyed by those who merely claim the identity of Islam, without living in accord with its primary message [of *rahmah*].

We should recall what the Messenger of Islam, the Prophet (saw.), said at his final sermon, during the last haj that he performed. “Oh people—” He used the term *al-nas* (people), addressing not just believers—the Muslims—but all human beings. “Oh people, your God is One and your Father is One.” This means that we should regard all humanity as our brothers and sisters, and not use any differences between us to justify enmity or the destruction of others.

It is the will of God that we have all these differences. Different skin colors, languages, ethnicities and religion. Islam teaches us to accept these differences and not seek to eliminate them. Nor do Muslims throughout the world need to wear identical clothes, adopt a

monolithic culture, or have the same physical appearance [such as wearing a beard, turban or cap]. No. We come from many different cultures. It is our right and responsibility to develop our *own* civilizations, our *own* cultures, and simply let Islam inspire and guide our efforts.

For example, Indonesia is our home. Thus it is our responsibility, as Indonesian Muslims, to preserve our precious civilization. We do not feel that we must abandon our culture and civilization to imitate other cultures. What is ours is ours, and it is our right to preserve it. The same principle holds for you as Americans: this is your home, your civilization, your culture, and it is for you to preserve it. It is your responsibility to manifest Islam as a valuable contribution to American culture and society.

Let us pray to Allah that He grant His guidance and blessings not only to Muslims, but to all human beings. May God grant His *rahmah* to us and to every living creature, so that we may bequeath a different and much brighter legacy to future generations.

May God bless us and guide us to perform deeds that please Him, and may His infinite love, compassion and mercy envelop and protect us.

Assalamu 'alaikum warohmatullohi wabarokatuh.

(May the peace and blessings of God be upon you.)