



**2019_09_25_Pope Francis to NU Leaders:
“Pray for me and I shall pray for you. We are all brothers.”**

“Humanitarian Islam and its foundational texts represent a compelling moral, ethical and theological basis for close cooperation between Nahdlatul Ulama and the Roman Catholic Church”

**Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue welcomes opportunity to
“renew our close relationship” with NU spiritual leaders**

VATICAN CITY: On September 24 and 25, 2019, a delegation of Indonesian Muslim and Roman Catholic leaders met with senior Vatican officials to discuss the global Humanitarian Islam movement and possible cooperation with the Vatican in promoting a shared humanist agenda. The multi-faith delegation was jointly led by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (“Gus Yahya”), Religious Affairs Advisor to the President of Indonesia and General Secretary of the world’s largest Muslim organization—Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—and Monseigneur Agustinus Agus, the Archbishop of Pontianak in West Kalimantan (Borneo).

The delegation also included the senior-most leadership of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, NU’s 5-million-member young adults movement; scholars from one of Indonesia’s most prestigious Islamic boarding schools, PP. Krapyak; a group of Dominican priests; and Indonesian businessman Paulus Totok Lusida. Senior journalists from Indonesia’s two leading print media groups, *Kompas* and *Jawa Pos*, accompanied the delegation and covered its meetings in depth.

In his message to the Pope, Gus Yahya stated:

“It brings us great pleasure to present to you, on behalf of Nahdlatul Ulama and its international affiliate, Bayt ar-Rahmah, the foundational texts of the global Humanitarian Islam movement.

“Guided by Nahdlatul Ulama’s spiritual leaders, the Humanitarian Islam movement was inspired by former Indonesian President and NU Chairman Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid and by the example of the 15th century Javanese *Wali Songo* (‘Nine Saints’) movement, which view *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) as the primary message of Islam and *ukhuwwah basyariyah* (universal human fraternity) as its practical expression.

“We believe Humanitarian Islam and Christian humanism to be kindred traditions, whose spiritual and philosophical values are consonant with—and, in the case of Christian humanism, helped to shape and secure the adoption of—the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR).

“*The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed by Your Holiness and Grand Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb of al-Azhar, sits firmly within this venerable humanitarian tradition, and was formally adopted by Nahdlatul Ulama at its 2019 National Conference of Religious Scholars in Patroman, West Java.

“It is our belief that the spirit of universal human fraternity that animates UDHR, Christian humanism, Humanitarian Islam and its foundational texts—a copy of which we are giving you today—represents a compelling moral, ethical and religious basis for close cooperation between Nahdlatul Ulama and the Roman Catholic Church, coordinated via Bayt ar-Rahmah.

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“We look forward to establishing a close and productive relationship with the Vatican, in order to foster 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’s conversation with Pope Francis—held near St. Peter’s Basilica in the heart of Vatican City—constituted the centerpiece for two days of intensive discussions between key NU and Roman Catholic figures, examining how the universal values shared by Christian humanism and the Humanitarian Islam movement may contribute to the emergence of a global civilization endowed with noble character.

The extensive talks were facilitated by the Indonesian Catholic Archbishop of Pontianak, Monseigneur Agustinus Agus, in close coordination with Bayt ar-Rahmah, a non-profit organization founded by Nahdlatul Ulama spiritual leaders and based in North Carolina, United States, that serves as a hub for the worldwide expansion of NU operations.

Deliberations began on September 24 with a [roundtable discussion](#) hosted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf briefed Vatican officials regarding a number of theological decisions made during the February 27 – March 1, 2019 “National Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Scholars” (“2019 Munas”), whose [historic findings](#) may be said to parallel those of the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965), both in their profound theological implications and their potential to unite people of goodwill of every faith and nation, by enlivening transcendent spiritual values and calling for universal human fraternity. PCID was founded during Vatican II, in order to institutionalize and implement two renowned declarations—*Dignitatis humanae* and *Nostra aetate*—which are seminal works within the Christian humanist tradition that, respectively, theologially validate freedom of religion and establish a framework for harmonious relations between Roman Catholics and non-Christians.

At its 2019 Munas, Nahdlatul Ulama formally adopted and incorporated ten (10) [foundational texts](#) of the global Humanitarian Islam movement, which seeks to restore *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) to its rightful place as the primary message of Islam. These foundational texts include the [International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders \(ISOMIL\) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration](#) (2016); [First Global Unity Forum Declaration](#) (2016); the [Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam](#) (2017); the [Nusantara Manifesto](#) (2018); and the 2019 [Document on Human Fraternity](#), which was jointly signed by Pope Francis and Grand Shaykh Ahmed al-Tayyeb of al-Azhar, Egypt’s pre-eminent center of Islamic authority.

During their deliberations, NU religious scholars produced a detailed set of theological arguments in support of—and a practical road map to achieve—the aspirations of the *Document on Human Fraternity*, issuing two new declarations: *The Recontextualization of Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Transformation of the Prevailing “Muslim Mindset,” for the Sake of World Peace and to Achieve a Harmonious Communal Life for All Mankind*; and *Findings of Bahtsul Masa’il Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation, Citizenship, State Law and Peace*.

The latter document represents new *ijtihad* (the creation of Islamic law through a process of independent legal reasoning) designed to meet the needs of Muslims living amid the changed circumstances of the 21st century. Among the noteworthy theological conclusions reached at 2019 Munas, Nahdlatul Ulama declared that there is no legal category known as “infidel” (*kafir*) within a modern nation state, and prohibited use of the term *kafir* to describe one’s fellow citizens; affirmed the legitimacy of the nation state and laws created through democratic political processes; committed Muslims to strive for peace as a religious obligation; and provided a detailed framework for bringing Islamic orthodoxy into alignment with 21st century norms.

Father Markus Solo Kewuta—an Indonesian Catholic from the island of Flores and the personal representative of Cardinal-elect Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, President of the Council—welcomed Mr. Staquf, his delegation and the findings of the 2019 Munas:

“The Vatican has a long history of close relations with Nahdlatul Ulama and we recognize the NU’s profoundly spiritual understanding of religion. [Gus Dur](#) [H. E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, who served as Chairman of the NU Executive Board from 1984 – 1999] used to stroll in and out of the Vatican [like a second home], but no senior NU leader has been here since Gus Dur. We deeply appreciate your having taken the initiative to visit us, and welcome the opportunity to renew, with Ustadz [Mr.] Staquf, the close relationship the Catholic Church enjoyed with Nahdlatul Ulama during the Chairmanship of Abdurrahman Wahid.

“NU and Banser [the NU/Ansor militia, which is committed to a principled [defense of religious minorities](#)] are sincere friends of the Catholic Church, and it is a great blessing that the two major religions in Indonesia [Islam and Christianity] are working together. We are grateful for NU’s decision to eliminate the category of infidel [from Islamic law], and will carefully study the very important findings of the 2019 National Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Scholars, which you have so graciously conveyed to us.”

Monseigneur Indunil Janakarathne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, emphasized the need to enliven the spirit of human fraternity, in order to counter the innate human tendency to embrace an atavistic tribal identity:

“We must all choose whether to promote human fraternity, or tribalism. ‘Survival of the fittest’ has shaped our biological heritage, and encourages tribalism as a mechanism to ensure individual and group survival. That is natural, but can also lead to destructive consequences, for every human being has two aspects: good and evil.

Fear and ignorance are the bane of humanity. In the past, we [the Roman Catholic Church] made mistakes in how we treated people of other religions.... We established the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue to implement the findings of *Nostra aetate*, drawing upon the fact that in addition to an evil tendency, we also have an innate tendency to view other human beings as our brothers and sisters, because God created us in his image.”

On the morning of September 25, members of the Indonesian delegation attended a general audience with Pope Francis, and subsequently met and spoke with him personally. In addition to discussing the foundational texts of the Humanitarian Islam movement with Mr. Staquf, the Pope took a special interest in the leadership of Gerakan Pemuda Ansor—the NU’s 5-million-member young adults movement—who presented him with the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* and an elaborate batik painting by a master Javanese artist.

Following their audience with Pope Francis, members of the Indonesian delegation were taken on a guided tour of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) by its Director, Father Diego Sarrio Cucarella, and other senior faculty members. Established in 1926, PISAI is a study and research center whose teaching and scientific activities provide the necessary preparation for an informed theological dialogue with Muslims. Several prominent figures in the current Vatican hierarchy are alumni of the Institute, including Cardinal-elect Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot of PCID.

PISAI engages in close academic collaboration with the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum) and the Jesuit Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; with Georgetown and Notre Dame in the U.S.; and with the Australian Catholic University. Among other subjects discussed between Nahdlatul Ulama, PISAI and PCID figures was NU/Ansor

participation in the Vatican's Global Education Alliance, to be launched in May of 2020; and the establishment of systematic, ongoing collaboration between NU-affiliated institutions and a network of Roman Catholic Universities, with PISAI facilitating their interaction.

Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staquf meets Pope Francis, calls for Islam that sees no 'infidels'

VATICAN CITY, September 27, 2019 / 01:03 pm (Catholic News Agency). The leader of the largest independent Muslim organization in the world met Pope Francis this week to present his vision for a more peaceful future and greater human fraternity.

Sheikh Yahya Cholil Staquf leads the 50 million member Nahdlatul Ulama movement, which calls for a reformed "humanitarian Islam" and has developed a theological framework for Islam that rejects the concepts of caliphate, Sharia law, and "kafir" (infidels).

The Indonesian Sunni leader told CNA that he was "thrilled and excited" when Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb signed in February the Abu Dhabi declaration on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," because it expresses the vision of "compassionate Islam" his organization has advocated for decades.

The sheikh has specific recommendations for concrete steps to achieve the pope's aspirations of peace and human fraternity. He came to Rome to share them with the pope.

Staquf said that [the] Abu Dhabi declaration requires "decisive follow-up" with actions, not just words.

Just weeks after the Abu Dhabi declaration, Nahdlatul Ulama hosted a conference in Indonesia with over 20,000 Muslim scholars in attendance. At this conference, Muslim clerics and scholars issued an "ijtihad" stating their theological reasoning for prohibiting the term "kafir," meaning "infidel," to describe one's fellow citizens.

Read the full article [here](#).

Indonesia's largest newspaper, *Kompas*, published three separate articles covering different aspects of Mr. Staquf's intensive meetings with the Vatican. In one—headlined "Kyai Haji Yahya Staquf Conveys President Jokowi's and the People of Indonesia's Warm Greetings to Pope Francis"—senior journalist Mohammad Bakir reported that Mr. Staquf invited the Pope to visit Indonesia and participate in a high-level summit of religious and political leaders.