



International Religious Freedom Summit

Nahdlatul Ulama leader on “The Rise of Religious Nationalism”:

**“We need to address obsolete values within our own traditions,
which prevent peaceful coexistence”**

WASHINGTON, DC, July 15, 2021: Nahdlatul Ulama General Secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf delivered a keynote address to nearly 1,000 civil society and government leaders at the 2021 International Religious Freedom Summit, during a five day visit to the United States. His topic was the complex and often controversial subject of religious nationalism.

Mr. Staquf is co-founder of the global Humanitarian Islam movement and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, which seek “to prevent the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; promote solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, 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.”

Mr. Staquf’s DC agenda included both public and private discussions with Members of Congress, State Department officials, senior statesmen, representatives of foreign governments and religious leaders, as well as a [book launch](#) and signing of [The Nation’s Mosque Statement](#). This *Statement* cemented an alliance with African American members of the Imam W. Deen Mohammed Community, and the 600-million-member World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), to promote shared civilizational values amidst widespread polarization in the United States and weakening of the post-WWII rules-based international order.

The International Religious Freedom Summit was co-chaired by Republican Samuel D. Brownback, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, and Democrat Katrina Lantos Swett, former Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

A bipartisan array of current and former U.S. government officials addressed the IRF Summit. “The U.S. is committed to advance human rights,” stated U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, “and religious freedom is a vital component of our diplomacy.”

Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, added that “[This] summit demonstrates our ironclad commitment to international religious freedom, which transcends party and politics.”

“The fight for international religious freedom is not just a reflection of who we are as Americans, but of strategic national interest to the United States and a key foreign policy objective,” stated Samantha Power, Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development. “The Biden-Harris administration is dedicated to its protection and advancement, at home and around the world.”

In his keynote [address](#) to the IRF Summit — titled “The Rise of Religious Nationalism” — Mr. Staquf discussed the pressing need for religious, cultural and political leaders to wisely manage the inevitable struggle between competing values, as globalization brings highly diverse peoples, cultures and traditions into ever closer contact.

Specifically, Mr. Staquf described the need to identify and observe those universal values that a majority of the world’s inhabitants already acknowledge, such as the virtues of honesty, compassion and justice. He then spoke about the importance of developing a global consensus regarding shared values that the world’s diverse cultures will need to embrace, if they are to co-exist peacefully.

In this context, Mr. Staquf pointed out, it is also necessary to acknowledge that many traditional communities continue to embrace certain values that may prevent peaceful coexistence with others.

In this regard, the Nahdlatul Ulama General Secretary noted several actions that his organization has taken to address problematic values among its own faith community. As [Christianity Today](#) reported, “In 2019, a gathering of thousands of NU scholars abolished the religious category of kafir—‘infidel,’ or ‘non-Muslim’—replacing it with the concept of citizenship in a modern nation-state. The fatwa built upon their 2018 Nusantara Manifesto, criticizing the imposition of sharia law, and their 2016 Jakarta Declaration, decrying extremism and its alleged Islamic justifications.”

In an article titled “Christian and Muslim Leaders Agree on Legitimacy of Evangelism,” [Christianity Today](#) also reported: “‘Evangelicals very much aspire to proselytism, and so does Islam. So naturally there will be competition,’ said NU secretary general Yahya Cholil Staquf. ‘But we need to have this competition conducted in a peaceful and harmonious environment.’”

Geopolitical observers as distant as [Europe](#), the [Middle East](#) and [Asia](#) noted the ramifications of Mr. Staquf’s visit to the United States and Humanitarian Islam’s burgeoning alliance with African American Muslims and the WEA.

On the morning of Friday, July 16, the United States–Indonesia Society held an “Exclusive Discussion on Indonesia’s ‘Humanitarian Islam’ and the Nahdlatul Ulama’s Geopolitical Engagement,” which provided U.S. government and civil society leaders an opportunity to meet and speak personally with Mr. Staquf. USINDO’s President, Ambassador David Merrill, hosted the event, which was moderated by Dr. Timothy S. Shah, Senior Fellow at the University of Dallas and Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Center for Shared Civilizational Values.