



Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama

**Historic speech, published in English for the first time,
offers a stark reminder to the West**

**“Social unity is the highest virtue
and most powerful instrument for promoting the common good”**

“Division has been the cause of weakness, defeat and failure throughout the ages”

WASHINGTON, DC, August 9, 2021: The world’s largest Muslim organization, Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has made a century-old speech by one of its founders, KH. Hasyim Asy’ari, available for the first time in English. The publication of this speech — titled *Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama* — is part of a larger effort by the 90-million-member NU to promote shared civilizational values and discourage the political weaponization of identity.

The speech, which was delivered at the inaugural meeting of Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926, warns that social divisiveness “is the root of destruction and bankruptcy, the source of collapse and ruination, and the agent of humiliation and chaos.” Nearly a century after its delivery, this address, which articulates the ethical and theological framework embraced by the world’s largest Muslim organization, remains the foundational document of Nahdlatul Ulama.

Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama appears in a book titled [God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations for the 21st Century](#). An anthology of writings by preeminent Muslim and Christian scholars affiliated with the Humanitarian Islam movement and the World Evangelical Alliance, the book was launched on July 13, 2021 at a religious summit hosted by Masjid Muhammad, known as “The Nation’s Mosque.” Located in the historic Shaw district, less than two miles from the White House, Masjid Muhammad is the first mosque in the United States built by descendants of enslaved African Americans.

In a speech delivered on that occasion, Imam Talib Shareef of The Nation’s Mosque observed that all human beings share a common identity derived from their Creator. “From that [single, shared] identity came the many beautiful, wonderful, diverse expressions of human life, which have contributed to the beauty and strength of our nations and of our world... Humanitarian Islam is focusing upon that [shared] human identity,” which fosters love, compassion and a strong sense of unity with others.

Three days later, in a discussion with former U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo broadcast on July 16, 2021 by the Hudson Institute, NU General Secretary KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf warned that identity-based conflict in the U.S. poses a significant threat to international peace and security:

“Whatever happens with America will affect the entire global situation. So, let me just straightforwardly say that we need a strong and coherent America. We cannot

afford for America to be divided. The whole world cannot afford for America to be broken because of all this identity conflict.”

The following text is drawn from the central portion of Kyai Hasyim Asy’ari’s address, while omitting extensive quotations from the Qur’an and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), with which Kyai Hasyim Asy’ari opened and concluded his speech. We believe that *Mukaddimah Qanun Asasi* remains as relevant today as when it was first delivered. For the past century, Nahdlatul Ulama has consolidated and preserved traditional Islam within Indonesia, in the face of repeated threats from transnational Islamist movements and their ideology, originating in the Middle East.

As Nahdlatul Ulama approaches its centenary, NU spiritual leaders look to this document as a source of inspiration and guidance in their efforts to project strategic influence worldwide. For its message remains relevant not only to Indonesians, but also to the people of North America and Europe, where political divisions threaten to undo the unique achievements of Western civilization, which helped give birth to a rules-based international order founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama *(Mukaddimah Qanun Asasi)*

Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy’ari

A single nation is like a single body, and its people are like its limbs. Each member has an appropriate task and role, the performance of which the body cannot neglect.

As is universally acknowledged, human beings are inherently social creatures, mingling with others; for no one can fulfill his or her every need by acting alone. Willing or not, every person must interact socially, interaction that should ideally contribute to the well-being of all other members of society while preserving them from danger. The unity of human hearts, and minds, as people help one other achieve a common goal, is the most important source of human happiness and the strongest factor inducing human beings to love one another.

Because of this principle, many nations have become prosperous. Slaves have become rulers, fostering widespread development. Nations have become advanced; the rule of law enforced; transportation networks constructed, enabling economic and cultural exchange to flourish. Countless other benefits arise from social unity, for social unity is the highest virtue and most powerful instrument for promoting the common good...

The above affirms the words of the poet who rightly said:

*“Gather together my children if
The moment of crisis strikes
Do not become scattered and alone
Cups are averse to breaking when together
When scattered
One-by-one they shatter”*

Sayyidina Ali (ra.) [601 – 661 CE] said: “God gives nothing good to those who are divided, either in the past or in the future.”

The reason for this is that a people whose hearts are divided are ruled by their passions, leaving no place for the common good. Instead of being a unified nation, they are merely individuals gathered together in the physical sense: though one might think that they are unified, their hearts are, in reality, disunited and discordant.

They have become — as some say — like goats scattered in an open field, surrounded by ravenous beasts. If the goats are well for a time, this is merely because predators have yet to reach them but, one day, these predators will surely arrive. It may be that the ravenous beasts fight among themselves and subdue one another, such that the victors become robbers and the losers thieves. Even so, the goats will fall prey to both the robbers and the thieves.

Division has been the cause of weakness, defeat and failure throughout the ages. It is the root of destruction and bankruptcy, the source of collapse and ruination, and the agent of humiliation and chaos.

How many large families have lived — at first — in prosperity and comfort in many houses that made them feel at ease until, one day, the scorpion of divisiveness crawled among them, its creeping poison corrupting their hearts as the devil played his part against them? In the end, the family becomes a chaotic mess, and their houses collapse upon them.

The Prophet’s Companion Ali (ra.) eloquently stated: “The cause of Truth can become weak due to strife and internal division; while evil may grow strong through cohesion and unity of purpose.”

In short, whoever looks into the mirror of history and turns its many pages about diverse nations and the ebb and flow of time — and sees what happened to these nations up until the point of their extinction — will know that the glory which once enveloped them was nothing other than a blessing attributable to their unity of ideals, thoughts and purpose. This unity was the decisive factor that elevated their dignity and ensured their sovereignty: the impregnable fortress that safeguarded their strength and ensured the preservation of their teachings.

A united people’s enemies can do nothing to harm them; rather, they bow their heads in respect for that people’s power and dignity. A united people are able to brilliantly accomplish their many goals.

This is the destiny of a people upon which God’s sun never sets; rather, the rays of His Light always shine upon them and not upon their enemies.

O *ulama* and God-conscious [enlightened] leaders of the Sunni community, who follow the four schools of jurisprudence: you have all drawn from the well of knowledge of those who came before you; and those who came before you drew knowledge from those who came before them, in an unbroken chain of transmission (*sanad*) that extends [from the Prophet Mohammad saw.] to each of you today. And each of you is continually learning from whoever may impart unto you the wisdom of your religion.

Thus, you are the gatekeepers and the guardians of this precious knowledge. Do not enter a house except through its front door. Whoever enters through a different means will be called a thief.

For there is a class of people [Wahhabis] who fall into the depths of strife (*fitnah*), choosing to embrace innovation rather than the Prophet's teachings (saw.), while the majority of believers are simply stunned into silence. And so the heretics and thieves [including Wahhabis] run rampant. They pervert the truth in order to suit themselves, enjoining evil as if it were good and forbidding good as if it were evil. They call others to follow their interpretation of God's book, even though their actions are not in the least bit guided by the teachings of the Qur'an.

They did not stop at this, but rather, founded organizations to systematically propagate their deviant teachings and amplify their manifest error. The poor flocked to these assemblies and did not hear the words of the Prophet (saw.):

فَانظُرُوا عَمَّنْ تَأْخُذُونَ بَيْنَكُمْ

“So look carefully at those from whom you take your religion...” (a reliable Hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad and Imam al-Hakim). “Indeed, as the day of Apocalypse approaches, many liars will appear. Do not weep for religion if it is in the hands of those who know the Truth (*ulama*). Rather, weep for this religion (Islam) if it falls into the hands of ignorant charlatans.”

Umar bin Khattab (ra.) [584 – 644 CE] was entirely correct when he said: “The religion of Islam disintegrates in the hands of hypocrites who argue skillfully manipulating the Qur'an.”

All of you are upright souls capable of dispelling the falsehoods of those who are expert at propagating evil; the religious interpretation of fools; and the debauchery of those who exceed all bounds; by employing the proofs (*hujjah*) that have been provided to us by God, Lord of the universe, who demonstrates the proof of His Truth through the tongue of whomever He wills.

And all of you are among the community described by the saying of the Prophet (saw.): “There is a group of my people who never waver; who always stand firmly upon the truth; and who always obtain victory. They cannot be harmed by their enemies before the coming of God's Day of Judgement.”

Come! All of you, and all your followers among the poor and the wealthy, the weak and the strong. Flock to this blessed community (*jam'iyyah*) which is called: “*Jam'iyyah Nahdlatul Ulama*.”

Enter [this community] with a spirit overflowing with love, compassion, harmony and unity of purpose. Enter with a bond that unites us, body and soul. This is an upright community (*jam'iyyah*): peaceful, whose nature is to improve character and foster politeness towards others. It tastes sweet in the mouths of those who are devoted to goodness and obstructs the throats of the wicked, choking those [who may be skilled at reciting the Qur'an, but do not apprehend its inner meaning in their hearts]. In this regard, all of you should seek to remind one another to work harmoniously together, employing means that are satisfying and appeal to the heart, along with irrefutable proofs [regarding one's convictions]. Clearly convey what God

has commanded you, so that religious fabrications are purged from all people in every direction.

For the Prophet (saw.) said: “Whenever religious fabrications and strife appear, and my companions are reviled, beseech those who know the Truth (*ulama*) to reveal their knowledge. Whoever fails to do this shall be cursed by God, the Angels and all humanity.” (Hadith narrated by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī [1002 – 1071 CE] in *al-Jāmi‘*.)

God (swt.) has declared:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى

(Qur’an 5:2) “And assist one another in fostering virtue and developing full awareness of God.”

Translated by Thomas G. Dinham and C. Holland Taylor