



9/11: A 20-Year Retrospective

Regent University, founded by televangelist Pat Robertson, welcomes Indonesian Muslim leader on the eve of 9/11 anniversary

U.S. evangelicals endorse General Secretary of the world's largest Islamic organization

Praised as “a leading Muslim voice” who seeks “to reform obsolete tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that enjoin religious hatred, supremacy and violence”

VIRGINIA BEACH, Virginia, September 9, 2021: Regent University — which, together with the Christian Broadcasting Network, may be said to represent “the beating heart of evangelical Christianity in the U.S.” — invited Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the world's largest Muslim organization, to deliver a keynote address at Regent's commemoration of the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

The invitation may signal a major shift in evangelical attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, inspired by Nahdlatul Ulama's willingness to [acknowledge](#) and [address](#) certain tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that underlie and animate Islamist extremism worldwide. [These tenets](#) are often employed by groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram to condemn those they regard as infidels, thereby legitimizing the widespread [persecution](#) of Christians in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

Over the past year, the [World Evangelical Alliance](#), then-U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. [Pompeo](#), and former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel [Brownback](#) have endorsed Mr. Staquf and the Humanitarian Islam movement he leads.

Nahdlatul Ulama is renowned in Indonesia, and increasingly in evangelical circles worldwide, for defending Christian churches from attack by radical Muslims. As Mr. Staquf told evangelicals watching the commemoration of 9/11:

Like the United States, Indonesia has suffered from the horrors of terrorism. In 2002, just over a year after the 9/11 attacks, the first Bali bombing killed over 200 people — devastating the island's tourist economy and sending thousands of Indonesians back to their rice fields and out to sea, to feed their hungry families. Terrorists have also attacked churches, hotels, foreign emissaries and even our national mosque. My organization has a 5-million-member militia, called Banser, whose members we send to defend churches every Christmas and Easter.

On the evening of December 24th, 2000, a 25-year-old member of Banser, named Riyanto, discovered a suspicious bag on a pew in Ebenezer Church in Mojokerto, East Java. He grabbed the bag, rushed outside and was killed when a bomb exploded in his arms. To us in Nahdlatul Ulama, Riyanto is a martyr, and we honor his memory every Christmas Eve alongside millions of our Indonesian Christian brothers and sisters.

Regent University was founded in 1977 by U.S. televangelist Pat Robertson and is closely associated with the Christian Broadcasting Network, which describes itself as “a global ministry committed to preparing the nations of the world for the coming of Jesus Christ.”

Mr. Staquf delivered the final keynote address in a day-long program that featured a number of panels and prominent speakers including former NYC Police Commissioner on 9/11, Mr. Bernie Kerik; former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft; former U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark; former Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Pete Hoekstra; and former U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo.

The day-long event was hosted by Michele Bachmann, Dean of Regent University’s Robertson School of Government. A former Member of Congress from Minnesota’s 6th district, Michele Bachmann is perhaps best known for having sent a series of letters to oversight agencies at five federal departments in 2012, citing “serious security concerns” about what Bachmann called a “deep penetration in the halls of our United States government” by the Muslim Brotherhood. Representative Bachmann was widely criticized by members of the Democrat and Republican political establishment for raising this issue.

In 2009, leaders of Indonesia’s largest Muslim organizations — Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah — published [*The Illusion of an Islamic State*](#), which documented the Muslim Brotherhood’s long-term, systematic penetration of state and civil society institutions across Indonesia. As the book notes: “The Nahdlatul Ulama’s central board firmly proclaimed that transnational Islamist movements such as al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood (represented in Indonesia by the PKS) and Hizb ut-Tahrir are dangerous political movements which threaten Sunni teachings and have the potential to destroy the nation.”

In his keynote address at Regent University, Mr. Staquf described how and why Indonesian Islam differs from more politicized expressions of the faith characteristic of the Middle East. The political weaponization of Islam has long dominated the Muslim world, and is rooted in a [mosque–state alliance](#) that has been perpetuated by Muslim autocrats for over a thousand years.

Nahdlatul Ulama, observed Mr. Staquf, was founded to safeguard, preserve and strengthen the great Islamic civilization that arose on the Indonesian Archipelago — rooted in the principle of *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) — and prevent its subversion by transnational Islamist movements that adhere to a harsh, repressive and often violent understanding of Islam that is widespread in the Middle East.

As may be seen in the following excerpts from his speech, the NU General Secretary explained that:

Nahdlatul Ulama was founded in 1926 in response to two world-historic events. The first was the conquest of the most holy cities in Islam — Mecca and Medina — by Abdulaziz Ibn Saud and his Wahhabi army, whose ideology resembled that of ISIS, al-Qaeda and those who attack Christian churches in Indonesia.

The second event was the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate, by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1924. For nearly 600 years, the Ottoman Empire — an Islamic caliphate — had politically dominated much of the Islamic world and shaped its understanding of Islamic orthodoxy. Seemingly overnight, this unifying force vanished, leaving a political, theological and civilizational vacuum in its wake. Nahdlatul Ulama’s founders recognized that this seismic event heralded a profound change within the international order, which would affect the lives of Muslims worldwide.

Prior to World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate, the world was largely dominated by empires. Unlike America and Indonesia today, these empires generally had official state religions. The full enjoyment of legal privileges by the subjects of these empires was usually predicated upon their adopting the state’s religious identity. For example, the Ottoman Empire — and other Islamic caliphates before it — systematically discriminated against non-Muslims by enforcing a wide range of orthodox Islamic tenets that govern the treatment of conquered infidels, or “*dhimmi*.”

Like Christianity — whose institutionalized teachings and practices have varied widely over the course of its 2,000 year history — Islam is a diverse and complex religion. One element thereof is classical Islamic law, known as *fiqh*, which addresses how a Muslim state should be governed and conduct international affairs. This classical Islamic jurisprudence evolved gradually over the course of centuries, within the context of a bygone “age of empires,” which witnessed over 1,200 years of violent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims — including many jihads and crusades.

In the post-World War II era of nation states, equal citizenship, human rights and religious freedom, some tenets of classical Islamic orthodoxy are no longer relevant to Muslims’ daily lives. A few examples of such tenets are norms that encourage enmity towards non-Muslims; require the establishment of a universal Islamic state, or caliphate; and reject laws derived from modern political processes.

**“Muslim extremists dream of re-establishing a global caliphate”
and re-igniting “the great religious conflicts of the past”**

For 1200 years prior to the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate, the majority of the world’s Muslims lived under political systems that sought to embody the orthodox ideal of a unified Muslim community, led by a pious Muslim ruler who adhered to the basic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy and led his community in a state of permanent warfare with neighboring non-Muslims. These tenets of classical Islamic jurisprudence are still taught by most orthodox Sunni and Shi’ite institutions as authoritative and correct — and thus continue to shape what may be described as the “prevailing Muslim mindset” worldwide.

One of the few regions of the Muslim world where these orthodox legal teachings were not historically dominant is in the Malay Archipelago, the territory of modern day Indonesia, which we call *Nusantara*...

The sudden dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate and emergence of a new international order triggered profound anxiety, confusion and chaos throughout the Islamic world. Many Muslims joined Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Jamaat-e-Islami; many, in the Middle East, embraced Arab nationalism; while others turned to Communism. Even in

Indonesia there was profound opposition to the establishment of a multi-religious and pluralistic nation state. From 1949 to 1962, we waged a bitter struggle to defeat an armed insurrection called the Darul Islam, or Islamic State, movement. During the 1950s and 60s, the third largest Communist party in the world was that of Indonesia. Following a Communist coup attempt in 1965, Nahdlatul Ulama joined other Indonesian nationalists to defeat those who wanted our country to become part of the Communist bloc.

Unlike many across the Muslim world, NU leaders did not insist upon a return to the obsolete construct of an Islamic caliphate. Instead, they chose to establish Indonesia as a nation state, which they acknowledged as the fundamental building block of a new, rules-based international order that promised to foster harmonious relations between different civilizations and to avoid the great religious conflicts of the past.

“We established the Center for Shared Civilizational Values so that Muslims and non-Muslims alike can join to reject any and all forms of tyranny, and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order”

Unfortunately, many Muslims — especially in the Middle East — have come to view the nation state as a colonial imposition. Muslim extremists dream of re-establishing a global caliphate. The devastating events of 9/11, the Bali bombings and the constant drumbeat of attacks perpetrated by Islamist terrorists worldwide for the past two decades have convinced us that Indonesia’s traditionally pluralistic and tolerant understanding and practice of Islam cannot survive if we neglect to address developments in the Muslim world at large....

These considerations explain why, in February of 2019 — at a gathering of over 20,000 NU religious scholars — Nahdlatul Ulama adopted an official ruling that abolishes the legal category of infidel within Islamic law; theologially legitimizes the nation state and laws derived from modern political processes; and establishes a religious obligation for Muslims to foster peace rather than wage war on behalf of our co-religionists, whenever conflict erupts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations anywhere in the world.

But this struggle cannot be won by Muslims alone. That is why we established the Center for Shared Civilizational Values: so that Muslims and non-Muslims alike can join to reject any and all forms of tyranny, 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.

We are pleased that the World Evangelical Alliance, which represents 600 million Protestants in 140 nations, is working hand-in-hand with us to accomplish these objectives.

The sovereign nation state is the indispensable cornerstone of an emerging global civilization, and the nation state requires a strong foundation of religious values, culture and tradition. In Indonesia, our local Islamic traditions, epitomized by NU, serve as the fundamental pillar of support for our nation state. These traditions are clearly threatened by transnational movements such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, which seek to eradicate our cultural identity and to establish an Islamic caliphate.

“If local cultures and traditions are to survive amid the rapidly accelerating globalization of the 21st century, we must engage with each other and adapt to new realities”

I believe that your situation, in America, has many parallels to ours in Indonesia. Our national motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or Unity Amid Diversity. I am aware that it was primarily Protestants who established the United States and its Constitution. Although imperfect, your ancestors' vision helped to inspire a global movement that ultimately led to the abolition of slavery worldwide and the establishment of a rules-based international order, founded upon the aspiration to ensure respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

We hope that all of you, as Americans, will remain proud of that which is noble within your history and traditions, while joining people of good will of every faith and nation in embracing change that is for the betterment of humanity at large.

But if local cultures and traditions — like those of Indonesia and the United States of America — are to survive amid the rapidly accelerating globalization of the 21st century, we must engage with each other and adapt to new realities. That is why we are working hand-in-hand with the world's largest political network, Centrist Democrat International, which was previously known as Christian Democrat International. It is also why we have established a Joint Working Group with the World Evangelical Alliance.

As stated in a book we recently published with the WEA, titled *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century*:

Leaders
of the World Evangelical Alliance
and the Humanitarian Islam Movement
cordially invite you
to join in building a global alliance
founded upon shared civilizational values.

This alliance seeks to prevent the political
weaponization of identity;
curtail the spread of communal hatred;
promote solidarity and respect among the diverse
people, 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.

Thank you for your invitation to speak on this solemn occasion. May we never forget those who have lost their lives to terrorism. And may we honor their memory by striving to bequeath to our children and grandchildren a more peaceful world in which Muslims and Christians may live side by side, respecting each other's God-given freedom of conscience.

[View](#) Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf's keynote address.

Click to read a [transcript](#) of Mr. Staquf's complete remarks at Regent University.

[Click](#) to view the Regent University webpage that hosts videos of the entire 9/11 commemorative event.