



Humanitarian Islam Co-founder Elected General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama

Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf:

“NU was founded to develop a new civilizational framework, following the collapse of the old civilizational construct after WWI and the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate.”

Nahdlatul Ulama launches a movement to “revive Gus Dur’s humanitarian vision” and “create a better, more noble future for human civilization as a whole”

BANDAR LAMPUNG, Indonesia: On December 24, 2021 Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf was elected General Chairman of the world’s largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, with a mandate to promote Humanitarian Islam on the global stage — 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.

In a fiercely contested election whose complex maneuvering dominated Indonesian media coverage for weeks prior to NU’s 34th National Congress — held from December 22 – 24, 2021 in Lampung province on the island of Sumatra — Mr. Staquf received 337 votes to 210 votes cast in favor of the incumbent Dr. KH. Said Aqil Siradj, who served two terms as General Chairman of the NU Executive Board from 2010 – 2021.

In a [speech](#) delivered shortly after his election, Mr. Staquf outlined [two primary agendas](#) he will pursue as Chairman of the 90-million-member organization: “The first is to develop self-sufficiency and autonomy for all Indonesian citizens, and the second is to heighten Nahdlatul Ulama’s role in the struggle to foster world peace.”

Regarding efforts to promote world peace, Nahdlatul Ulama has already proven successful in conducting [a number of initiatives](#) that are increasingly [acknowledged](#), and [valued](#), by [key elements](#) of the global community.

What needs to be done now is to accelerate our international engagement and develop synergy with initiatives conducted by the Indonesian government. For if we examine the international landscape and current geopolitical dynamics, it is clear that no single nation is better positioned to contribute to world peace than the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).

Attended by the heads of 548 provincial, regional and international chapters and autonomous bodies within Nahdlatul Ulama (est. 1926), the quinquennial National Congress adopted a wide-ranging and systematic work plan for the coming five-year period (2021 – 2026). As reported by Indonesian media, decisions taken at the National Congress will [greatly influence](#) the future of Nahdlatul Ulama:

NU’s centenary work plan identifies four priority programs for the next five years, namely: [accelerating the transformation of “the NU understanding of Sunni Islam”](#); developing the quality of NU’s human resources; achieving economic self-sufficiency

for all Indonesian citizens; and strengthening institutional organizations and networks...

“What was produced at the 34th NU Congress could provide a legacy as well as a means to navigate its second century, helping administrators at every level of Nahdlatul Ulama and its followers develop their capacity to act, in various humanitarian roles, in a concerted effort to realize world peace as a manifestation of Islam *rahmatan lil’ alamin* (universal love and compassion),” said Radian Jadid, an NU leader from East Java.

Mr. Staquf, the newly-elected Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, is the scion of a highly respected NU family. His great-grandfather, KH. Cholil Harun (1867 – 1939), co-founded Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926. His grandfather, KH. Bisri Mustofa (1915 – 1977), has been described as the most prolific Javanese Muslim author of his era. Mr. Staquf’s father, KH. Muhammad Cholil Bisri (1942 – 2004), co-founded Indonesia’s largest Islamic political party, PKB, in 1998; and his paternal uncle, [KH. Mustofa Bisri](#) (1944 –), is the former Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama’s Supreme Council and its preeminent spiritual leader.

A disciple of long-time NU Chairman and Indonesian president [H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid](#) (“Gus Dur”), Mr. Staquf seeks to revive the humanitarian spirit of Gus Dur and place it at the center of Nahdlatul Ulama’s agenda. As Mr. Staquf told Indonesian media outlets following his election:

In the midst of so many problems, few public figures appear with the intelligence to offer genuine solutions like Gus Dur. Amidst the pitch-dark clouds of immorality that envelop the world, confusing humanity and giving rise to social chaos, there are also few who speak with complete honesty like Gus Dur...

Let us invite all human beings to embrace the values that Gus Dur fought for, the movement that Gus Dur once fought for: universal human values and the struggle to create a better, more noble future for human civilization as a whole. Let us build a movement to revive Gus Dur.

For the past decade, Mr. Staquf and other close friends and associates of President Wahid have been working to [realize his vision](#) on a global scale. In 2014 Mr. Staquf, together with KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, [C. Holland Taylor](#) and F. Borden Hanes, Jr., established [Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da’wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin](#) (Home of Divine Grace for Revealing and Nurturing Islam as a Blessing for All Creation) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to help coordinate the expansion of NU operations worldwide.

In 2016 Mr. Staquf co-authored the [International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders \(ISOMIL\) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration](#) and the [Global Unity Forum Declaration](#), which called for “qualified ulama (Muslim religious scholars) to carefully examine and address those elements of *fiqh* [classical Islamic law] that encourage segregation, discrimination and/or violence towards anyone perceived to be ‘non-Muslim.’”

In 2017 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor — NU’s 5-million member young adults movement — and Bayt ar-Rahmah launched the global [Humanitarian Islam movement](#) and issued the [Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam](#).

In 2018 Mr. Staqf and his colleagues arranged for Indonesia’s largest Islamic political party, the NU-based PKB, to join the world’s largest political network, Centrist Democrat International (CDI), which has endorsed Humanitarian Islam and its strategic agenda in five separate resolutions unanimously adopted by the CDI Executive Committee from 2019 – 2021.

In February of 2019, 20,000 Muslim scholars gathered in Banjar, West Java, at the [2019 National Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Scholars](#), which abolished the legal category of *kafir* (infidel) within Islamic law; ruled that Muslims are not obliged to establish a global caliphate; and acknowledged the theological legitimacy of laws derived from modern political processes.

In 2020 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah launched the Movement for Shared Civilizational Values at an event in Jakarta, Indonesia, titled “Nurturing the Shared Civilizational Values of Islam Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin, the Republic of Indonesia and the United States of America.” In [remarks](#) delivered at this event, US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo stated:

Indonesia has an incredible reach and potential as a force for good in the region and indeed throughout the entire world... Your very own Gus Dur helped to lead Indonesia’s transition to democracy. His profoundly humane vision and teachings inspired the birth of the Humanitarian Islam movement. His legacy lives on today in the current generation of leaders who, in 2014, launched the Islam Nusantara campaign to [repudiate](#) ISIS’ hateful and violent brand of Islam. And it lives on in the Movement for Shared Civilizational Values as well.

In 2021 Mr. Staqf co-founded the [Center for Shared Civilizational Values](#), to serve as an institutional platform through which people of every faith and nation may cooperate to identify and strengthen values that are essential to the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, and global civilization, in the 21st century.

Backed by Nahdlatul Ulama spiritual leaders and a decisive majority of NU provincial chapters throughout the vast Indonesian Archipelago, Mr. Staqf’s election as General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board constitutes a broad-based endorsement of his strategy and consistent efforts to promote Islam as a source of *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) worldwide.

A wide range of Muslim and non-Muslim figures responded to Mr. Staqf’s election with enthusiasm. Talib Shareef, Imam of The Nation’s Mosque in Washington, DC and a prominent figure within the African-American Muslim community, wrote:

Alhamdulillah! The complete perfect praise and thanks to Allah... This important election gives wind beneath the wings of the [Nusantara Statement](#) and [The Nation’s Mosque Statement](#), and continues the trajectory of a progressive moderate path of Islam

in the destiny of Indonesia on the world stage. Please convey our regards to all and we plan to share this in our *Muslim Journal* and other mediums across our community.

Imam Yahya Pallavicini — head of the [Islamic Religious Community of Italy](#) (COREIS) and ambassador of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) for dialogue among civilizations — wrote: “Congratulations to our chairman Pak Yahya. We prayed for his success during our Friday *salat al-jama’ah* (congregational prayer).”

Rabbi David Saperstein — long-time Director of the Union for Reform Judaism’s Religious Action Center and former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom — wrote: “Congratulations! Much success in pursuing your vision of interfaith understanding, respect and cooperation.”

Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, Secretary General and CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance, wrote a [letter](#) to Mr. Staquf in which he said: “It was a joyful and unexpected Christmas gift to me and to the World Evangelical Alliance to learn of your election as General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama on 24 December 2021.”

Representatives of various governments around the world, including the Middle East, also extended their congratulations to Mr. Staquf.

Writing of Mr. Staquf’s election as General Chairman, CNN reported that “what he is trying to accomplish is to shield NU from intervention by political parties and build a firewall between the organization and the ambitions of those who seek political power.”

Indonesia’s leading newspaper, *Kompas*, wrote that “Gus Yahya’s leadership is expected to mobilize a widespread effort to strengthen democracy and tolerance in this country... As the new General Chairman of the NU Executive Board, Yahya hopes to fully consolidate the organization so that NU may become an agent of transformation,” both domestically and internationally.

In a meeting held at the Presidential Palace in Bogor (“Bogor Palace”) on December 29, President Jokowi and the newly-elected Chairman discussed developing greater synergy between Nahdlatul Ulama and the government in promoting the welfare of Indonesia’s citizens and acting upon the world stage.

In an [article](#) titled “Progressive Muslim scholar elected leader of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama,” *The Straits Times* of Singapore noted that “the challenge for the new chairman is to find a way to replicate NU’s success in Indonesia to Muslim societies elsewhere... NU’s concerns are no longer just about Indonesia, but the world. The NU has always promoted the middle way, the moderate path, and the challenge will be how to market this globally.”