



Nahdlatul Ulama and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values

“Striving to ensure that religion in the 21st century functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems”

JAKARTA, Indonesia and WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina, May 20, 2022 — In the midst of rising identity-based conflict world-wide, leaders of Indonesia’s 90-million-member Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have created an organizational vehicle to “identify shared values that may serve as the basis for harmonious coexistence between the diverse people, cultures, nations and religions of the world.”

The North Carolina-based Center for Shared Civilizational Values (CSCV) provides an institutional platform for global cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

CSCV was incorporated in June of 2021 by the former head of the NU Supreme Council, [KH. A. Mustofa Bisri](#); the Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, [KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf](#); and Indonesia’s Minister of Religious Affairs, the [Honorable Yaqut Cholil Qoumas](#), with Americans [C. Holland Taylor](#), [F. Borden Hanes, Jr.](#), and [Dr. Timothy Samuel Shah](#).

On May 20, 2022, Nahdlatul Ulama and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values formalized their relationship at a major NU conference in Jakarta, where the assembled leadership of the grassroots Muslim organization witnessed the signing of an 8-page memorandum of understanding. The MoU outlines the shared civilizational vision and mission of the two organizations, as well as the nature and scope of their cooperation.

“I regard the work of Humanitarian Islam and the Movement for Shared Civilizational Values as one of the most pathbreaking and important developments in world politics and cross-civilizational ethics in our generation.”

~ Dr. Robert Hefner, Professor of Anthropology & International Relations at Boston University and President, American Institute for Indonesian Studies

I seek refuge in God from Satan, the outcast (from His mercy).

Oh you who have attained to faith! Remain fully conscious of God; and let every human being look to what he sends ahead (for the morrow, through his actions); and once again, remain conscious of God, for God is fully aware of all that you do (59:18)

Oh men! Know that we have created all of you out of a single male and a single female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know (and respect) one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is he who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware (49:13)

Addressing the opening session of the two-day NU conference, which was heavily covered by Indonesia's print, broadcast and social media, including its [national wire service](#), Mr. Staquf said:

We know that in the coming years Nahdlatul Ulama will celebrate its one hundredth anniversary [in 2023 according to the Islamic calendar, and 2026 in the Gregorian calendar]. To welcome the centennial, the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board has designed a series of dynamic programs and events. This is to ensure that when Nahdlatul Ulama enters its second century, all NU members, all NU cadres, all levels of NU's leadership, from the Central Board to branch offices at the grassroots level, will have a clear understanding of what Nahdlatul Ulama intends to accomplish, and must accomplish, during its second century.

We have planned a series of events consisting of nine program "clusters," conducted in various fields, including economics, education, health, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), religion and international programs. One of these events is a summit of major religious leaders from throughout the world. God willing, we will hold this conference in advance of the G20 Leaders Summit, which will be hosted by the Government of Indonesia in November of this year.

Now I need to report that we will call this summit of international religious leaders the "R20 Forum," an abbreviation for "Religion 20," because it will be linked to the annual Group of 20, or G20, Summit that is hosted each year by a different member of this group of powerful nations.

In conjunction with the R20 Forum, the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board has formally resolved to cooperate with an international institute that has already been working to support Nahdlatul Ulama's global agenda prior to our engagement with the G20. This international institute, the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, was established in 2021 in North Carolina, in the United States of America, by His Eminence Kyai Haji Ahmad Mustofa Bisri.

This evening we will sign a Memorandum of Understanding between the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board (PBNU) and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values. As is customary, I will sign on behalf of PBNU, and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values will be represented by its Chairman, Kyai Haji Ahmad Mustofa Bisri.

The second international event that, God willing, we will hold in conjunction with the peak of our celebration of Nahdlatul Ulama's centennial next year [according to the Islamic calendar], will be called the "International Conference on Civilizational Fiqh (Islamic Law)." By holding these two international conferences, we intend to address a variety of crises that are engulfing societies throughout the world — crises for which no one has yet identified, and implemented, viable solutions.

God willing, through this ikhtiar (solemn intention or choice), Nahdlatul Ulama will develop an effective means to engage with, and contribute to, the world at large, by forging a path out of these crises, which threaten to overwhelm humanity and civilization itself.

Nahdlatul Ulama's paramount spiritual leader, Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri (above), delivered a keynote address during the opening session of the NU conference, expressing his hopes for Nahdlatul Ulama during its newly inaugurated (2022 – 2027) period of administration, headed by KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf. In his address, Kyai Mustofa said:

NU is like a straight razor. Yet too often, in the past, it has been used to peel onions. A sharp razor, simply used to fill a cooking pot. [NOTE: this may be interpreted as a subtle reference to interference by Indonesian political and economic elites, who wish to obtain the support of Nahdlatul Ulama and its 90 million followers.] There has not been a proper balance between the enormous potential of Nahdlatul Ulama and what it actually accomplishes.

For that reason, whenever people devote themselves to serving Nahdlatul Ulama's mission — that is, to serve not only Nahdlatul Ulama's followers, and not only Indonesian citizens [regardless of their religious faith], but ALL of humanity — I always pray that those who genuinely serve this higher purpose will be endowed with inner and outer strength by God, Who is the Most Holy and the Most High.

May they be shielded from every trial and temptation that would disrupt their service to Nahdlatul Ulama and its noble mission.

Kyai Mustofa went on to tell a story about a visit to Saudi Arabia several decades ago, in the company of former NU Chairman KH. Abdurrahman Wahid and their close mutual friend, KH. Sahal Mahfudz. Called to meet privately with Shaykh Abdulaziz bin Baz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, [Abdurrahman Wahid](#) and Kyai Sahal asked Mustofa Bisri to serve as their spokesman.

Shaykh bin Baz asked us, "How many followers do you have?" I answered 50 million. At the time, the entire population of Saudi Arabia was just 18 million. "Where do you get the money to pay them all?" asked Shaykh bin Baz. And I thought, "Mashallah! (What God has willed to transpire!)" Because I realized that they were paying everyone, as far as the azan (call to prayer) could reach. They were paying all their [Wahhabi] followers, while we in Nahdlatul Ulama work for free....

Following Mustofa Bisri's speech, a formal ceremony was held, during which Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf signed memoranda of understanding with the North Carolina-based Center for Shared Civilizational Values, represented by the Chairman of its Board of Directors, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, and with Indonesia's Ministry for Communication and Information Technology, represented by its Minister, the Honorable Johnny G. Plate.

What follows are excerpts from the 8-page Memorandum of Understanding between Nahdlatul Ulama and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values.

CONSIDERING:

14. That in 2021, Nahdlatul Ulama leaders incorporated the Center for Shared Civilizational Values in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA, to diffuse the collective wisdom and

experience of Nahdlatul Ulama throughout the world and establish a platform for systematic cooperation with non-Muslims, in order to preserve and strengthen a rules-based international order founded upon universal ethics and humanitarian values....

21. That the Center for Shared Civilizational Values works with a group of closely affiliated organizations, including Nahdlatul Ulama; Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, the NU's 5-million-member young adults movement; Bayt ar-Rahmah; LibForAll Foundation; and the Humanitarian Islam movement....
29. That the Center for Shared Civilizational Values has developed an extensive strategy to leverage the "Group of 20" (G20), an annual gathering of the world's most economically powerful nations, to ensure that religion in the 21st century functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems;
30. That in 2022, Nahdlatul Ulama established the G20 Religion Forum ("R20"), in cooperation with the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, in order to mobilize diverse religious, political and economic leaders, to foster a rules-based international order founded upon shared moral and spiritual values.

WHEREFORE THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

1. That the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board ("PBNU") and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values ("CSCV") shall cooperate in the development of a framework for identifying shared values that may serve as the basis for harmonious coexistence between the diverse people, cultures, nations and religions of the world, and in the building of a global movement dedicated to overcoming any and all forms of tyranny;
2. That PBNU and CSCV shall jointly develop and expand this "Movement for Shared Civilizational Values" by attracting and mobilizing people of good will of every faith and nation — including opinion leaders, civil society institutions, and governments throughout the world — who wish to strengthen and support a rules-based international order founded upon universal ethics and humanitarian values, including respect for human dignity, justice, virtue and moral self-governance;
3. That PBNU and CSCV shall join people of good will of every faith and nation in a common effort to abolish the primordial cycle of hatred, tyranny and violence that has plagued humanity since time immemorial;
4. That PBNU and CSCV shall cooperate in developing and implementing a global strategy to block the political weaponization of identity within and between nations, and thereby avert a devastating clash of civilizations;
5. That PBNU and CSCV shall cooperate with people of good will of every faith and nation to establish conceptual "boundary markers" that enable human beings to readily distinguish between benevolent expressions of civilization and barbarism;
6. That benevolent expressions of civilization reflect the noblest aspirations of humanity and contribute to the flourishing of our common home, by promoting solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, cultures, and nations of the world;

7. That barbarism reflects the innate human will to dominate others and may assume a wide variety of forms, ranging from primitive to economically, politically, technologically, and militarily advanced;
8. That PBNU and CSCV will cooperate in fulfilling Nahdlatul Ulama's "civilizational mission," as bequeathed by the *Wali Songo*, the "Nine Saints" who in the 15th and 16th centuries proselytized *Islam Nusantara*, rooted in the principle of *rahmah* (universal love and compassion); as described by Hadratus Shaykh Kyai Haji Hasyim As'yari in *Mukaddimah Qanun Asasi (Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama)*; and as expressed in the lives and vision of NU's founders, including Kyai Haji Wahab Chasbullah;
9. That PBNU and CSCV will cooperate in realizing the civilizational vision of H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, who inspired the birth of the global Humanitarian Islam movement;
10. That PBNU and CSCV will cooperate in fulfilling Indonesia's "constitutional mandate," as described in the Preamble to its 1945 Constitution ("UUD-45");
11. That cooperation between PBNU and CSCV shall be subject to the direct supervision of, and control by, the General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board and the Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values;
12. That PBNU and CSCV shall develop and execute a geopolitical strategy designed to accomplish the objectives of this Memorandum of Understanding;
13. That PBNU and CSCV shall develop and execute programs and initiatives designed to accomplish the objectives of this Memorandum of Understanding;
14. That PBNU and CSCV shall develop and execute these programs and initiatives with appropriate partners and allies, including civil society actors and governments throughout the world;
15. That PBNU and CSCV shall produce and disseminate strategic communications — through a wide variety of media — designed to accomplish the objectives of this Memorandum of Understanding;
16. That PBNU and CSCV shall cooperate to develop and ensure the success of the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and an associated "Council for Global Harmony," with CSCV serving as the Permanent Secretariat for both the R20 and the Council for Global Harmony.

Read the entire [Memorandum of Understanding](#)