



R20 Plenary Session 7: Handover Ceremony

“See you in India!”

“I think R20 has set in motion a tectonic force here in Bali. From Bali it will go to India, from there to Brazil, from there onwards to wherever G20 is held.”

~ Sri Ram Madhav Varanasi

BALI, Indonesia — Formal deliberations at the R20 Summit in Bali concluded with an official handover ceremony on the afternoon of 3 November 2022. KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, Founder and Chairman of the R20, passed the R20 banner to prominent Hindu leaders, who will host the R20 Summit during India’s 2023 presidency of the G20.

Opening this final plenary session, C. Holland Taylor — Deputy Chairman and CEO of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, which serves as the Secretariat of the R20 — described the cultural and spiritual environment that gave birth to the G20 Religion Forum (R20). Mr. Taylor’s remarks have been edited for publication:

It takes courage to speak up. It takes courage to acknowledge and address the weaponization of religion for political purposes, particularly when the religion in question is one’s own. One thing I have always admired about Nahdlatul Ulama is the courage its spiritual leaders consistently display and their determination to act on the basis of conscience and principle.

I believe this is inextricably linked to a profound spirituality that is rooted in the very soil of Indonesia. Hence, I am pleased and full of admiration — but not surprised — that President Joko Widodo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Indonesian society as a whole have enthusiastically embraced Nahdlatul Ulama’s initiative to introduce religion for the first time at the center of G20 discourse and decision making.

Indian civil society activist and public intellectual Sri Ram Madhav Varanasi, who played a key role organizing his country’s participation in the R20 Summit, delivered the event’s final keynote address. An excerpt of Mr. Madhav’s remarks, edited for publication, appears below:

I do not know if Pak Yahya and his team realize what kind of tectonic force they have unleashed here. I am reminded of a story that David Foster Wallace, the famous American novelist, narrated to students at a college in Ohio.

Two young fish were swimming up a river, when an older fish came along in the opposite direction. The old fish asked the younger ones, “How’s the water?” and proceeded to swim past them. After some time, one of the younger fish asked the other one, “What the hell is water?” There is deep meaning in this story. You live in a

country that is a kind of heaven. Indonesia, and Bali, offer a remarkable example of harmonious coexistence between different faiths.

Perhaps the beauty of your intercommunal life, which you have enjoyed for centuries, prevents you from understanding the enormous effect this initiative will have upon the rest of the world. I wholeheartedly compliment you for launching this great initiative as part of the G20.

What is the R20? Is it another interfaith talk shop? Where each one of us comes to sing the praises of our religion, speak courteously about other religions, and return home convinced that we are the best? I think R20 has, or should have, a much larger vision and objective. As an extension of the G20, the R20 must address the diverse crises humanity is facing. In that sense, it is not just a religion-centric event. It is a humanity-centric event....

In the past, there have been religious leaders, spiritual leaders, who could stand up and guide mankind in the right direction. Today, we are busy quarrelling amongst ourselves. Even the religions are quarrelling, while politicians, technocrats, and economists control the direction of society.

Political and economic power are the new demigods. We should ponder how to address this enormous challenge and R20 has a vital role to play in that process. We need philosophers who possess the combined wisdom of every religion. Representing the cumulative wisdom of all religions, the R20 should guide mankind, together with leaders of the G20....

You have created history here in Bali. We are grateful to you for this big start. Both the R20 and G20 will move to India in 2023. Just as Indonesia is a beautiful microcosm of the world, characterized by pluralism and coexistence, India is also a mosaic of religions and a mothership of spirituality....

So, friends, as we accept the mantle for organizing the R20 next year, I would like to conclude by making one humble submission about Hindu philosophy, which Swami Mitrananda beautifully conveyed to you. During the past two days, we have thought a great deal about one God, and agreed that we must all remember that God is one. In Hinduism, we have gone just one step further, to say that there is not just one God, but only God. Whatever exists is God. The entire creation is divine.

Welcome to the country that believes everything is divine. You are divine. I am divine. Everything, whether animate or inanimate, is divine. [Speaks in Sanskrit]. Welcome to the country that celebrates the diversity of humanity. Come join us in that celebration next year in India.

KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf delivered the Summit's closing remarks, which have been edited for publication:

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers and participants, this is a very touching moment.

I can barely find the proper words to express my utmost appreciation and gratitude to each and every one of you for participating in the R20, for answering our call to action, and for your shared commitment to continue working together with us to pursue the noble values that we share and consented to in this discussion.

Let me begin by conveying the greetings of H.E. Dr. Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, who had to leave us early this afternoon due to pressing commitments that he cannot abandon. We convey his greetings to all of you: assalamu alaikum.

I would also, on behalf of Nahdlatul Ulama, like to express my gratitude to the government of the Republic of Indonesia, and especially to H.E. President Joko Widodo for the support that has been provided to the R20. The government of the Republic of Indonesia has mobilized all the resources we needed to host this Summit in the best manner possible, and that has included use of their good offices to manage and develop this event from start to finish — extending to embedding very important officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the R20's Organizing Committee. Allow me to introduce one of these officials to you. Will His Excellency Pak Muchsin please rise? Pak Muchsin from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been working with us since the beginning to ensure the success of the R20. And of course, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to each and every one of you — distinguished speakers and participants.

The R20 is a natural and spontaneous outgrowth of a long-term effort that we in Nahdlatul Ulama have engaged in. From time to time we reach out to find friends, partners, and allies all over the world to build a global movement to ensure a constructive and positive contribution by religion to the betterment of Indonesia and towards a better future for humanity and human civilization as a whole.

Ours is a universal call: we engage whoever answers. You have answered our call. So here we are, together, striving towards a shared vision. I believe that, today, we all agree that the R20 should not merely be a one-off event, but rather should become a global movement. As I said in my opening remarks yesterday, this initiative comes from a sincere, good, and spiritual will of people of religion — from a sincere concern, on the part of all religious believers, about the future of humanity. We call upon religious and political leaders and people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join this endeavor with us: to build a global alliance founded upon shared civilizational values.

Please allow me to thank you once more for your conscientious participation and contributions. May Allah Almighty, God, always be with us on our journey together. We may not know how and where it will end, but we do know that we will all be measured. All we have is hope. A deep, spiritual hope that our efforts truly constitute a noble contribution to humanity and human civilization.

Thank You. Wallahul Muwaffiq ila Aqwamit Tharieq. (May God guide us to the right path.)

To mark the end of this event, here I am knocking on the door of God, asking for His help.

[Strikes gavel 3 times].

Assalamu alaikum wa rohmatullahi wa barokatuh. (May the peace, blessings and mercy of God be upon you.)

[View KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf s closing remarks.](#)