Doctor Honoris Causa

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot,
MCCJ Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue at the Holy See:

"I am deeply touched to be the first Roman Catholic Cardinal ever to receive an honorary doctorate from an Islamic University"

KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf,
Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board:

"All my activism under the flag of Nahdlatul Ulama — both domestically and internationally — bears the theme of this struggle for the wellbeing of all humanity and the future of human civilization"

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia — On 13 February 2023, Pope Francis' personal emissary for interreligious dialogue, Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, joined Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf and former Muhammadiyah Chairman Dr. Sudibyo Markus in a ceremony at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, where the three religious leaders were awarded honorary doctorates for "Fostering Global Peace, Human Fraternity, and Unity in Diversity."

Broadcast live and heavily covered by Indonesian mass media, the ceremony was attended by a wide range of dignitaries, including religious leaders, academics, and senior officials from both the Vatican and the government of popular two-term Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Cardinal Ayuso played a key role in facilitating the creation of *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which Pope Francis and Grand Shaykh Ahmed al-Tayyeb of al-Azhar, Egypt's pre-eminent center of Islamic authority, signed on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Nahdlatul Ulama endorsed the *Document on Human Fraternity* at its 2019 National Conference of NU Religious Scholars, held in Banjar, West Java.

Then-Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Said Aqil Siradj noted that the *Document on Human Fraternity* appeared to incorporate the groundbreaking *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) of former NU Chairman KH. Achmad Shiddiq, who first articulated the concept of universal human fraternity as a *shari'ah* basis for legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims at the Nahdlatul Ulama National Congress held in Situbondo, East Java, in 1984.

An estimated 3.1% of Indonesia's population are Roman Catholic, while approximately 87% of the population are Muslim.

In response to a request from the rector of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, conveyed by the government of Indonesia, Pope Francis personally designated his emissary, Cardinal Ayuso, to receive the honorary doctorate alongside current NU Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil

Staquf, with whom Pope Francis has met repeatedly, including in January 2020 at his residence in the Vatican.

More recently, Pope Francis sent a personal message to the G20 Religion Forum (R20) Summit of International Religious Leaders held in Bali, Indonesia on 2 – 3 November 2022, which was co-chaired by Mr. Staquf and Shaykh Mohammad bin Abdulkarim al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League. Mr. Staquf founded the R20 "to ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems, in the 21st century."

Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf's address, edited for publication, may be read below.

[In Arabic] May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you. Praise and thanks be to God, and may peace be upon the Messenger of God, our lord Muhammad Abd Allah (the Servant of God) and upon his family, companions, and followers.

[In English] Honorable guests, my beloved family, my mother. I have my birth mother here Nyai Muchsinah Cholil, and my soul's foster mother, Nyai Umi Salamah Masyhuri.

I have too many people to mention here. My beloved friend, the scout and the guide, the sherpa of my international activism, Charles Holland Taylor, is present here.

My friends from the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, honorable guests, distinguished members of the academic community of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN). Welcome to Yogyakarta and welcome to the second century of Nahdlatul Ulama!

First, I feel like I have to apologize and beg your pardon if I look awkward in this position. I do indeed feel awkward because — to be honest — I have great doubts about whether I am eligible to be here, about whether I am worthy to receive this great honor. For I know the history of my academic career, which was a total failure.

[Widespread laughter among the audience]

[Former NU Chairman and Indonesia's first democratically elected president] KH. Abdurrahman Wahid once said — and I'll say this in Indonesian so Cardinal Ayuso doesn't understand — "There are two people who can only graduate if their university campus burns down. The first is Yahya Staquf, and the second is [NU General Secretary] Saifullah Yusuf."

[Widespread laughter]

Saifullah Yusuf, congratulations! You managed to graduate without your campus burning down, while I have been granted a *Doctor Honoris Causa* by UIN Sunan Kalijaga. This certainly means that UIN has saved my first university, UGM [Gadjah Mada University] from burning down!

[Uproarious laughter]

This situation makes me appreciate even more greatly UIN's courage in granting me this honor, as there is always a chance that — in granting an honorary title to a person who dropped out

of another university — this could turn into an academic embarrassment. So, if anything happens in the future, all I can say is: "you asked for it!"

[Continued laughter]

Nevertheless, ladies and gentlemen, I bear a burden of anxiety. This anxiety has been caused by a somewhat painful and harsh thought regarding how Islam should adapt to the reality of our current global civilization. This anxiety, this painful thought, has been preoccupying my mind for decades.

In my early adulthood, I was very much preoccupied by the thought that Islam was under pressure, was under attack, was under threat from all directions, both domestic and international. It was so painful, because this thought came from my knowledge about the stark reality of Muslims' condition all over the world.

And I, even during my childhood, experienced the harsh treatment of Nahdlatul Ulama during the early years of the Suharto regime. From the time of my grandfather, my family have been NU activists and so — when Nahdlatul Ulama had to face terrible threats and abuse during the Suharto regime's consolidation — my family faced a very tough situation. I'm sure many of us here today, especially those my age or older, also experienced this.

So, the thought was there: to find a way to fight back against those attacking Islam, both domestically and internationally. I was extremely fortunate that I did not encounter any radical or terrorist movements at this time, because I might easily have joined them. Instead, the person I encountered was Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, who opened my eyes to reality and what is realistically possible.

I attended university. I entered the faculty of social and political sciences at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and majored in sociology, because I was seeking an answer to the question of how Islam should be positioned in the context of our current civilization. Like I said, I didn't finish my studies because I easily got bored by books. I tend to become drowsy when listening to lectures, not just in university but also *pesantren* [Islamic boarding schools]. Nevertheless, I was seeking the answer to this question.

I then realized several things. First, that this anxiety I bear is not mine alone. I saw that my entire generation have borne a similar anxiety, as we share a similar experience.

Second, I realized that our options [as Muslims] are limited. On the one hand — because I was educated and trained in Islamic discourse, especially *shari'ah* — I know that Islamic teachings contain tenets that encourage Muslims to simply fight whoever is perceived to be a threat to Islam and even anyone who is perceived to be outside of Islam [i.e., non-Muslims]. I was educated and trained in these matters from early childhood. This is why I, myself, actually had — and many of my fellow Muslims still have — this urge to fight against "others."

In reality, however, there is no realistic chance of winning such a fight against non-Muslims. It is impossible. In fact, in such a fight there would be no winners, only losers. Such a conflict would result in the complete destruction of everyone.

Under the guidance of Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid ("Gus Dur"), I realized that there is no better way to improve the condition of Islam than to struggle to improve the condition of all

humanity. Because if humanity wins, then everybody wins. If humanity wins, then Islam wins, Christianity wins, Hinduism wins, Buddhism wins, the Shiites win, the Sunnis win, everybody wins.

Hence, I reached a conviction that I must set forth upon this path of struggle for the sake of all humanity. That is why all my activism under the flag of Nahdlatul Ulama — both domestically and internationally — bears the theme of this humanitarian struggle. This is a struggle for the wellbeing of all humanity, and for a better and more noble future for human civilization.

This is not going to be an easy struggle. It is going to be a long, long fight for all of us. But we must begin somewhere, and in my position in the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama, and in entering the second century of Nahdlatul Ulama, I can state that this is Nahdlatul Ulama's mission: to fight for our common future.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I think I should stop thinking about whether I am eligible for this honor or not. I want to thank Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta. And yes, in fact, to be honest I feel proud of myself.

[In Indonesian] This trencher cap might look too small. Actually, before it was made yesterday it was measured and it looked just right, but when I wore it today it felt too small. Maybe that's because, after I felt the power here today, my head grew a little.

[In English] I'm honestly proud. I am proud and I am very, very grateful for this honor. All I can offer in return is a prayer that all of this will become something true and meaningful, not just for me and my family, but for all of those who I am fighting for. May Allah grant this blessing to all of us. Thank you.

[In Arabic] May God guide us to the straightest path, and may the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you.

UIN Sunan Kalijaga is named after one of the Nine Saints (*Wali Songo*) who introduced Islam to the island of Java. In 1586, disciples of Sunan Kalijaga founded the Second Mataram Dynasty, whose current heir, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X — hereditary Governor of the Yogyakarta Special Administrative Region — attended the ceremony honoring Mr. Staquf, Cardinal Ayuso, and Dr. Sudibyo.

During his acceptance speech (excerpted and edited for publication), Cardinal Ayuso said:

> As Pope Francis has reiterated on various occasions, religions should not be part of the problems, but rather, part of the solutions….
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> Facing the role that religions are playing in the world and the role that many are urging they play — given the looming necessity to transform the impending clash of civilizations into a dialogue of civilizations — all religious communities must find new ways to revitalize their authentic, classic traditions, so that they can relate to each other and collaborate in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.
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> In a pluralistic society, religious traditions and communities have an essential and unconditional responsibility to build up societies together, rather than dominate each other; to stand together for the rights of each and every person without discrimination;

> and to protect the inviolability of human dignity, so that all may prosper, rather than waste energy competing with one another for particular interests….
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> Today's historic event is a bold contribution to the promotion and strengthening of human fraternity in order to build a peaceful world in common coexistence. Interreligious collaboration can and must support the rights of every human being, in every part of the world and at all times, because we are all members of one human family and, as such, we all have equal rights as well as duties as citizens of this world.
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> So, let us not forget that at the base of any collaboration or dialogue there is the common root of our humanity. This means that we do not start at zero in dialogue. There is always our shared humanity, with all its existential and practical aspects, which provides a much-needed meeting ground….
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> As I feel today a brother to you all, who are conferring upon me this *Doctor Honoris Causa*, I take this opportunity to express once more my sentiments of unity in diversity [a reference to Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*] with all of you, and my profound desire that together we will continue struggling to build a better world, where peace may always be the cornerstone of our societies.

Following the event at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Cardinal Ayuso and a delegation of Roman Catholic bishops and archbishops visited Pondok Pesantren Pandanaran in Sleman, Yogyakarta. The Islamic boarding school, which is headed by Dr. KH. Mu'tashim Billah, often hosts prominent foreign delegations, including the G20 Religion Forum (R20) in November 2022; Centrist Democrat International (CDI) in January 2020; and the Second Global Unity Forum in October 2018

In accepting his honorary doctorate, former Muhammadiyah Chairman Dr. Sudibyo Markus introduced the argument of his recently published book, *Islam and the West: A Light on the Horizon* (Fons Vitae). Dr. Markus urged religious communities worldwide to transform themselves into instruments for dialogue and peace, stating that "so long as we are not aware of [universal] human dignity, then global human unity will not be achieved."

View the complete speech of KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf ('Gus Yahya')
upon receiving the *Doctor Honoris Causa*.