



R20 Book Launch

Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders
illuminates NU strategy to avert a global “clash of civilizations”

“The launching of this book... is nothing less than a transformative moment in contemporary world affairs. The book provides a breathtaking overview of the ideas and exchanges animating the most comprehensive meeting of religious leaders from around the world ever organized”

*~ Robert Hefner,
Professor of Anthropology and International Relations at Boston University
and President of the American Institute for Indonesian Studies*

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia — On 4 August, 2023, scholars and religious leaders from across the world gathered in the historic Senate Building of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) — Indonesia’s premier seat of higher learning — for the official launch of a seminal work titled *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia*. A panel of highly respected scholars representing a wide range of academic disciplines praised the 428-page volume for providing a clear vision and practical roadmap whereby the world’s major religions “may become a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems.”

In a world in which scholarly publications are often slow to reach the printing press and strikingly expensive, Nahdlatul Ulama, the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, and the G20 Religion Forum (R20) worked with Gadjah Mada University Press — the publishing house of Indonesia’s top university — to make *Proceedings of the R20* available in both high-quality hardback and an open-access online [version](#), nine months after the event was held in Bali, Indonesia.

“It is now up to all of us to ensure that this book’s hopeful news is heard far and wide. One way to do that is to see that the book is reviewed in as many places as possible. Another is to get the book into the hands of as many people as possible who need to be aware of its important messages, and another way is simply by word of mouth.”

*~ Mary Ann Glendon,
Learned Hand Professor of Law, Emerita, at Harvard University
and a former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See*

The digital edition of *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia* may be freely accessed and downloaded [here](#)

Livestreamed and heavily covered by Indonesian print and broadcast media, the book launch featured globally recognized authorities on human rights, geopolitics, international law, Islam, Christianity, and the history and cultures of Southeast Asia.

Speakers included Prof. Ova Emilia, the Rector of Universitas Gadjah Mada; Mary Ann Glendon, Learned Hand Professor of Law, Emerita, at Harvard University; Dr. Ahmad Munjid, Director of UGM's Center for Peace and Security Studies; Dr. Wening Udasmoro, Vice Rector of UGM; Dr. Muhammad Najib Azca, Deputy General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama and a senior lecturer in the Sociology Department of UGM; Dr. Timothy Samuel Shah, co-founder and Director of Strategic Initiatives of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values; Dr. Al Makin, Rector of Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University; Dr. Robert Hefner, Professor of Anthropology and International Relations at Boston University; and Dr. Mochtar Mas'ood, Professor Emeritus of International Relations and former Dean of the Faculty of Social & Political Science at UGM.

Excerpts from speeches delivered by participants at the R20 book launch appear below, edited for publication. One may also access the complete text of several noteworthy contributions.

In his keynote address, titled "[Religions' Civilizing Mission](#)," Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf said:

Let me begin by expressing, on behalf of Nahdlatul Ulama, our gratitude to Gadjah Mada University for publishing *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia*, and for launching the book here in this august — indeed almost sacred — location, for this is the Senate Building inaugurated by our founding father and Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, in 1959.

This is a poignant moment for me. As you may know, I never completed my studies at Gadjah Mada University, but there's no place like home: especially for a runaway child such as myself [laughter]. It's so great to meet old friends, teachers, and mentors on this occasion, including my beloved master KH. Mochtar Mas'ood.

[Speaking in Indonesian] Thank God, Pak Mochtar: in the midst of an intense competition for leadership [of Indonesia, including one presidential candidate who is portrayed as] representing a noble Arab lineage, at least my own humble [i.e., native Javanese] fortune is steadily improving! [Laughter].

[Speaking in English] For our foreign guests, this joke wouldn't have been nearly as funny if I told it in English.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the run-up to a general election to be held in February next year, Indonesians are talking about the threat of identity politics. During the last two national elections we had very bad experiences with politicians using religion as a weapon to gain support and to attack others. Indonesians are realizing that identity politics represents a severe danger to our society. This issue has broad ramifications and, at the same time, very deep roots within the teachings of religion itself.

For Muslim believers, this poses a quandary: if identity politics is dangerous, is it permissible to bring religion into public and social life?

This question is so difficult because the faithful naturally want to express their religious identity in public.

The secular view is that religion should be left to the private sphere of the individual, as bringing religious faith into the public arena risks triggering a competition for dominance — a religious struggle for control of public and social spaces.

For Nahdlatul Ulama, this danger is obvious: it would be disastrous to permit interreligious strife in a global context where — throughout the world — people of different faiths live cheek-by-jowl in the same neighborhoods. Such religious competition would endanger peace and social stability.

Then again — despite these risks — a profound question remains for religious believers: are we permitted to bring religion into public and social life, or not?

If we contemplate this question deeply, it is clear that religion is not merely or solely a threat to social stability. On the contrary, it has long been the very *bedrock* upon which society itself is constructed. Over a history spanning thousands of years, religions have given birth to great and noble civilizations. Religion played a vital role — perhaps even the most fundamental role — in the rise of Egyptian civilization, ancient Rome, Christian Rome, Islamic civilization, Persia, India, China, and so on.

It is obvious to believers like me and my colleagues that religion is meant to build civilization. Religion is given to us by God to help develop civilization, which necessarily entails developing society in its entirety, including its manifold social structures. So, if religion is meant to develop civilization, why should it not be free to enter the public sphere?

Some may reply: “because political identity seems to be deeply embedded within the original structure and instinct of religion itself.” Given this fact, how can we preserve the beneficent functions of religion in our civilization while at the same time preventing the dangers that may accompany the public expression of religion itself?

This deep concern — this genuine concern of believers — motivated us to found the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and its various initiatives. We are seeking a way to continue to uphold our religion and contribute to the emergence of the global civilization that humanity is striving towards, while at the same time preventing religion from creating problems. That is why the creed of the R20 is to “help ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems.”

In her keynote address, titled “[The Civilizational Origins, Vision, and Aspirations of the G20 Religion Forum](#)” Prof. Mary Ann Glendon, a world authority on the United Nations and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said:

Thanks to all of you for being here to celebrate the publication of the proceedings of the first R20 — which brought together over 400 Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders to discuss a crucially important question: How can religion function as a source of global solutions, rather than problems, in the twenty-first century?

For those of us who attended that first Religion Summit, it was clear from the outset that we were witnessing an event that just might turn out to have been a historic milestone....

The R20 ended with an inspiring communiqué from which I would like to quote: It “calls upon religious and political leaders and people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global alliance founded upon shared civilizational values [in order to] prevent the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; [and] promote solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, cultures, and nations of the world.”

That is a call that deserves to be heard and amplified in every corner of the earth. And, God willing, *Inshallah*, the book launched here today will help to make it so.

In an address titled “[Gotong Royong and a Tale of Two Professors](#),” Dr. Timothy Samuel Shah — one of the editors of *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia* — discussed the volume in the context of two epoch-defining professors, who were resident at Harvard University when he was a student there in the early 1990s: Samuel Huntington and Mary Ann Glendon.

Those of us who have faith really do believe that God has not given up on his creation, and that it is possible for people — even very different people — to come together and experience that *gotong royong* (“mutual cooperation”) that I described at the beginning of my remarks. We really can unite and collaborate in a spirit of mutual respect....

Nahdlatul Ulama is taking us beyond the pessimism of Samuel Huntington and his “Clash of Civilizations,” and beyond the excessive optimism of Francis Fukuyama and his “End of History,” to build a more harmonious, just, and peaceful world order, as Gus Yahya so eloquently stated: not for the sake of NU itself, not for the sake of narrow self-interest, but for the sake of building a better world that all may enjoy together. Nahdlatul Ulama is creating a world where the great civilizations can retain their distinctive characteristics while coming together in peace on the basis of values that Professor Mary Ann Glendon has demonstrated that we do, in fact, share.

So, we have Nahdlatul Ulama combining the realism of Samuel Huntington with the hopeful vision of Mary Ann Glendon, and working in an extraordinary and effective manner, not just to show us a path, but to actually create a practical vehicle for building a new global civilization based on shared values.

Prof. Al Makin — Rector of Indonesia’s Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University — provided a brief commentary on KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf’s opening address to the R20, which is included in Part 1 of *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia*:

Pak Yahya says, “The Catholic Church has already undertaken this process [of theological reform] with the Second Vatican Council.” That’s very clear, right? Pak Yahya, the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, acknowledges the Second Vatican Council. This view is indeed inclusive and pluralistic. He is aware, and reminds us, of the Second Vatican Council. How inclusive he is! How [Gus Durian!](#) [A reference to

former Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman and Indonesia's first democratically elected president, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid].

Again, he reminds us “that in 2016 a community of Jews — the *Masorti*, or Conservative stream of Judaism — convened a forum of rabbinical scholars and issued a 29-page statement that may serve as an inspiration for all of us [*The Status of Non-Jews in Jewish Law and Lore Today*.]” Pak Yahya compares this with Nahdlatul Ulama's experience in [2019 in West Java](#), where NU ruled that the status of non-Muslims, in Islamic law, should no longer be that of infidels but, rather, fellow citizens. NU examined this difficult issue from a sociological, anthropological, and political science perspective. This is indeed a breakthrough, and a breakthrough shared by other faiths: that is the underlying fact.

In his speech, titled “[A Transformative Moment in World Affairs: Nahdlatul Ulama and the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders](#),” Prof. Robert Hefner — who is among the world's foremost academic experts on Indonesian politics and society — said:

In my view, the book's core achievement, its high-minded and inclusive spirit, and its courageous appeal for reformation of religious values obsolescent in our modern age — none of this would have been possible in national settings other than that of Indonesia, and other than that of an Indonesia reminded of its higher callings by the NU leadership....

The publication of *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders* is a joyous moment. It bears witness to a great nation — Indonesia — demonstrating a new and well-deserved confidence in its role as an agent for a far-reaching rethinking of the role of religion in our global world. The *Proceedings* also bear witness to a great leadership, that of Nahdlatul Ulama under the executive direction of KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, reaching out to Muslim leaders from other nations, including Shaykh Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa of the Muslim World League, all to promote a like-minded movement for a religiously informed and human-rights-based civilization within and beyond Indonesia. In all this the project and the *Proceedings* provide stunning evidence of an Indonesia and a Nahdlatul Ulama making good on a divine command: that religion and religious actors be a blessing to the whole world. With the R20 Summit and the publication of the event's *Proceedings*, Indonesia and Nahdlatul Ulama have once again done just that.

Dr. Muhammad Najib Azca — Deputy General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama and one of the book's editors — provided an overview of *Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia*:

The R20 volume includes speeches delivered at the Summit by a wide range of distinguished religious authorities, political leaders, and scholars from around the world and across its major faith traditions. It also contains a number of significant primary source documents, which are included either in their entirety or in excerpted form.

These texts were chosen because they contain timeless and visionary statements that touch on — and illuminate — the R20's major themes and aspirations, including:

- The need to identify shared values and establish reciprocity among the world’s diverse peoples, cultures and religions, by treating one another in accordance with the highest moral standards embraced by our respective traditions;
- Historical grievances, truth-telling, reconciliation, and forgiveness;
- The recontextualization of obsolete and problematic tenets of religious orthodoxy;
- New values that the world’s diverse religions and cultures will need to develop if they are to co-exist peacefully; and
- Restoring balance to nature and society through the understanding and practice of “spiritual ecology.”

These major themes correspond to Plenary Sessions 2–6 of the R20 Summit of International Religious Leaders held on 2–3 November 2022 in Bali, which sessions were preceded by an Opening Plenary addressed by His Excellency Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia.

Proceedings of the R20 International Summit of Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia, opens with a poem titled *Prayer for Liberation*, composed by Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri, former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council and Chairman of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, which serves as the Permanent Secretariat for the R20:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Compassionate

*Oh God, our God!
Oh Beauty,
and Source of all that is beautiful!
Oh Creator,
Who pours His infinite blessings upon this world!
Oh Generous and Bountiful God,
rescue and preserve our souls
by forging within us a noble character worthy of Your favor,
free from any and all stains that mar the beauty
of our human dignity.
Guide us, our leaders and our people
to the path of beauty
that leads to the sublime experience
of our own true freedom.
Strengthen us inwardly and outwardly
to resist the temptations of false beauty
that divert us from the true beauty
of our humanity and inner, spiritual freedom.
Liberate us from the fetters of every form of bondage except to You,
including the tyranny of our own ego and passions.*

*Oh King of Kings! Sovereign of the Universe!
All-Ruling and Omnipotent God!
Do not place us
—because of our sins—
beneath the dominion of earthly rulers who do not fear You,
nor feel any love or compassion for us.*

*Bless our people with leaders
whose hearts are filled with the Light and Beauty of Your Love,
so that their own love and compassion will overflow
and envelop every member of society.
Do not punish us with rulers who are a sign and reflection of
Your anger towards our people.*

*Oh Light of Lights, above every light!
Illuminate our eyes and vision with Your Light!
Illuminate our ears and hearing with Your Light!
Illuminate our mouths and words with Your Light!
Illuminate our hearts and convictions with Your Light!
Illuminate our thoughts and actions with Your Light!
Illuminate our surroundings with Your Light
to the left and to the right
above and below us!
Illuminate us with Your Light!
Illuminate us with Your Light, oh Light of Lights
that we may perceive
the beauty of Your creation
and allow it to penetrate and soften our hearts;
that we may perceive the beauty of Your blessings
and be grateful;
that we may perceive the beauty of Your path, which is straight,
and follow it;
that we may recognize the crooked ugliness of Satan's path,
and avoid it.*

*Illuminate us with Your Light, oh Light of Lights,
that we may perceive the beauty of truth
and follow it;
that we may perceive the ugliness of falsehood
and distance ourselves from it;
that we may perceive the beauty of honesty
and fully embrace it;
that we may perceive the evil of lies
and guard against them.*

*Illuminate us with Your Light, oh Light of Lights!
Destroy the darkness within us and leave not a single trace!
Oh Light of Lights, above every light,
do not allow
false worship and envy
hatred and the desire to harm others
conceit and arrogance
greed and cruelty
spite and revenge
falsehood and hypocrisy
self-praise and excessive love for this world
to cast a veil upon the vision of our hearts
and thus prevent us from
beholding the Infinite Beauty of Your Face
and receiving your Love,
by seeking and attaining Your Presence.*

*Oh God, Our God, the All-Merciful One!
Forgive us our sins
and those of our leaders and people.
Oh God, Our God,
the Beneficent, the Compassionate!
Liberate us from spiritual ignorance and fulfill our prayer.*

Amen.

~ Prayer for Liberation

by Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri
Former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council and
Chairman, Center for Shared Civilizational Values