

# Interfaith Cooperation against Radicalism and Violence in Indonesia: A Christian perspective<sup>1</sup>

Zakaria J. Ngelow<sup>2</sup>

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## A Matter of Definition

It is a delicate task to define religious radicalism, especially Muslim radicalism in global as well as Indonesian contexts. Some terms to characterise any religious group could be regarded as pejorative and could easily cause unexpected trouble. An internet dictionary mildly defines *radicalism* as “the beliefs and opinions of radicals, especially a set of ideas which advocates more substantial social and political change than is supported by the political mainstream.”<sup>3</sup>

A young Indonesian Muslim researcher defined religious radicalism as “the rigid religious attitude which contains violence.”<sup>4</sup> He quoted Hassan Hanafi, a renowned Egyptian Muslim scholar, that at least there are two reasons behind the violence in contemporary Islam. First, it is due to the oppression of the prevailing political regimes. Islamic groups have no freedom of opinion. Second, the failure of secular ideology of the prevailing regime makes religious fundamentalism or radicalism an ideological alternative for Muslim communities. He also referred to the findings of the Chicago Project on Fundamentalisms that fundamentalisms are a defense mechanism which appears as a reaction to the threatening crisis. It is the circumstantial crisis that determines their existence.

Olivier Roy, a French expert on political Islam, mentioned the phenomena of religious radicalism (Salafism) and political radicalism (Al Qaeda) in recent Islamic development in the West. He argued that contemporary religious radicalism was above all related to a consequence of globalization and Westernization of Islam, similar to the development in American Protestantism.<sup>5</sup>

AIVD, the intelligence bureau of the Netherlands, in a study report defines radicalism as:

The (active) pursuit of and/or support to far-reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to (the continued existence of) the democratic legal order

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<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Dr. Zakaria J. Ngelow is an Indonesian theologian and director of Yayasan Oase Intim, a foundation for the promotion of local Christian theologies and praxis ministries.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.allwords.com/word-radicalism.html>

<sup>4</sup> Happy Susanto, “Observing the Phenomena of Religious Radicalism,” (2004) accessed at <http://islamlib.com/en/page.php?page=article&id=657>

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Roy, “Islam in Europe: Clash of religions or convergence of religiosities?” (2007), accessed at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-05-03-roy-en.html>

(aim), which may involve the use of undemocratic methods (means) that may harm the functioning of the democratic legal order (effect).

The study explains that radical Islam consists of a multitude of movements, organisations and groups which show a certain affinity with one another, but which may also have very different ideological and strategic views. According to this study, there are three types of radical Islam.

The first type is *radical caliphatism*. This type highlights resistance against Western political (and also economic) oppression. The focus is on the political power of the West as something that should be broken and replaced by the political power of Islam. The second type of radical Islam is *radical Islamic puritanism*. It emphasises resistance against Western cultural oppression. The focus is primarily on the 'baneful' Western lifestyle, which is considered a threat to 'pure Islam'. The third type is described as *radical Muslim nationalism* (or *radical Muslim communitarianism*). This is a reaction against both the political and cultural dominance of the West, but is less religiously motivated in the proposed alternative. These three types have one important factor in common: they share a strongly mobilising force from the ideology of the Umma, the ideal of an Islamic global community. In the Islamic world the Umma is seen as a source of inspiration for identification and organisation, and as a fundamental for the pursuit of implementing the aims of radical Islam.

Rumadi, from Wahid Institute, observed a combination of three factors behind the emergence of religious radicalism in Indonesia: (1) disappointment with the democratic system which is considered secular and where religion has no space in the state, and thus, the struggle for theocratic state is deemed necessary; (2) disappointment with the collapse of the social system caused by the state's powerlessness to manage society's life religiously; and (3) political injustice which breeds religious radicalism as a form of opposition or resistance towards political systems which are regarded as oppressive and unfair.<sup>6</sup>

In recent Indonesian context, the term Muslim radical or Islamic radicalism refers to the whole range of development materialised in the emergence of groups, organisations or movements such as Jamaah Islamiyah, Komando Jihad, FPI, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, and Hizb-ut Tahrir, etc. While they have a common character as radicals, they have different emphases and employ different means. Some work for formal application of Islamic shari'ah through constitutional channels; others organise anti-American/Western mass demonstrations, or violent mobs destroying night clubs, brothels and churches. [A Muslim scholar coined a phrase, "Islam Pentungan" (= "bludgeon Islam"), to characterise these mobs.] Some organise and train militias to join violent armed communal conflicts and engage in terrorist acts of suicide bombings.

It should be added that religious radicals were also found among Indonesian non-Muslim communities. But so far they are not significant in terms of violence and of political agenda. Some Christians, for example, figured in the violent mobs that happened in Ambon and Poso and other places with communal conflicts. It was reported that in Minahasa they

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<sup>6</sup> Rumadi (2002). "Democracy and Religious Radicalism" accessed at <http://islamlib.com/en/article/democracy-and-religious-radicalism/>

found a militia, but so far no public exposure of harming interreligious harmony. There was also a report that Christians in a Papuan regency tried to formalise a kind of exclusive Christian law, and in Bali, also a Hindu law. A report from Oslo Coalition (Oddbjørn Leirvik, 2002) mentioned the Christian hard liner charismatic movement:

From the Christian side, it was noted that some of the hardliner Christian groups take their inspiration from American, charismatic Christianity. The “hardliner” groups of either side [Christians and Muslims] are not necessarily violent (most of them are not), but their radical discourse and sectarian identity politics may nevertheless serve to fuel outbursts of communal violence.<sup>7</sup>

## Historical Background

Mark Woodward (1999) from Arizona State University, employed the term “Islamism” or “Islamist” to Muslim radicals, referred to the founding of Muhammadiyah in 1912 as the beginning of Islamist political and theological discourse in Indonesia.

Islamist discourse emerged in the beginning of this century as a religious response to Western colonialism and the growing gap between the Islamic world and the West in science, economics, and technology. The fundamental tenets of Islamism, which could also be termed shari’ah-utopianism, are the inherent perfection of Islam as a way of knowing and living in the world as well as a religion, and the belief that the Islamicization of knowledge and social life will lead to a Muslim renaissance and, ultimately, to the decline or conquest of the morally decadent West. As Lawrence has observed, Islamists have been quick to adopt the technological products of modernity, but are unalterably opposed to modern concepts of pluralism and independent intellectual inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

Dutch Muslim scholar Martin van Bruinessen tried to trace the roots of Muslim radical groups in Indonesia to two Indonesian Muslim political movements in the past: the Darul Islam movement and the Masyumi party, and to a number of more recent transnational Islamic networks.<sup>7</sup> The Darul Islam rebellion movement emerged in the time of Indonesian independence revolution in West Java, under the leadership of Kartosuwiryo, who proclaimed the Indonesian Islamic State (NII) in 1948. Darul Islam movement was supported in Aceh (Daud Beureuh), South Kalimantan (Sultan Hamid II), and South Sulawesi (Kahar Muzakkar). Rebellion in Aceh later transformed into the long lasting GAM (Aceh Freedom Movement), while in South Sulawesi DI/TII (Indonesian Islamic Troops)—transformation of veterans of the independence revolution—under the leadership of Kahar Muzakkar troubled the region until the 1960s when he was killed in a military

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<sup>7</sup> Oddbjørn Leirvik, “Report from a delegation visit to INDONESIA by the Oslo Coalition of Freedom of Religion or Belief, July 29 - August 11, 2002.” [http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project\\_indonesia/indonesia\\_project\\_report.html](http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_indonesia/indonesia_project_report.html)

<sup>8</sup> Mark R. Woodward, “President Gus Dur, Indonesia, Islam, and Reformasi” accessed at <http://web.archive.org/web/20030219093713/http://www.asu.edu/clas/asian/pubs/woodward.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (2002), “Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in post-Suharto Indonesia” accessed at [http://www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/genealogies\\_islamic\\_radicalism.htm](http://www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/genealogies_islamic_radicalism.htm)

onset in 1965. Christians but also Muslims in South Sulawesi (including the recently formed Southwest and West Sulawesi provinces) suffered severely at the hands of this Islamic rebellion. Supporters of the DI rebellions survived in underground networks. Some were exploited by Suharto military intelligence to counter underground communism in the early years of the New Order. But in 1984, after violent riots against the government, leaders of ex DI and other Muslim critics to Suharto regime were arrested. The rest fled to Malaysia, from where thousands went to Pakistan and Afghanistan to join military training for the jihad resistance against the Taliban. They returned after Suharto fell. Majelis Mujahidin, one of the Indonesian Muslim radical groups, is regarded as successor of DI movement.

Masyumi was a Muslim radical political party in the 1950s which fought to replace the Pancasila with an Islamic ideology for Indonesia. The Islamic ideology was promoted since Indonesian nationalism movement for independence by Muslim political leaders, competing with secular democratic nationalists. In a draft formulation of the ideology for the future Indonesian independence in June 1945, known as the Jakarta Charter, both sides compromised to insert a phrase for the Muslim benefit, i.e. the state obliged Muslim citizens to follow the shari'ah (Islamic law). But Christian leaders from Eastern Indonesia objected to "the seven words" for Muslim exclusivity and eventually on 18 August 1945, a neutral religious formulation was adopted into the Constitution.

In the period of liberal democracy in the 1950s, Masyumi, a radical political party, competed in the general election in 1955 with NU, another Islamic political party of traditionalist character. Masyumi got 21 per cent and NU 18.5 per cent. Together with other small Islamic parties, both parties fought all out for Islamic ideology in Parliament sessions. As the Parliament failed to produce a new Constitution, Sukarno issued in 1959 a presidential decree to dissolve the Parliament and return to the Constitution of 1945. Eventually the conflict between Masyumi and President Sukarno led to the dissolution of the party in 1960. Its leaders were imprisoned. Under the New Order regime of Suharto, revival of Masyumi was denied. Some leaders then found a new political Islamic party but others joined GOLKAR, the government party. Masyumi's main leader, Mohammad Natsir, then turned to religious activities of promoting Islam by founding a council for Islamic mission (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII). The council was critical to New Order regime. Martin Bruinessen explained the character of the council:

We find with the Dewan Dakwah group an unlikely combination of attitudes: a belief in the superiority of western-style democracy over the neo-patrimonial forms of rule adopted by both Sukarno and Suharto, an almost paranoid obsession with Christian missionary efforts as a threat to Islam, and an increasingly strong orientation towards the Middle East, notably Saudi Arabia. The DDII established close relations with the Islamic World League (Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami, established in 1962), of which Natsir became one of the vice chairmen. It became the Saudis' preferred counterpart when these began using their oil wealth to finance the spread of conservative and puritan brands of Islamic teaching.<sup>10</sup>

While politically restricted, under the New Order period Indonesian Muslims accessed

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<sup>10</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (2002).

various Islamic religious and political thoughts developed in the Muslim and western world. Books by puritans as well as progressive Muslims thinkers, included that of Shi'ism, were translated and published. DDII strongly campaigned against progressive Muslim thought, as well as to Shi'ism influences. Its publication also focused on perceived threats. Besides the threats from Shi'a and Islamic liberalism, DDII also focused on danger of the Christian (Catholics of Chinese descent) and Jewish threats to the world of Islam (anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories).

Given the virtual absence of Jews in Indonesia, it is not immediately obvious why anti-Semitism became such a prominent element of conservative Muslim discourse. Solidarity with Palestine is only part of the story; the labels "Jew" or "Zionist" refer to a whole range of internal enemies and such threats as secularism, cosmopolitanism and globalization, as well as the inseparable evil pair of capitalism and communism. Though rarely explicit, the reference appears to be primarily to the Chinese business elite but it also includes liberal and cosmopolitan Muslim thinkers.<sup>11</sup>

Many Muslims, and not just the radical, believe in the existence of an international conspiracy, involving the assorted enemies of Islam—Zionists, Christian missionaries, imperialist politicians, and their various local allies—aiming to destroy or weaken Islam in Indonesia. Considering Islam as harmful to their interests, these conspirators not only fight it by force of arms where this is possible, but they also try to subvert it from within through sex, drugs and rock-and-roll or, more dangerously, through spreading deviant teachings of various kinds ranging from Shi'ism and heterodox mysticism to what is broadly subsumed under the label of "liberal Islam."<sup>12</sup>

Another important development was among the Muslim students on university campuses. In the 1970s most of the committed Muslim students followed progressive thoughts. The late Nurcholish Madjid emerged as a young pioneer to socialise fresh thoughts into the Muslim discourses. It was the time when interfaith dialogue was initiated, by government support as well as by faith communities. But in the 1980s another phenomenon on the campuses was the rise of fundamentalistic inclination among Muslim students. Depolitisation of campuses (including student associations) and making Pancasila the sole ideology under the Suharto regime forced many Muslim students to withdraw from direct political life and to be active in religious study groups where they learned fundamentalistic teachings "on personal morality and piety, discipline, and an inner rejection of the Pancasila state and of un-Islamic practices in modern Indonesia." Promotion of shari'ah law and ideology was part and parcel of the teachings of these study groups, later known as Tarbiyah movement. Many of them were attracted to Shi'a revolutionary thoughts after Iranian revolution, but mostly influenced by Egyptian fundamentalist party, Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (Muslim Brotherhood), and also by Saudi Arabian puritan Wahabi or Salafi Islam. From this circle emerged in 1998 a new Muslim student association, KAMMI, which was quite prominent in the anti-Suharto mass demonstrations.

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<sup>11</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (2003), "Post-Suharto Muslim engagements with civil society and democracy" accessed at [http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Post\\_Suharto\\_Islam\\_and\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Post_Suharto_Islam_and_civil_society.htm)

It should be mentioned however, that fundamentalism as a movement was not only an urban phenomenon. The traditional Islamic education institution, Pesantren, was also influenced to the extent that some were considered as breeding nests of Muslim radicalism.

In the end of the 1980s Suharto reoriented his new political policy in this context of fundamentalist Indonesian Islamic development as he accommodated Islamic politics. A Muslim intelligentsia association (ICMI) was set up in 1990 under the leadership of B.J. Habibie, a prominent member of the inner circle, and later appointed as successor to Suharto's presidency. Accommodation to Islam was executed as non-Muslims in the cabinets, military commanders and other government positions were replaced by Muslims. This "greening policy" eventually covered parliament membership. Habibie popularised the term "proportionality" to emphasize that Muslim should occupy most of the positions as majority in the country. The phenomenon of "Islamisation" was effected in various segments of society such as the founding of an Islamic bank system or an Islamic economy, etc. A major Islamic daily newspaper (Republika) was published as well to balance Christians and secular publications. Islamic outfits (of Arabian look) were introduced and even forced onto civil servants. It was under Suharto's new political policy that some Muslim radical groups such as KISDI emerged with its strong resemblance to the DDII agenda.

Among Indonesian Muslims, it was NU, the traditionalist wing, under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid (known as Gus Dur) that criticised Suharto's policy on Islam as sectarian and anti-pluralism. Instead of joining ICMI, together with Christians and secular intellectuals, Gus Dur founded Forum Democracy to promote democracy, civil rights and human rights. Also in the circle of NU young Muslims developed progressive religious thoughts, notably on interfaith relations. The Liberal Islam (JIL) and the Emancipatory Islam (JIE) movements are from this circle. From the Muhammadiyah, once regarded as a modern and progressive Muslim organisation, it was Amin Rais who became a prominent figure in the ICMI. But he was forced to resign as he expressed his critic to Suharto. It made him later a prominent figure of the political reformation movement that brought down Suharto's regime.

In the so-called Reformation era (post-New Order), closed political channels have been reopened. More than 40 secular and religious political parties have been founded. PBB, a Muslim radical party – established by ex Masyumi – did not get significant votes. But radicals also work in "street politics," i.e. mob demonstrations against government policy, or against acts and regulations they consider violating their religious belief. Moderate Muslims and non-Muslims set their hope on the two biggest Islamic organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, as bulwarks against the radicals. Germany's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kerstin Muller, in a meeting with NU Chairperson, Hasyim Muzadi, was quoted as saying that NU and Muhammadiyah will be able to muffle radicalism in Indonesia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Kompas*, Rabu, 16 Juli 2003.

Politically, however, members of NU and Muhammadiyah are divided into parties of different wings, including radicals.

### **Christian Nationalism**

World religions and political power are common phenomena in Indonesian history. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam were introduced to the archipelago with their respective political centers of Hindu or Buddhist kingdoms and Islamic sultanates. In the case of Christians, there was no political center. Early Roman Catholic missions by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century did not set up a RC kingdom in the Moluccas. Neither did the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). In the next two centuries of its power it did not set up a Calvinist Protestant monarchy. Western powers in that age of mercantilism were less interested in religion than in economic monopoly. The same policy was adopted by the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia. The process of secularisation and separation of Church and State followed the French revolution, and the policy of "security and order" restricted Christian missions to work only among the so-called "pagan" Indonesian tribes. Eventually Indonesian churches were organized along ethnic lines, such as the Nias church(es), the Batak church(es), the Dayak church, Torajan church(es), Papuan church, Sumba church, etc. The number of Indonesian Christians ranged from 8 - 12%, but no official statistics are available.

The Indonesian Central Statistic Bureau (BPS) conducts a census every ten years. The latest data available, from 2000, drew on 201,241,999 survey responses; the BPS estimated that the census missed 4.6 million persons. According to the BPS report, 88.2 percent of the population described themselves as Muslim, 5.9 percent Protestant, 3.1 percent Catholic, 1.8 percent Hindu, 0.8 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Jewish. The country's religious composition remained a politically charged issue, and some Christians, Hindus, and members of other minority faiths argued that the census undercounted non-Muslims. The Government does not recognize atheism.<sup>14</sup>

The Dutch colonial regime supported Christians only in two instances. One is in taking care of the Dutch and indigenous congregations inherited from the previous Dutch VOC. The congregations were organised in a single Protestant Church in the Netherlands-Indies, without meaningful missionary activities. Another is in supporting Christian mission boards in the early decades of the last century to run basic schools, mainly in "outer Islands" (outside Java) as realisation of colonial Ethical Policy to provide education for the indigenous people. The Roman Catholic Church was allowed to work only in Flores Island and to maintain their small congregations in towns throughout the country. This was the reason that RC in Indonesia concentrated on education and medical services which are now regarded as among the best services in the country. Since the 1930s other

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<sup>14</sup> Jakarta US Embassy, "Indonesia International Religious Freedom Report 2006" accessed at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71341.htm>

Protestant denominations have entered, mainly from North America, most of them of evangelical or fundamentalistic outlooks.

Indonesian Christians began their political activity under the umbrella of a Dutch Protestant political party in 1917 when colonial government installed the People's Council. This pro-colonial political party was not in tune with Indonesian nationalist movement. Since the 1920s a small group of Christian students developed an Indonesian Christian nationalism which favored modern democratic ideology, where human rights, pluralism and tolerance, anti-discrimination and freedom of religions were guaranteed. As for the political strategy, Indonesian Christians employed a model promoted and practiced by a Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). In a modern pluralistic society each community should work for the well being of its own community and do the best to determine the course of the nation's development as a whole. Hence, Christians should develop their own universities, social institutions, mass media, and of course a Christian political party. Minority in number can be substituted by high quality human resources and good management. The ideal of "creative minority" is alive in certain circle of Indonesian Christians, with reference to the political roles of biblical figures, e.g. Joseph in the Egyptian palace and Daniel in the Babylonian court.

### **Christians and Pluralism**

The founding fathers of Indonesia solved the problem of Indonesian religious plurality with Pancasila, which is neither a religious nor a secular ideology. On 22 June 1945 they formulated a draft for the basic statement of the Constitution—known as Jakarta Charter, which accommodated the Islamic shari'ah. Revision on 18 August 1945 was accepted as Christian leaders from Eastern Indonesia resisted the famous seven word clause which was considered as discriminatory and characterised the state as a religious state. But soon in early 1946, as compensation, the Ministry for Religious Affairs was set up, for the benefit of Muslims interests.

In the 1950s there were some events of importance for interfaith relations. While DI rebellions harmed Christians in some regions, RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan or South Moluccan Republic) was proclaimed in South Moluccas, a Christian enclave. After the general election in 1955, Christian and Roman Catholic political parties supported the nationalist side to uphold Pancasila as Islamic politicians opted for Islamic ideology. Meanwhile, other Christian enclaves of North Sumatra and North Sulawesi were involved in a military upheaval of PERMESTA (Perjuangan Semesta, Universal Struggle).

Interfaith relations were troubled as Muslim mobs crushed some Christian churches and other buildings in Makassar in October 1967. It was said to have been triggered by a high school teacher's explanation about Prophet Muhammad which was regarded as humiliation by Muslims. The broader context was a reaction to the issue of mass Christianisation financed by foreign missions following the 1965 Communist affair. New Order government developed interreligious dialog to promote interfaith harmony in a tripartite "program for interreligious harmony": among religious adherents, inter-religions, and between religions and government. This government project turned out to be a top-down approach supported by military surveillance to tame religious leaders for Suharto's political interests. A critic



labeled such inter-religious harmony as “harmony under the point of guns.” The Minister of Religious Affairs, and later joined with Minister of Home affairs, issued regulations on religious life, notably on support from abroad, and on restrictions of constructing religious buildings (i.e. church). The regulations were objected to by Christians as an injustice and even used in recent years by radicals to tear down church buildings or resist new construction plans. But instead of issuing better revisions, in March 2007 both Ministers issued two complicated and discriminative joint regulations. The Leaders of NU (Islam), PGI (Protestant Christians), and KWI (Roman Catholic) accepted the regulations under duress, hence, issued a common statement (April 2006) appealing to: (1) faith communities to preserve interreligious harmony and retreat from street justice and anarchic attitudes; (2) central and local governments to fairly apply the regulations; (3) security and police forces to guarantee faith communities’ practice of their respective religions and to resist any illegal anarchic actions against them; (4) media to accurately report any illegal closing of faith community’s place of worship (NU, PGI, KWI 2006).<sup>15</sup>

The third item of this statement is related to the role of authority to provide legal protection and its serious practical application. In many cases of violent attacks by radicals, security forces did not take any action to protect the victims. This so-called “politik pembiaran” (connivance policy) of authorities in the past communal conflicts eventually led the victims to organise retaliation attacks.

The New Order regime was strongly against any alternative to Pancasila ideology, including Islam. But Christian leaders and politicians were worried about Muslim politicians with their Islamic ideology, as manifested in the post New Order era – with increasing numbers of church buildings that were destroyed;<sup>16</sup> communal conflicts in Christian enclaves; terrorist bombings; and constitutional efforts to revive Jakarta Charter and shari’ah regulations that support such Christian Islamo-phobia.

The Jakarta Charter was discussed extensively in the 2001 and 2002 MPR sessions, and the matter was resolved once again by shelving the famous seven words, for there was no majority supporting it. The two largest Muslim organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, had resolutely made a clear stand against this attempt to enshrine the shari’ah in the Constitution. This is not the end of efforts to give the shari’ah force of law in Indonesia, however. Attempts have been made to use the enhanced authority of regional parliaments under the regional autonomy law to get elements of the shari’ah adopted into regional regulation. Islamist bureaucrats in the Ministry of Justice are reportedly preparing a large number of legal changes that will amount to a significant degree of Islamisation. Non-Muslims also perceive a deliberate effort at sneaking Islamisation in other new legislation, such as the new bill on national education, which obliges schools to provide pupils with education in their own religion—so that all Christian schools will become centres of Muslim

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<sup>15</sup> In 2002 the three religious national institutions issued a commitment to fight corruption and other immoral practices by those in authority and the common people.

<sup>16</sup> List of churches destroyed in the New Order period: 1965-1974 (46); 1975-1984 (89); 1985-1994 (132); 1995-1997 (105).

education.<sup>17</sup>

Since the early 1970s, Christian theological and church institutions of moderate (ecumenical) character have introduced inclusive and pluralistic interfaith theologies to replace exclusive apologetic theology. This development was related to three milestones in the history of Christianity of twentieth century: the founding of WCC, Protestant ecumenical institute (1948) with its world concerns, the findings of Second Vatican council (1962-1965), notably the declaration on interfaith (*Nostra Aetate*); and the emerging of Liberation theologies in Latin America (late 1960s) to deal with social problems with its famous catchword, "preferential option for the poor." Since 1980 the R&D section of the National Council of Churches of Indonesia started organising an annual seminar on religions, thank to Olaf Schumann, a German expert on Islamic studies, and others. This annual study seminar introduced students and leaders of churches not only to the fresh ideas of interfaith theologies and their relation to socio-cultural, economic or political contexts, but also to personal contact with Muslims.

Another important link between Indonesian churches and the ecumenical movement worldwide is the common commitment to address global issues at a local level. Interfaith dialogue, women's issues, human rights, poverty, environmental crises, democratisation, and violence, were among the common agenda of the global ecumenical churches. It was in the framework of these common concerns that churches were urged to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation in their respective contexts. Classical or traditional theologies were revisited and the Bible was read in different perspectives to retrieve fresh theological insights to address various concerns. Biblical messages of obligation to love or to forgive are basic for Christians to resist any kind of violence, but also to live harmoniously with other faith communities.

### **Interfaith NGOs**

In the next decade, while more radical groups appeared in public life, interfaith and dialog fora were also founded. The first forum established is INTERFIDEI (Interfaith Dialogue) or DIAN (Dialog Antariman), founded by the late Th. Sumarthana, in 1991 in Jogjakarta, with a vision of "the establishment of a civil society which is rooted in humanitarian and democratic values." In 1996, MADIA (Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama; English: SIDA, Society for Inter-Religious Dialogue), was founded in Jakarta. In a public statement dated May 1998, MADIA expressed its concerns:

We are deeply concerned to observe how often religious symbols, as well as ethnic and racial diversity, have been misused as tools for political engineering and business interests for the advantage of certain groups and individuals and at the expense of society at large.

We are deeply concerned to witness the culture of violence which has become a

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<sup>17</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (2003), "Post-Suharto Muslim engagements with civil society and democracy" accessed at [http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Post\\_Suharto\\_Islam\\_and\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Post_Suharto_Islam_and_civil_society.htm)

standard practice in effecting political change in Indonesia, and the lack of respect for human values and dignity which result from such violence.

We are deeply concerned that none of the above problems has received serious attention from, or been openly, critically and seriously discussed by, either the nation's power elite or its religious leaders.

In 2000, ICRP (Indonesia Council on Religion and Peace) was inaugurated by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, with a vision of shaping a peaceful, just, equal brotherhood/sisterhood of the Indonesian society, in religious and faith pluralism, with respect for human dignity.

In Makassar, capital of South Sulawesi, participants of an interfaith conference organized by INTERFIDEI agreed to set up a regional interfaith forum, FORLOG, for Forum Dialog Antar Kita di Sulawesi Selatan (Our South Sulawesi Dialogue Forum). FORLOG stated that part of its mission is to develop a tolerant pluralistic society with an inclusivistic and pluralistic spirit through formal and non-formal education. A forum of interreligious leaders initiated by the provincial government to cope with the social disturbances also functions in the region. There is also a Makassar branch of an Indonesian Chinese nationalist forum.

It was reported in an interfaith network conference in 2006 in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, organized by INTERFIDEI, that about 80-90 interfaith organisations at national and local levels are operating in the country on a wide range of concerns. Another meaningful point was that most of the interfaith activists are young people, men and women engaged in various issues at the grass roots. Some struggle with economic poverty, others with civil democratic education or environment crises, or advocating for indigenous people and other marginalised groups. They are addressing issues of religious and cultural enlightenment, human (notably women) rights and social maladies. Discriminated communities of unrecognised religions and religious sects regarded as blasphemous heresy or criminals are also advocated for. So are the interfaith marriage couples. Many groups are engaged in natural (and social) disaster relief actions. Compared to the government sponsored interreligious dialogue forums and their top-down approach, these interfaith NGOs empower civil society. From a Christian perspective, works and services by interfaith organisations are in tune with the social responsibility of the church.

It should be noted that even within a moderate religious community, there are those who are opposed to engagement in interfaith activities. The Oslo Coalition reported thus:

Christian and Muslim dialogue activists thus often strike inter-religious alliances which may be felt to be controversial in both camps. In inter-religious dialogue, internal differences must be taken just as seriously as efforts at overcoming boundaries between the religions.<sup>18</sup>

~~The weakness (and strength) is that most of these organisations are not formally connected~~  
<sup>18</sup> Oddbjørn Leirvik (2002), "Report from a delegation visit to INDONESIA by the Oslo Coalition of Freedom of Religion or Belief, July 29 - August 11, 2002" accessed at [http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project\\_indonesia/indonesia\\_project\\_report.html](http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_indonesia/indonesia_project_report.html)

to their respective religious institutions. Another problem is lack of financial support, a common problem of most interfaith NGOs in the country.

Development of progressive interfaith theologies, therefore, is an important support to interfaith activities. It is important to develop a kind of principle that to develop interfaith harmony one has to tolerate differences of religious thoughts and practices, not only between different religions but also in one's own religion. There is no single Christianity or Islam. Each of the world religions consists of different traditions or denominations. In some cases, even the same religious terms are understood differently, thereby conveying different meanings.

### **Church and Religions in South Sulawesi**

In terms of interreligious relations, South Sulawesi is historically and demographically one of the important regions in the country. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century Islam and Christianity (Roman Catholic) competed in the region. Alauddin, Sultan of Gowa, politically Islamised most of the region by military force in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Three major ethnic groups—i.e. Bugis, Makassar and Mandar—were converted to Islam but mostly in a nominal way. A mixture of Islam and pre-Islamic religion was common in the region. Some mystic schools were also introduced to color the Islamic variant in the region, and later, puritan Islam. Only the fourth ethnic group, the Torajans, relatively managed to uphold their ancestral religion until the second decade of the last century when Christian missions from Dutch Calvinism began to convert them to Protestant Christianity; and later also to Roman Catholic by Roman Catholic Mission. A small number of Bugis and Makassar people joined Christianity in the 1930s and was organised into the Christian Church of South Sulawesi.

Bugis and Makassar Muslims are migrant people. They migrated to the whole archipelago and even beyond. They are found in various Eastern Indonesian towns mostly as small scale traders. They were affected when the communal conflicts broke up in East Timor, Kupang, Ambon, Halmahera, Poso, Luwu and other places, and many of them returned home as refugees. In Makassar, emotional and primordial solidarity with the refugees accumulated in—or some analysts argued was exploited for—persecuting Christians.

As mentioned before, in the 1950s, DI/TII rebellion under the leadership of Kahar Muzakkar troubled the region. Many Christian villages were terrorised, occupied or burned down. Christians were killed or were forced to apostasise. I was a baby when my people (Toseko) had to flee as refugees from the DI/TII occupation. The bitter recollection of the DI/TII was revived as a group of Muslim radicals set up a committee for preparation of implementation of Shari'ah in the province (KPPSI, Komite Persiapan Penegakan Syari'ah Islam) under the leadership of a son of Kahar Muzakkar in the last few years. The committee—influenced by national and international radical networks—has the vision of making the province follow the step of Aceh in turns of applying shari'ah laws. Some regencies in the region have formally applied the law, mainly dealing with preventing vices in society.

Leaders of local churches reacted to the undesired movement by expressing their worries

to the authorities. Some meetings and conferences were organised by churches to get more information and to issue appeals concerning the movement, sometimes inviting speakers both from moderate and radical Islam circles. A national survey was organised by PGI in regions with sharia'ah movements and in South Sulawesi. The findings were that the legal procedure of issuing a regency regulation was violated, including employing terror and violence. The movement was more of a political agenda than a religious one. While the ideals of the regulations are for a better morality in society and to be applied only to Muslims, in practice cases of discrimination against non-Muslims and women have also been reported.

Urged by religious leaders, the Government of South Sulawesi set up a committee to study the movement. Together with two colleagues, I was included in the committee as representative of Christians. The committee recommended to the government that formal shari'ah application should be resisted. As a religious matter, its application should be regulated by and exclusively for Muslims with cultural approaches. It was also recommended that government will be more serious to eliminate or minimise social vices, and promote social, economic and political justice for all.<sup>19</sup>

Some interfaith groups and NGOs addressed the movement by programs of studies, research, empowerment and advocacy. Public discourses from moderate Muslims and secular writers to counter the movement were also launched in the media.

### **New Direction of Religious Education**

This presentation, so far, is an attempt to sketch Indonesian contexts of interfaith cooperation in response to Muslim radicalism. The Indonesian faith communities are exposed to the reality of radicals as religious and political movements at local, national and international levels who employ various modes of struggles, from public doctrinal discourses and constitutional channels to mass violence and terrorism.

Religious and political radicalism is a reaction to religious and political conditions, both local and global. Hence, the existence of radicalism should be addressed by religious and political reforms. Islamic radicalism in Indonesia and elsewhere is motivated by—or a reaction to—local as well as global conditions, notably the Western advanced countries' policies with consequences of North - South economic discrepancies. Therefore, faith communities worldwide should continue to develop and improve networks of co-operation and common commitment to global freedom, justice and peace. They should demonstrate sincere courageous prophetic stances towards government political and economic policies, especially of the superpowers. At the national level, two short remarks can be made. First, religious leaders should strongly resist religious exploitation by narrow or selfish interest.

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<sup>19</sup> It was interesting to observe that in the November 2007 elections, the positions for provincial governor and vice-governor were won by the pair of candidates regarded to be more inclusive. They got 40.72% and 37.13% votes, respectively. Another candidate from the Muslim radical circles got 22.15% of the votes.

Second, as radicalism is a perennial phenomenon, it is reasonable to consider the argument of Rumadi that the role of the state is not how to eliminate that radicalism but how to channel it through political institutions to control it within a democratic frame.<sup>20</sup>

Addressing radicalism in religious engagement provides new perspectives of religious theological and practical renewals. Some options can be mentioned as follows:

First is a new approach to religious education with interfaith perspective of peace and non-violence, supported by relevant theological or ethical thought. Religious education determines religious attitudes. Rigid and narrow doctrinal approach will eventually forge radical outlooks. Flexible and open minded cultural-ethical approach will equip religious commitment for peace and non-violence. Reading of scriptures provides both possibilities of exclusive and inclusive doctrines. Therefore, a contextual perspective to support our inclusive orientation is much needed. Feminist theologies, for example, should not be literally extracted from scripture texts. A contextual perspective of women's concerns (such as the problems of migrant women workers, trafficking, sexual abuse, prostitution, domestic violence, civil and political rights, etc.) could be employed to construct a relevant theology. Objective and critical history of religion is important for new orientation in religious education. Socio-political history and the role of religions at national and global levels as well as history of religious/faith encounter should be integrated in the curriculum of religious education. There should also be concerns for human rights, conflict resolutions, ecology crises and disasters, mass poverty, and social disaster.

Inclusivism or pluralism as an orientation in theology and in religious commitment requires inter- or multi-disciplinary and creative approaches to resources, methods and frameworks of doing theology. In biblical studies, for example, creative and relevant programs such as Reading the Bible with New Eyes should move on to interfaith reading of texts.<sup>21</sup>

Second is balancing ritual activities with social programs to develop socio-economic justice and prosperous society. Faith communities are obliged to engage in social concerns to reduce poverty, support democratic processes, uphold human rights, empower and advocate for the marginalized groups, etc. In Christian circles, such commitment is supported by Jesus' examples of his Galilean ministry. It is relevant, therefore, to develop the Gospels' "Galilean Jesus Christology" as complementary to St. Paul's Hellenistic Christology.

As radicalism is also critical of moral degradations in society, it is imperative for faith communities to improve social morality. Political and economic democracy supported by relatively better educated society (i.e. civilised) will eventually weaken radicalism. Together with moral-religious education, there should be improvements in the legal system as well as consistent law enforcement. Local wisdoms have emerged as rich resources to develop relevant methods and values.

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<sup>20</sup> Rumadi, "Democracy and Religious Radicalism" (2002) accessed at <http://islamlib.com/en/article/democracy-and-religious-radicalism/>

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, D. Preman Niles, "Cross-Textual Reading of the Bible in Asia: A Counter-Colonial Approach," in *Quest*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 2007): 1-31.

Third, provide opportunities for sincere dialog and interactions with radical groups. The weakness of interfaith movements is that it is mainly organised among moderate groups. Of course inclusion of radicals in interfaith dialog is not easy. But there should be serious efforts to create spaces for both sides to interact in a peaceful way, not necessarily in academic forum but through common social engagement or any other possible means. Uil Absar Abdalla from Liberal Islam Network (JIL) says that plurality of Islamic discourses can be a healthy process for the future of Islam. He could be right if peaceful dialog is continuously alive among the faith communities. A blessing in disguise from the communal conflicts in the past is the reinforcement of common interfaith commitment for peace and reconciliation; more options for non-violent conflict resolution; and serious research to understand social, political, economic and theological roots of conflicts. Again, assessment of the history of religious encounters should be seriously done in academic and practical levels. The history of religious intolerance in Europe of pre- and post-Reformation periods should be seriously studied by faith communities in order to learn lessons so they will not succumb to the curse of repeating the tendency to propagate religious intolerance.

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