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**ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION:
ACHIEVAL AND CHALLENGES FOR INDONESIA**

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Friends, Indonesia is the most diverse nation in the world. Geographically, it encompasses thousands of islands, 6,000 km from West to East, hundreds of different ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religious orientations. How can it be one Indonesia? But Indonesia succeeded. Indonesia is united. But that unity cannot be taken for granted.

As the letter of invitation wrote: "We live in a networked society where most people use social media, mostly driven by ICT. Social media use has a lot of promise for promoting social cohesiveness. On the other hand, it presents challenges of partisanship and division."

I'm not a social media expert, let alone an expert on the impact of AI. You'll have to investigate that. What I can do is

point to Indonesia's experience. Because Indonesia's experience is extraordinary.

Indonesia experienced three major crises. One, leading up to the declaration of independence, questioned the place of Islam in the Indonesian state structure. The second was in 1965-6 where the assassination of six top Army generals led to a mass killing of people deemed communists. The third occurred in 1998. As a result of the Monetary Crisis of mid-1997, the Rupiah lost 80% of its value and millions of people fell into poverty. All sorts of conflicts that had been brewing for a long time emerged. Finally, the ruler for 32 years, General Suharto, had to step down. People feared that Indonesia could break up like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. But Indonesia didn't.

A few words about the 1965-66 crisis, in which, in one of the world's largest genocides in the second half of the 20th century, approximately 2 million so-called communists were killed. I can only touch on this horrific crisis; it certainly requires a separate discussion. Simply put: Tensions between the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the Armed Forces, supported by religious parties, exploded when six top Army generals were murdered on October 1, 1965. The murders were believed to have been orchestrated by the Communist Party. President Sukarno, who firmly upheld

"NASAKOM" - that Indonesia should be based on the three ideologies of nationalism, religion, and communism - was at a loss as to how to handle the killings. As a result, beginning from Sumatra, Java, and then Bali, communists were arrested and killed. Indonesian communism never recovered from that destruction. The wounds of those events have not yet healed.

However, an important note is necessary. Perhaps still as a long-term consequence of the 1965-66 events, not a single party elected to the House of Representatives is currently left-leaning. If we ask: Small farmers, small fishermen, small laborers, people who make their living from doing business as street vendors in the big cities, which party should they vote for? There is no answer. 60 percent of the Indonesian people are not yet out of poverty. If they would get the impression that Indonesia belongs to those "up there", we shouldn't be surprised if they seek a different ideology than Pancasila. "After 80 years of Pancasila we still do not yet live prosperous."

Last August, demonstrations and riots suddenly broke out in many major cities across Indonesia, protesting the House of Representatives. The protests were crushed, and thousands of "rioters" are still being detained. Clearly, if the common people in Indonesia—60 percent—continue not to

feel treated in a just way, Indonesia's cohesion will be threatened. So social injustice remains a serious threat to Indonesian unity.

However, here I want to focus on religion. The fact that Indonesia, with 87% of its now approximately 285 million population being Muslim, has succeeded in establishing excellent interfaith relations is, in my opinion, the strongest asset for the unity and cohesion of so the diverse Indonesian nation.

Let's start in 1928. Remember, Indonesia is the most diverse country in the world, stretching over thousands of islands, with hundreds of languages, cultures, ethnicities, and religious orientations. In October 1928, hundreds of young people from all over Indonesia, at their own expense, gathered in Jakarta, then still called Batavia. They vowed to fight for "one land, the land of Indonesia, one nation, the Indonesian nation, with one unifying language, Indonesian." What united them was their determination to break free from colonial rule.

There was a distinctive detail. On the first day, they had to gather in a shed belonging to the Catholic Youth. While Catholics were the smallest group among them. In 1922, Javanese Catholics had separated from the *Catholic Party*, formed by Dutch Catholics, and formed their own party, the

"Pakempalan Katolik." Thus Catholics were involved in the struggle for independence from the start. A helpful factor was the nine-year exile of young Sukarno in the 1930s to the island of Flores, an almost entirely Catholic island. From then on, Sukarno came to respect Catholics.

On August 17, 1947, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed Indonesia's independence. On the following day, August 18 1945, the founding fathers would install the Constitution for independent Indonesia. And there, something truly significant happened: Although 87 percent of Indonesians were Muslim, the founding fathers agreed that Islam would not be accorded a special status in the Indonesian constitution. The first principle of Pancasila, which states that the Indonesian nation is based on belief in God, was formulated in a way that was open not only to monotheistic religions but also to religions with different conceptions of God, such as Buddhism and Hinduism: "Belief in the One Divine". The entire Constitution contains no reference whatsoever to Islam, the religion of the vast majority. Indonesia was an Indonesia belonging to all Indonesians. It is interesting to note that the second prime minister of the young Republic of Indonesia, Amir Sjarifuddin, was a Protestant. Likewise, the first deputy commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces, T. B. Simatupang, was also a Protestant.

Of course, tensions did persist in later years. So in the 1950s, a group of Muslims, particularly in West Java, declared an Islamic State of Indonesia. Since the late 1970s, Islamic extremism in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or returning Indonesian Muslim fighters from Afghanistan in the 1980s, has been involved in various terrorist acts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, old religious tensions in Kalimantan and Eastern Indonesia flared up again.

However, since the 1970s, something very important occurred: a growingly closer communication between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia. Through figures like Father Mangunwidjaja, Nurcholish Madjid, and, of course, the extraordinary figure of Abdul Rahman Wahid, our Gus Dur, relations have become increasingly close. Since the end of the last century, we, Catholics and Protestants, and both Nadlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—the two largest Muslim civil society organizations in the world—have become close to each other. If there's a problem, we do discuss it together. Several terrorist attacks on churches have been firmly rejected by our Muslim friends. When my colleague, Father Prier, was physically attacked in Yogyakarta, his head was bandaged first by several Muslim women.

What's also interesting: During the riots last August religion played no role at all. Interfaith relations in Indonesia are a success story. Indonesia is so stable because the "Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, ("NKRI"), Based on Pancasila" is supported by an unofficial coalition consisting of the three most important parties in Indonesian society: Nationalists (most of whom are of course also Muslim), non-Muslims, and Mainstream Islam (as represented by Nahdlatul Ulama [NU] and Muhammadiyah). Such good interfaith relations are arguably the most important asset for Indonesian unity.

However, two points should be made. First, even if interfaith relations are good, they should never be taken for granted. These relationships need to be continually cultivated. It's important to remember that the majority doesn't need the minority, but rather the minority needs the majority. When I have the opportunity to speak to parish priests, I always remind them: Dedicate 10 percent of your work time to building relationships with Islamic leaders in your parish. It's so easy in Indonesia. The priest and two or three parishioners visit a local Islamic figure. Silasturahmi. They're always well-received. They introduce each other. Then they invite each other. Incidents of intolerance usually stem from a situation where Christians, f. i. Bataks, Florenese, and Javanese live in an indigenous community of, for example,

Minangs, all of the Christians not speaking Minang. If they want to integrate, they must take the initiative and establish friendly channels of communication.

Second note: The greatest threat to unity, indeed, social cohesion, lies in the experience of injustice. Once again: if 60 percent of the nation feel left behind while those at the top live in luxury, they will riot, and divisions will become sharper again. Therefore, I see the greatest danger to the cohesion of the Indonesian nation and state in ongoing corruption, by powerful oligarchies, and the nepotism of the wealthy. The demand of our students in 1998 to eradicate corruption, collusion, and nepotism, "brantas KKN", have not been met. Unfortunately, the fate of a great nation rests largely in the hands of those who control it. We should not give up hope.

