

**PARLIAMENTARY EVENT ON
INTERFAITH DIALOG ON**

**THE PARLIAMENTARY ROLE IN
PROMOTING INTERFAITH AND
INTERCULTURAL COOPERATION**

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UNIVERSAL ETHICS FOR INTERFAITH COOPERATION THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Three years ago the Organization of the Islamic Conference remembered the 40th anniversary of its establishment. It did so, among other celebrations, by convening an International Conference on "Intercivilizational Dialogue" in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. I had the honour of having been invited to this conference. It was an very positive learning experience for me. Now, three years later the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia and the Parliamentary Union of OIC Member States has convened a conference in Indonesia where the theme of interfaith and intercultural cooperation will be taken up again.

That Nusa Dua has been chosen as the place for this event has its own meeting. About 87 percent of all Indonesians belong to the Islamic faith. But the original inhabitants

of the island of Bali where Nusa Dua is located belong since more than 1800 years to the Hindu faith. Although only a small percentage of about 1.5 of the Indonesian population (about 9 more percent are Christians, the others are Buddhists, Confucians, followers of indigenous and other religions) the Balinese are a very characteristic cultural and religions element in Indonesia. They give an very important contribution to the religious and cultural, so very plural, identity of Indonesia. That the conference has been called to Bali also wants to stress that religious plurality is respected and valued in Indonesia and supported by the constitutional safeguarding of religious freedom. My contribution should be understood in this context.

PARLIAMENT AND UNIVERSAL ETHICS FOR INTERFAITH COOPERATION

The question we want to answer – a question that will always return and always demands a new moral and intellectual effort from us all – is, this I want to talk about, what parliament, parliaments, can do in order to promote Interfaith cooperation. Let me make some preliminary remarks in order to get a focus.

Interfaith cooperation is a bit highbrow. In many places on earth, including a few places in Indonesia, it is already something if members of different faiths do not kill each

other. In order to achieve these the minimal conditions a principled attitude of nonviolence and, secondly, a readiness to accept others in their otherness, thus of tolerance, is required.

But tolerance is only the stepping stone. In order to cooperate positively with each other across differences of religion and beliefs tolerance, peace, or what we name *kerukunan*, are not enough. What has to be developed is the readiness to recognize one another in one's identity, and that means to accept and value positively the other in his or her different religious identity too. Thus a Christian accepts a Muslim brother or sister not in spite of the fact that they are Muslim, but as Muslim.

This has an immediate implication. If what we strive for is positive acceptance of each other then a distinction between "officially recognized" identities, meaning religions, and other identities, thus not recognized identities, is not acceptable. If a country defines as "blasphemy", or as "insulting religion" ("*penodaan agama*") all beliefs that are different of those beliefs officially, or legally, recognized, we have already sinned against the first demand of civilized living together: that we accept the cultural and religious identity of each other. What a person, or a group of persons, believe in is exclusively their business, nobody else has the right to censor this. In this country we can, I am sorry to say this, ob-

serve immediately where this kind of state rejection of religious identities leads: To murder, arson, expulsion, destruction of the foundations of a normal life, stigmatization, brutal discrimination.

Thus before we even enter the question of “inter-religious cooperation” we have to come to terms first with its basic demand, acceptance of each other in one’s identity. We also can see that although there are (always are) problems between the different religious communities, the real problem lies in the attitude towards so called “communities with deviant teachings” (what in traditional Christian language was called “sects”). Talking of tolerance, freedom of religion and inter-religious cooperation, while at the same time officially declaring certain religious convictions as deviant – people have been put in prison because of such “deviant” convictions – is pure hypocrisy. I find it extremely embarrassing when a country with such a flawed “blasphemy law” comes out on world stage promoting a general judicial ban of blasphemy. We have in Indonesian the expression *tahu diri*: feeling what it appropriate to say and what not. Before lecturing others about not blaspheming – I support the criminalization of derision and the willful dirtying of what is holy for other people – *mbok iya* clean up first your own mess. As long as our “law on insulting religion” stands at it is we better be silent on world stage.

Thus the first step in promoting inter-religious cooperation is the willingness to recognize the other without holding back in her or his identity, including her or his religious convictions. But there are two important points: The first is: recognizing each other in one's identity does not mean accepting all kind of behavior. Everybody has to obey the law and the law applies to everybody. But the law has to be in accordance with the human right to freedom in religious belief. Thus as long as a people worship together without disturbing other beyond what is normal, they have the right to follow their convictions. But in the public sphere they have to obey the law. The second point is: Recognize each other in one's otherness, positively value the other person in her – possibly very different religious identity – does not mean to accept as true what the other believes. The point is precisely that we learn to live and work together in spite of having different religious beliefs. Actually, in Indonesia, except for the already mentioned case of “sects”, this works very well and, in fact, Muslim, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians have consistently build up positive relationships among themselves, they have learned that they can trust each other in spite of very different religious beliefs.

STARTING POINT

It is, of course, very laudable and useful to talk about Inter-faith Cooperation. But this seemingly harmless subject gets

its bite if we put it into the context from where it arose. This context is conflict. The outbreak of a growing number of conflicts with a religious background is one of the most dangerous global phenomena since the end of the cold war more than 20 years ago. These conflict, surely, do have almost always a very complex background. They usually do not rise just because of religious differences. But this is of little importance. The dangerous fact is that conflicts between groups with different religious identities tend to suck in religious motivation as we have seen in the two terrible civil wars in Eastern Indonesia between 1999 and 2002 (which are not yet completely exhausted). Thus what begins with economical, political, sometimes cultural and ethnic tensions tends to develop into religious war.

Thus what we are really asking is how religious plurality, instead of deteriorating into tensions, small conflicts and finally real war, can be managed peacefully so that people of different religions can live and work positively together for the benefit of the whole people?

In my presentation I shall, first, point out two contradictory developments, the one negative, the other positive. The first development is a growing incapability to accept diversity, in simple words, intolerance towards diversity is diminishing. The second, highly significant development in Indonesia is a continuous improvement of relations between in-

tellectuals, religious leaders and members of different religions.

Whence the decreasing capability of tolerance? There are, substantially, two factors that, if not checked, will lead to quite dangerous situations. The first factor is the harsh economical, social, and sometimes political situation Indonesian individuals and groups find themselves. Traditional forms of communal group support for the individual (*gotong royong*) have long since evaporated as an unavoidable consequence of modernization. If you live in Jakarta, and the lower your income the more this is true, you have to look for yourself. Survival of the fittest is the law on Jakarta's streets. Automatically you look for support in your ethnic, cultural or religious identity group. In a fight for survival openness to "the other" is a luxury one can ill afford. Thus, for instance, when in the past the building of a church was opposed by the local majority, they would say that they are worried about proselytism, now they just say, we do not want to have you worship in our midst.

The second factor is, of course, growing ideologization or radicalization of religious groups. These groups, some of them very fundamentalists, are actually only a small percentage of the adherents of the respective religion. But their influence is steadily growing. They systematically foster an uncompromising religiosity avers to everything that does

not have their religious label. National and local cultural values do not count for them and, if drawn to the extreme – as for instance in the case of religiously motivated suicide bombers – all humanistic, so called “purely human” norms and considerations are for them just hot air. In the extreme they are prepared to kill in the name of religion.

In Indonesia this growing intolerance towards plurality shows everywhere. For minorities it is increasingly difficult to worship because they either do not get permission for buildings to be used for worship, or if they use such buildings without a full official permit, they are increasingly threatened by vigilante groups of the religious majority. The growing influence of hard-line fundamentalist groups is especially visible in the precarious situation of so called “deviant groups” like the Shiites or the Achmadis. They do not even enjoy the principled tolerance shown towards other “officially recognized” religions. They live in mortal danger, hundreds of them had to flee their houses and live under miserable conditions in public shelters, some of them since many years. The state even does not give them identity cards so that they cannot legally marry and they and their children have therefore no possibility to achieve better positions in society. Shiites and Achmadis are our embryonic Rohingya.

In order to get a balanced picture two facts have to be added. The first is that the potentially more dangerous tensions in this country are not inter-religious ones, but the tensions and frictions outside Java between different ethnicities, especially between indigenous people and migrants, as came to the surface only two months ago in an extremely worrying way in Southern Sumatra where indigenous (Muslim) Lampung people clashed with migrants (Hindu) from Bali. These frictions have often an economic background. But they tend to be sharpened by political interests (but I can not enter these far leading waters about our “autonomy of the religions” and our democracy).

The second point is quite reassuring: In spite of the said difficulties, up to now 95 percent of religious minorities live, communicate, work and worship in peace among their majority neighbors. The is also true specifically for most Christians living on Java, Sumatra and other islands among a Muslim majority. Thus we better say that the worrying developments I have taken up are warning signs. We have to take them seriously but there is no reason why we should not manage our “unity in diversity”, also on the religious front, in a positive way – if we take the necessary measures.

It is obvious that here the state, both the government and parliament as representatives of the people, are demanded. But before I ask what the state can and should do,

let us look first at Indonesian civil society. Civil society is us, the people, both all kind of media (which, in Indonesia, enjoy a very high degree of freedom) and all kind of social bodies and organizations, especially the religious organizations and groups, but also all kind of NGOs, the “Forum of (university) Rectors”, youth organizations, especially religiously oriented ones, and, in Indonesia always very influential, intellectuals. First I want to shortly recount how relations improved during the last 20 years. I shall focus on Christian – Muslim relations because they are the two biggest groups, comprising together 96% of all Indonesians (87% of all Indonesians belong to Islam, 9% to Christianity; I dare to say that if Muslim and Christians can positively work together, all of Indonesia’s problems will be overcome). But then I want to show what unites us, thus what is the basis for us accepting each other and working together positively.

CHRISTIAN – MUSLIM RELATIONS IN INDONESIA

In the following story I am focusing on the Catholic Indonesian community. But most of what I shall say holds also for the Protestant communities. The point of what I am going to recount is that during the last 30 years Catholics learned that they will only feel safe in Indonesia if they succeed in building up trusting relations with mainstream Islam.

This was not always the case. Hundred years ago relations between missionizing Christians and Muslims were characterized by suspicion and fear. It was the Indonesian independence movement and four years of freedom struggle against the Dutch (1945-1949), which brought Indonesian Muslims and Christians together. Thus the first Indonesian Catholic bishop, Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata SJ, by President Soekarno declared a national hero, in 1946 left Dutch occupied Semarang where he was bishop, for Yogyakarta, then the capital of the Republic of Indonesia under President Sukarno. Indonesia's second prime-minister (1947-48) was the tragic Amir Syarifuddin, a Protestant Batak (tragic because he later outed himself as a communist and was killed with other communist leaders after the abortive Madiun revolt in 1948). Catholics always felt close to the Islamic Masyumi party because both were strong supporters of democracy and united by their mistrust of the communists.

But there were for instance no relations between us Catholics and the two big Muslim organizations the (traditionalist) Nadlatul Ulama and the (modernist-puritan) Muhammadiyah. Christians found their political and cultural allies among the so-called "nationalists" (who, politically, were represented by non-Muslim parties), particularly the Javanese *abangan*¹ (the majority of the Javanese who were only very superficially Islamized and culturally far away from or-

thodox Islam of both the “traditionalist” and the “modernist” variant).

But under Suharto things began to change. From the beginning of the 1970s a small group of Catholic intellectuals (among them well known Father Mangunwidjaja) began to doubt the general Catholic line of continued support for Suharto. They were appalled by the ongoing human rights violations and they were convinced that in the long run Christians would only be safe in Indonesia if they developed trusting relations with the Muslims. From there developed, especially through collaboration in NGOs, a growing network of inter-relations between mostly young Christian and Muslim Indonesians holding the same political, social and cultural ideals.

Of great influence was a growing number of open-minded, pluralistic Muslim intellectuals like the late Dr. Nur-cholish Madjid and the towering figure of the later president Abdurrachman Wahid. Although Suharto’s so-called turn to Islam at the beginning of the 1990s saw growing discrimination against Christians, relations nevertheless slowly intensified. During the nineties, visits by Catholic and Protestant ministers at pesantrens and “live-ins” by Catholic seminarians at Islamic boarding schools became more frequent. During the last 16 years close relations first evolved between Nadlatul Ulama and then also with Muhammdiyah. Many

Catholic parish priests have built up relations with local Muslim leaders, although at the grass-root level much more is still left to be done. These positive relations proved themselves during the two brutal civil wars between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Indonesia 1999 – 2002 (with almost 10.000 people killed and half a million displaced). Communications persisted and were very helpful in finally coming to peace agreements. Growing terrorist activities since 1999, abhorred by mainstream Islam, only reinforced this positive development. Only ten hours following the terrible Christmas bombings in 2000 a group of high-profile Muslims² invited Christians and Muslims to form an “Indonesian Peace Forum” that went to the highest authorities of the country demanding that the bombings be thoroughly investigated (they weren’t).³ After the first Bali bombings in 2002, I was, for instance, invited by Muslim students to a common prayer for the victims of the bombing. Hasyim Muzadi, the then head of NU, founded a “National Morality Forum”, headed by himself and Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, where the leaders of the most important Indonesian religions were included. This forum also visited Ambon, place of the worst Christian – Muslim atrocities, where they met with both sides. When we Catholics now have problems with Muslims, we do not go to the police or bring things immediately to the courts, but we go to NU. And although they cannot always solve the problem (f. i. overcome local resistance to the building of a church) they are sympathetic to us and help

enormously, also in preserving a conducive atmosphere. A very well accepted form of dialogue is called “silaturahmi”, “making acquaintance”. One just comes along, introduces oneself and gets acquainted.

OPENNESS AND COMMUNICATION

Thus openness, communication, and, by implication, appreciation for the Muslims are the key factors in making Christians live, worship and give witness in Indonesia’s strongly Muslim influenced society (Indonesia is formally not a Muslim state; state philosophy Pancasila gives all [recognized] religions equal standing). That the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) officially recognized the dignity of other religions, specifically extolling Islam’s belief in one God, has had its influence on Catholic attitudes and, in Indonesia, is known and admired among some Muslim intellectuals.

If we ask what unites us Christians with Muslims, the answer seems twofold. The first is, of course, that even hardline Muslims in Indonesia agree that “Islam” is tolerant and “has nothing against Christians”. This attitude also includes Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians (the officially recognized religions in Indonesia) (but unfortunately not groups with “deviant teachings” like Achmadiyah and the Shiites). This theological basis for tolerance is a basis for communication and

dialogue with Muslims without having first to make sure whether they are “hardline”, “mainstream” or “liberal”.

But what really unites us with Muslims and makes work for peace and progress together possible is the rootedness of Indonesian Muslims and Christians in basic human values that themselves are anchored in Indonesia’s cultural soil, like looking at others in a positive way, helping those in need, honesty, a deeply felt knowledge that envy, hatred, mistrust should not be given room in our hearts, rejection of unjust treatment. Indonesians of all religious denominations, with the exception of hardline fundamentalists, feel also united by the fact that “we all are Indonesians”. As such we are united by political values as expressed in *Pancasila*, like social justice and solidarity, identification with Indonesia, the feeling that we should always behave in a peaceful, civilized way, that we should work together to build an Indonesia that is a peaceful, just, prosperous and progressive society. On the basis of these values we dialogue with each other: About how to improve our relations, resolve problems, promote peace among us, overcome conflict. But we talk also about our common political, social and economic aspirations, about the abolition of poverty, about discrimination, about corruption. Questions like how to handle the threat of narcotics, pornography or the attraction of media manipulated consumerism worry us all. Both NU and Muhammadiyah have expressly proclaimed that for them “the Pancasila

state is the final fitting form of Government for Indonesia” which means that non-Muslim Indonesians are not just tolerated, but accepted as brothers and sisters joint by fundamentally the same values and ideals.

Let me summarize this section of my presentation. We, Christians, Muslim and our brothers and sisters of other religions have to continually develop communication on two levels. The first is on the basis of our common human values, together with the deep awareness that “we are all Indonesians”. The second level is the theological and intellectual level. We have to deepen our understanding of our own religions, for instance on tolerance, on pluralism, in order to be able to face the dangerous challenges of modernity and globalization with its shallow consumerist culture on the one hand and hardline ideologization on the other. The first leads to growing corruption on all levels of our national life - which itself is unsustainable, the second erodes the commitment to human and national values and leads to religious fanaticism, brutality and murder. I would say that we, the great majority of Indonesians, are on the right track.

THE TASK OF THE STATE

What, now, do we Indonesians expect from our state? But let me first shortly explain the pertaining constitutional and legal situation.

The basic decision which programmed Indonesia's way down her history was taken on August 18, 1945, one day after Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesia's independence. On that day the constitutional assembly (PPKI) ratified the constitution for the young republic. As written in the preamble, the state was to be based on five principles Sukarno had first proposed and called Pancasila.⁴ Of which the first was "belief in one God".

This was in fact a crucial decision, because it meant that Indonesia was not to be based on Islam. In fact, Islam did not get any special position in the constitution of 1945 (which essentially is still in force) in spite of being the by far biggest religion in Indonesia. But Indonesia's founding fathers took this generous decision for the sake of the unity of the country. They clearly wanted to make sure that there should be no discrimination of citizens of Indonesia on the basis of their religious conviction. In spite of some discriminations in daily life the principle of non-discrimination has up to this date not been questioned. Religious freedom itself is recognized in sentence 2 of § 29 of the constitution, stipulating that "the state guarantees the freedom of every inhabitant to embrace their respective religion and to worship according to their religion and belief." This was reinforced in paragraph 28 E through amendments made to the "Constitution of 1945" after the fall of the New Order regime.⁵

But only the constitutional situation is satisfying for minorities. In the meantime legal and administrative measures have, at least in some regions, made freedom of religion difficult for minorities. Of direct impact for minorities are two legal documents. The first is the "Common Letter" by the Minister of Religion and of the Interior from 2006 which stipulates that a building of worship can only be erected if (1) 60 members of the surrounding religious majority community give their assent in writing (in fact, this only works if there are financial transactions; one single signature might cost \$ 1.100,- [Rp. 10 millions] while both mayor and district head would receive \$ 5.500,- each) and (2) a *Common Forum of Religious Communities* (FKUB) gives its approval. Even if these conditions are fulfilled, it is quite possible that the Christian community is later accused of falsifying signatures and the whole thing stalls. The second one is the law on insulting religion (*UU penodaan agama*) where paragraph 4 says that "teachings that contradict the teaching of the recognized religions are insulting religion". This law means that a religious group that teaches for its members something that is not in conformity with one of these religions *eo ipso* is blasphemy! On the basis of this law Achmadiyah, the Shia communities and other local sects are persecuted and without any legal protection (It should be mentioned that on the same grounds the Protestants, 20 years ago, got a prohibition of the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mor-

mons which was only canceled in 2001 by President Abdurrachman Wahid).

Now back to our question: What is the task of the state in the matter of a plural society living together peacefully and positively? On principle, the state has the solemn task to make sure that all its citizens, without exception, are protected in their human and civil rights, are able to live a full life as citizens in peace, free from fear. This means that the state has the solemn obligation to protect minorities and to make sure that they can freely and fully participate in the life of the Indonesian society. This fundamental obligation involves two also quite fundamental tasks, and the quality and dignity of a state will be judged from the degree it fulfills these two tasks. The first task is to make sure that the constitution and the law are fully obeyed by all parties in the society, including the state apparatus itself (the world-infamous Yasmin Church case is an embarrassment for a country that, by its founding fathers, was conceived as a *Rechtsstaat* [a state under the rule of law] and explicitly not as a *Machtsstaat*. Although the highest judicial court in the country has ruled that the congregation has the right to use its church the congregation is not allowed to use it; if the state in such a way disregards its highest judicial instance it opens the door to force and violence are the real rulers). Specifically, the state has to show zero tolerance towards religiously motivated violence. That the state has allowed cer-

tain religious groups that are regarded as sects (deviant teachings) be driven out of their homes, their mosques and other places of worship burned down, while some of the community have been killed and the perpetrator then getting ridiculously low penalties is not only a shame, but shakes its own foundations as the civilized organization of a people.

The second task of the state, at least in a state as Indonesia, is the education of its people. Our society is in the midst of fundamental social change as consequence of modernization. Traditionally Indonesians had no difficulties with pluralism. But, as I said before, the harshness of the changes people experience means that they have to learn again how to handle plurality under existing conditions. Thus the state has to educate people that they can accept, and live with, plurality, that they learn again what tolerance means, that violence is under no circumstances an acceptable way of solving conflicts, that they internalize that one may only regard oneself as a mature person if one habitually behaves, under all circumstances, in a civilized way.

THE EXECUTIVE

The primary obligation lies, of course, with the executive, thus the government, both national and local, and with the head of the government. Because it is the government that

makes a state take action. I expect from our government a no-compromise attitude in its zero-tolerance towards violence. Not only actual violence, but hate speeches, incitement to violence are criminal acts and should not be tolerated. And I also expect from the government, specifically also from its head, that it continually encourages people to learn to accept each other. If a government minister can, without being rebuked, declare that the problem with the Shiites can best be solved by them leaving their Shiite convictions and returning to the Sunni fold, this government has already betrayed its commitment to religious freedom. People should be encouraged to protect and assure the existence of those that are different, while, at the same time, not following their way of life and religious practice.

THE LEGISLATIVE

Parliament consists of the representatives of the people. It is essential for the dignity of a parliament that its members, while having been chosen from people with specific political, economic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds, feel responsible for the welfare of all the citizens of the nation. Thus on the one hand parliamentarians have to bring up the anxieties, expectations, demands, rights and interests of the people they represent, on the other hand they have to control government and introduce legislation that makes sure that all citizens, without discrimination, can enjoy their hu-

man and civil rights and fully participate in the life of the nation. This means that parliamentarians are of a sufficiently open attitude, capable of, on the one hand, representing specific interests of their supposed supporters, on the other hand always having the common good of the whole nation, of all its citizens, before their eyes. Parliament ideally should be the trendsetter in the way people of different cultural and religious background communicate in a civilized, positive way with each other.

A final remark. It has to be recognized that the Indonesian state wants to be fair. Both the executive and the legislative do not indulge in sectarian attitudes. In parliament this is true not only for the secular parties, but also for the parties that base themselves on religion. This is a highly important positive heritage from the very beginning of the Republic. But care for minorities is not optimal. Cooperation between religious communities is developing quite well. Which means that Indonesian civil society does its part. From the state we expect background support by making sure the constitution and the law are obeyed and by educating the people on how to handle plurality in a civilized and positive way.

¹ Regarding the “*abangan*” see Clifford Geertz 1960, *The Religion of Java*, Glencoe: The Free Press.

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- 2 Among us was Benny Bikki, the brother of the Muslim leader Amir Bikki killed in the Tanjung Priok massacre 1984, as was Hidayat Nur Wahid, then leader of the Muslim Brotherhood leaning *Justice and Welfare Party* (PKS).
- 3 Which were never seriously investigated. After the Bali bombers had been caught it filtered out that some of these people were involved in some of those Christmas bombings. But there is only one organization that has the technical and logical competence to organize the preparation of 50 bombs (30 of which detonated) within 90 minutes in a region stretching from Medan in North Sumatra and Batam (close to Singapore) until the island of Lombok. If this organization was involved in the bombing it would of course make sense that they were not investigated.
- 4 These five principles are: "Belief in One God, Just and civilized humanism, Indonesia's Unity, People's power (or: Orientation to the people), lead by the guidance of wisdom in common deliberation/representation, and Social justice for the whole Indonesian people".
- 5 § 26 E of the Constitution now runs: "(1) Each person ist free to embrace a religion and to worship according to his/her religion.... (2) Each person has the right to freedom to believe in a faith, to express (his/her) ideas and attitudes, according to his/her conscience."