

ASEAN FOR THE PEOPLES CONFERENCE

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INTER-FAITH TOLERANCE AND ASEAN: INDONESIAN EXPERIENCES

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ASEAN consists of ten countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam plus Timor Leste. It is a political association, but should – as is the case with the European community – become an association of people. But ASEAN'S people are different. Also religiously. Some countries are strongly Muslim majority countries, others are Buddhist and even Catholic. In all ASEAN countries there live religious minorities. If ASEAN wants to become people-centered and people-oriented, obviously religious tolerance, the ability to accept others although they have different faiths, is a precondition. And religious tolerance must become a reality within each country. If in a country relations between different re-

ligious communities are based on openness and tolerance, the religious plurality of ASEAN will be no obstacle to close religions between ASEAN's people.

In other words, that ASEAN does, up to now, not mean a lot for the respective people, has not much to do with religious diversity, but with the fact, that people are already busy enough with the problems in their own countries. What happens in Cambodia is not so interesting for Indonesians in Poso, Maumere or Ambon, what is primarily important is what they have to do with each other and Jakarta. If a country, like Indonesia, succeeds in really becoming one – remember the Sumpah Pemuda, but also the acceptance of Pancasila – Indonesians might also look to Cambodia, Thailand anyway a. s. o. and that these countries have other religious majorities is no problem.

Therefore, in this paper I shall limit myself to Indonesia, and in Indonesia to Christian-Muslim relations because they are the most critical.

I. TRACING CHRISTIAN - MUSLIM RELATIONS IN INDONESIA

Bleak Starting Point

The starting point of Christian – Muslim relations in Indonesia could not have been bleaker. Christians came, missionizing, together with the Portuguese and the Dutch. Islam was,

of course, regarded as the old enemy, and these feelings were reciprocated from the Muslim side. *There always existed deep suspicions and prejudices between the Christian and Muslim communities.* We have a difficult common history which became part of our collective identities, a history of crusades and colonialism, of Arabs and Turks entering Europe. If, then, a conflict involving Christians and Muslims breaks out, it may feed on these suspicions and prejudices, regardless from what caused it.

Getting closer because of basic political positions

It was the Indonesian independence movement and four years of freedom struggle against the Dutch (1945-1949) which brought Indonesian Muslims and Christians together.¹ From this time on there existed very close relations between Muslim and non-Muslim politicians in Indonesia, while the Indonesian military from the beginning did not allow religion to influence their decisions.

¹ Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, was a close friend of Mgr. A. Soegijapranata, archbishop of Semarang, the capital of the province of Central Java. In 1947 when the Dutch returned to Indonesia and tried to subjugate Indonesia again, Soegijapranata took up residence in Yogyakarta, then the capital of the free Republic of Indonesia under Sukarno, instead of staying in Dutch controlled Semarang. Soegijapranata was, after his death, declared a national hero by Sukarno. The airport of Yogyakarta is named after Adisutjipto, a Catholic and national hero because of his exploits against the Dutch in his small DC3, the first aircraft of the Republic; he was shot down in 1947. The second Indonesian prime-minister, Amir Sjarifuddin (1947-18), was a Protestant as was Simatupang, the first chief of the general staff of the Indonesian Army.

I might mention that the three official heroes of the Indonesian Armed Forces: Adisucipto, Slamet Riyadi and Yos Sudarso were Catholics.

During the 1950s cordial relations developed particularly between leaders of the big reformist Muslim Masyumi party and the Catholic party, united by their conviction that Indonesia had to be democratic, and their common suspicion about the true intentions of the ever-growing communist party. During the 60s, before and after the decisive events of 1965 and 1966 (the leftist coup d'état, the subsequent annihilation of the Indonesian communist party, the rise to power of Suharto and the fall of Sukarno), this friendship continued in the close (anti-communist, later Suharto critical) collaboration between the Muslims Student Association (HMI) and the Catholic Students Association (PMKRI).

But outside the political domain communications between pious Muslim (the *santris*) and Christians were almost non-existent. But things began to change. From the beginning of the 70th some Catholic intellectuals began to doubt the general Catholic line of holding on to Suharto who promised that Indonesia would not become an Islamic state. These Catholic dissidents were appalled about the ongoing human rights violations under Suharto's military backed government, and they were convinced that in the long run Christians would only be safe in Indonesia if they developed trusting relations with Muslims. From there developed, es-

pecially through collaboration in NGOs, a growing network of inter-relations between, mostly young, Christian and Muslim Indonesians with the same political, social, and cultural ideals.

Of great influence was a growing number of open minded, pluralistic Muslims. There was the towering figure of Abdurrachman Wahid (later to become the fourth president of Indonesia) who combined a completely modern openness and commitment to religious freedom with being deeply rooted in Javanese Islam, with an inborn contempt for narrowness. Then there was the theologian Nurcholish Madjid. Nurcholish provoked a controversy with his 1970 pronouncement of "Islam yes, Islamic parties no", and his assertion that Islam demanded secularization. *Nurcholish later declared that whoever surrenders to the Absolute according to his or her conviction was a Muslim – Islam meaning "surrender" - and therefore could go to heaven. Through his Paramadina people's academy he transmitted intellectual formation, an open tolerant modern Islam, to thousands of Muslim intellectuals.* Here also has to be mentioned the fact that the Islamic State Universities (IAIN) have since the 70ths taught an open and dialogue minded Islam.

Although the 90s saw growing discrimination against Christians, relations nevertheless slowly intensified. Visits by Catholic and Protestant ministers at pesantrens, "live ins" by Christian students at Islamic places and the other way

around, became more frequent. All our Catholic bishops do now know Muslim leaders closely, and many Catholic parish priests have built up relations with local Muslim leaders, although at the grassroot level much more has still to be done. It was most astonishing that these relations did not suffer during the more than three years of brutal civil war among Christians and Muslims 1999-2002 in Central Sulawesi and the Molukkas.

Growing terrorist activities since 1999 only re-enforced this positive development. After the first Bali bombings in 2002 Muslim students, f. i., invited non-Muslims to a common prayer for the victims of the bombing. Hasyim Muzadi, the head of NU, founded a “National Morality Forum”, headed by himself and Cardinal Darmaatmadja, where the heads of the most important Indonesian religions were included. This forum, for instance, visited Ambon, place of the worst Christian – Muslim atrocities, where they met with both sides. *Only 10 hours after the terrible Christmas bombings in 2000 (later it was found out that they were perpetrated by people connected to the Bali bombers) a group of high-profile Muslims invited Christians and Muslims to form an “Indonesian Peace Forum” that went to the highest authorities of*

the country demanding that the bombings should be thoroughly investigated (they weren't).²

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Of course, there still are problems. Transnational extremist religious ideologies will stay with us. And therefore, occasional terrorist acts, as some years ago in Surabaya.

The same is true for local incidents of intolerance – f. i. disruptions of a Christian worship. They still happen every year. Situations particularly prone to local intolerance are if the minority community, let us say a Christian community, consists of people that do not speak the local language, thus they are newcomers, and are isolated from the original local population.

But also for local situations the decisive point is communication. It is the minority group. I tell Catholic parish priests, they should use 10 percent of their working time to build up relations of friendship with key members of the majority religion. It is so easy in Indonesia. The parish priest, accompanied of two of three members of his community, just knocks at the door of a well know Muslim, says, we want *silaturahmi*. They will always be accepted. They introduce themselves, have easy talk, maybe invite somebody to visit

² Among us was Benny Bikki, the brother of the Muslims leader Amir Bikki killed in the Tanjung Priok massacre 1984, as was Hidayat Nur Wahid, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood leaning Justice and Welfare Party (PKS).

them back. In 75 % of cases the communication will go on, both sides invite each other to some occasion.

Of course, minorities, we Christians, must what we call *tahu diri*. We need the majority, not they us. They should feel at ease and safe with us. We have no hidden agenda. We, the minorities have to be sensitive for what is important for the majority. They should feel respected in their identity. For us Catholics it helps, of course, very much, that the Church declared officially that according to our belief God offers salvation to all people (Lumen Gentium 13), not only those baptized, and that Catholic should respect and highly estimate “what is true and holy” in other religions (Nostra Aetate 2).

Thus, I am optimistic what regards the relations between the religions in Indonesia. The two big civil society organizations Nadlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have repeatedly declared that the Unitary State of Indonesia, as declared in the Proclamation of Independence 1945 and based on the five principles of Pancasila, is the definitive form of political organization for Indonesia. Which means that they accept Indonesia's de facto religious plurality. One could say that Pancasila-Indonesia is stable because it is based on an unofficial coalition of the three main communities of Indonesia: The nationalists (that, of course, are mostly Muslim), the Non-Muslim and the Muslim mainstream, with NU and Muhammadiyah as its core. One of the reasons why mainstream Islam rejects extremism is that NU and Muham-

madiyah realize they, and not the non-Muslim, are the real object of hatred of the extremist because they do not recognize their Islam.

Thus, Inter-faith-tolerance is already a fact in Indonesia. Which will help Indonesia. In Indonesia we accept each other more easily despite our different religions. This certainly will help Indonesia to promote an ASEAN where not only political leaders, but people communicate and the difference in religious adherence is not an obstacle but an enrichment for our communications.

Thank you.