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PANCASILA, BASIS OF TOLERANCE IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

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THE CONTEXT

A united Indonesia had to face two challenges:

- (1) On the more than 1000 islands inhabited lived hundreds of different ethnicities, all with their own local culture, with more than 700 different languages.
- (2) All major religions were represented, but the significant majority was Islam, with about 87% of the population, but Indonesian Muslims had quite different political ideas: some wanted an Islamic state, others wanted a secular state.

ONE NATION

Indonesia, therefore, is not naturally a nation, like Korea, Poland, or Portugal, thus a nation united by a common language and a common culture. As is the case with most nations, Indonesia became a nation because of an *historical process*. Indonesia's nationalism is an **ethical nationalism**. United by opposition to unjust colonial oppression (by the Netherlands) Indonesians felt united nation.

But there is a decisive point. In many of the existing nations the political elite that took over from the former colonial power had to pump national consciousness from above into their people which very often was the collective identity of a majority (as in Sri Lanka the official language and culture is Singhalese and Buddhist).

In Indonesia it was different. Indonesia was already a nation 17 years before she became a state. In 1928 youth from all over what then was *Netherlands India* came together in Jakarta and pledged themselves by a vow to be *one nation*, in *one state*, with *one national language*, the Indonesian language. As language they did not chose the language of the biggest ethnic group, the Javanese language, but Malay. While Malay is a kind of *lingua franca* through the Indonesian archipelago, less than 5% of all Indonesians speak Malay as their mother language. What meant that the national language of Indonesia, based on Malay, did not contain any

shade of the hegemony of a particular ethnicity (different from any other countries where the national language is often the language of the biggest, strongest ethnicity, therefore implying its hegemonic position).

Thus, Indonesian independence was not a gift by the colonial power, but the result of years of struggle by the Indonesian people fighting for their freedom after they declared their independence through the mouths of Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta on August 17, 1945. Thus, one could say: Indonesian nationalism was, and is, a **nationalism from below**.

PANCASILA

When, in June 1945, Indonesians prepared for independence, a fundamental problem came up: With 87% Muslims, should Indonesia become an Islamic (syariah) state, or a secular national state? Sukarno -shortly becoming the first Indonesian president- said: neither. Indonesia should be ideologically based on five principles rooted deeply in the culture of all Indonesians which he called PANCASILA.

The five principles were, after intensive considerations, formulated at the end of the preamble of Indonesia's constitution, decided upon on August 18, 1945:

- (1) (Belief in) One Divinity
- (2) Just and civilized humanism
- (3) Indonesia's Unity
- (4) People's power (or: Orientation to the people), lead by the guidance of wisdom in common deliberation/representation
- (5) Social justice for the whole Indonesian people

One could describe Pancasila as the fundamental values, ideals, and basic norms of political ethics of the Indonesian people. Pancasila is both: its five principles are rooted in the traditional values of the Indonesians, and they are ethics for a most modern nation among the other nations of the world. The first principle on the one hand reconfirms that the Indonesian state is a religious state, on the other hand it guarantees freedom of religion and conscience. The second principle, *just and civilized humanism*, states that relations among Indonesians must be civilized and based on justice and obliges Indonesia to respect human right. The third principle expresses the commitment to the unity of Indonesia, the fourth principle states that the Indonesian states belong to the people, thus to democracy, the fifth principle binds the nation to produce social justice for all.

The crucial importance of Pancasila becomes clear if we remember a most important condition that must be fulfilled if people from quite different ethnicities and religious

orientations are to become one nation in one nation state: *They must recognize each other in their specific identity.* Thus, a Javanese does not have to let go of her Javanese identity to become Indonesian, and the same is true for a Buginese from Sulawesi, a Muslim does not have to become less Islamic by becoming Indonesian and the same holds for Indonesian Catholics. Now, Pancasila is precisely the solemn commitment of the various Indonesian people and communities to recognize each other in each other's identity. By putting Pancasila as the basis of Indonesia's political identity into the solemn preamble to the constitution the Indonesian founding fathers affirmed that in Indonesia people of all religious identities, and, by implication, of all ethnic and cultural identities, were fully recognized as Indonesian citizens with the same civil and human rights and obligations.

This was proved by the Constitution, accepted on the same August 18, 1945, where Pancasila is contained in the preamble. Although 87% of all Indonesians were Muslim, the constitution does not give Islam any special position in it. Thus, it is a constitution all Indonesians, of all religious and, by inclusion, of all ethnic and cultural identities, could embrace. Indonesia was, from the very beginning, the nation state of all Indonesians, without discriminating according to majority - minority.

HOW PANCASILA WORKED OUT

Of course, reality in Indonesia was never as ideal as Pancasila would mean. There have always been discrimination and instances of intolerance. Indonesia has gone through terrible conflicts in her 73-year history as an independent nation. But it is a fact that this improbable nation of thousands of islands, more than 700 languages and all kind of religious orientations has proved itself strongly united (yes, the two most Eastern provinces of Papua and West Papua and, now less, the most North-Western province of Aceh, still have problems). Indonesia's unity has never been questioned.

This also holds for the commitment of Pancasila to accept each other in each other's identity. Even extremist groups do not question that Indonesia belongs to all her people, irrespective of their religion. Although there are cases of intolerance up to this day, but even hard-liner groups never said that religious minorities should not have the same status as members of the big -of course Muslim- majority. Thus, Indonesia belongs to Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, Hindu, Buddhists, and Confucians, they live together, communicate with each other, work together in all kinds of professions, and they can worship, although the building of houses of worship is often difficult for minorities. It must be said that this national consensus does not yet extend fully to what is often disparagingly called "deviant" religious groups, thus

"sects" or movements outside the six officially recognized religions. Thus, there are deficits.

REFORMASI

Pancasila proved itself in 1998 after the resignation of long reigning President Suharto. This was an extremely dangerous situation. Long suppressed conflicts broke into the open. People were asking whether Indonesia would split up like the Soviet Union of Yugoslavia. But it did not happen. It were mainly political leaders with strong Islamic identity, like President B. J. Habibie, Suharto's successor, and his successor President Abdurrachman Wahid who reintroduced democratic freedom, amended the constitution putting democratic safeguards and the most central human rights into it, thus making Indonesia become a democracy based on Pancasila. They rejected all attempts to make Indonesia a religious - meaning of course Islamic - state (compare it to what happened in Egypt after 2010).

Again, Pancasila proved itself: Pancasila on the one hand guaranteed that all (recognized) religions could live fully according to their aspirations, on the other hand made Indonesia the property and responsibility of all Indonesians.

CHALLENGES

Religious peace and tolerance are now threatened by radicalism, exclusivism, and extremism. As is the case in any part of the world. Much will depend on whether Islam, the significant majority religion, can maintain its spiritual power against religious, partly violent, ideologies from the outside. The —extremely complicated, successfully completed— national elections last April have shown that religious radicalism affects only a small minority. But certainly, religion, and that means, of course Islam, will be a key element for the future of Pancasila Indonesia.

Fortunately, relations between the religions, between Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslim are incredibly good. We will overcome extremist challenges if we consistently keep to a way of living our religions that, as Karin Armstrong (*"A History of God"*) formulates it, "fulfill standards of dignity and rationality" while speaking about God.

The fundamental standard for religious conduct is clear: violence and cruelty committed in the name of religion betray religion itself. All religions are genuine only when everyone experiences them as sources of grace and blessing. Because religions claim to speak in God's name, they are credible only when encountering them brings beauty, healing, comfort, inspiration, and reconciliation.

Religions that spread fear reveal that they have become disconnected from God. We should therefore practice our faith so that no one feels threatened or afraid. Religion should foster a society in which every spiritual and religious community, even those whose beliefs differ from ours, feels safe and protected. ■

