

*f*

For Human Rights

Publication of the Department  
for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation  
of the United Evangelical Mission

Volume 24

# PEACE AMONG THE PEOPLE

## Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive Communities

Documentation of the Third International Interfaith Conference  
on Peace and Inclusive Communities  
Jakarta, Indonesia, November 2023

Edited by  
Sabine Hübner, Andar Parlindungan and Jochen Motte



Persekutuan  
Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia  
(PGI)



UNITED  
EVANGELICAL  
MISSION

Copyright ©2024 foedus-verlag, Solingen

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of reprinting, translation, reproduction on microfilms and the storage and processing in data banks.

Cover illustration: MediaCompany – Agentur für Kommunikation GmbH  
[www.mediacompany.com](http://www.mediacompany.com)

Photos: UEM and PGI, Wiki Commons (p.53; p.110), Andreas Harsono (p.61; p.65), Fletcher Harper [GreenFaith] (p.45; p.46)

Publisher: United Evangelical Mission (UEM)  
Rudolfstrasse 137, 42285 Wuppertal, Germany,  
[www.vemission.org](http://www.vemission.org)

Sabine Hübner, Andar Parlindungan and Jochen Motte

ISBN 978-3-938180-86-0

# CONTENTS

Peace Among the People – Introduction	11
Conference Message	
Peace be with you: Discerning Respect and Diversity – The Jakarta Call	13

## INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND PEACEBUILDING

Learning Platforms for Peace: The Role of Interfaith Dialogue in Asia, Europe, and Africa <i>Abednego Keshomshahara</i>	19
Church and Wider Ecumenism: Churches in Indonesia Responding the Call to Peace and Inclusive Communities <i>Jimmy Sormin / Rosiana Indah Purnomo</i>	23
Faith Leaders and Communities Working Together for Peace and Justice: Insights from WCC Interfaith Initiatives <i>Peter Prove</i>	25
Beyond Words: The Need to Translate Islamic Theology into Action for Global Peace <i>Mouhanad Khorchide</i>	29
Experiencing Peace Amidst Conflict: Remarks on the Jakarta Peace Conference 2023 from an Indonesian Jewish Perspective <i>Yaakov Baruch</i>	33

## INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Challenges of Climate Change and UEM programs <i>Volker Martin Dally</i>	39
GreenFaith, A Multifaith Movement for Climate Justice, Calls for Action <i>Fletcher Harper</i>	43

## CASE STUDIES AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

### Indonesia

Challenges and Perspectives of the Muslim Community in Salatiga-central Java for Interfaith Actions  
*Suesthi Maharani* 51

Religious Intolerance, Discriminatory Regulations Against Minorities in Indonesia  
*Andreas Harsono* 53

### Germany

Fragile Solidarity and Interfaith Responsibility: Confronting Antisemitism as an Ongoing Task  
*Antje Menn* 67

The Responsibility of Religions Regarding Questions of Justice and Peace: A Muslim Perspective  
*Bilgehan Asena Ayvaz* 73

Strengthening Coexistence: How the BFmF Association Enhances Muslim Contributions to German Society through Education, Care, Counselling and Encounters  
*Hanim Ezder* 77

### Sri Lanka

Interreligious Dialogue and the Abrahamic Cluster: Insights from Sri Lanka on Engaging Other Worldviews for Justice and Peace  
*W. P. Ebenezer Joseph* 81

Young Clergy as Catalysts for Unity and Peace in Sri Lank  
*Sujithar Sivanayagam* 87

### Philippines

The Impacts of “war on terror” on Interfaith Dialogues in the Philippines  
*Amirah Ali Lidasan* 93

## **Tanzania**

Facing the Challenges of Interfaith Action in Africa: Examples from Tanzania <i>Rebecca Muhoza</i>	99
Five Centuries of Working on Interfaith & Intercultural Relations in Zanzibar: Successes, Challenges and Future Prospectus <i>Issa H. Ziddy</i>	105
Zanzibar Peace Experience and Examples of Interfaith Activities <i>Alex Malasusa</i>	115
Interfaith Dynamics and Environmental Challenges in Zanzibar: Navigating Peace and Coexistence in a Changing World <i>Abdulla Talib Abdulla</i>	121

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Learning to Integrate Differences for Lasting Peaceful Coexistence <i>Kambale J. B. Kahongya Bwiruka</i>	127
Interreligious Solidarity: Building a More Just and Peaceful Life <i>Irma Simanjuntak</i>	131
The UEM Book Series “For Human Rights”	135
List of Contributors	139



*Participants of the Conference with students of the IKAT Theological Seminary Jakarta*





# PEACE AMONG THE PEOPLE

## INTRODUCTION

There are people all over the world working on peace-building, conflict prevention, climate justice and human rights. Learning from each other and from different contexts has great potential and is urgently needed in these challenging times.

In November 2023, more than fifty people from nine countries in Africa, Asia, North America and Europe gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia, for an interfaith conference and a public action with the aim to explore the potential of religions as a driving force for peace and unity.

Representatives of Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Christian communities, as well as interfaith networks, NGOs and academia, took time to discuss challenges, exchange ideas and build networks.

The conference was organized by the United Evangelical Mission (UEM, a Communion of Churches in Africa, Asia and Germany) and the Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (PGI/CCI, the Communion of Churches in Indonesia), under the theme „Peace among the People – Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive Communities”.

Following a first Peace Conference in Wuppertal in 2017 and a second Peace Conference in Zanzibar in 2019, the meeting in Jakarta from 21-23 November 2023 was the third consultation of this format.

All papers from the conference series are available for download: [www.vemission.org/en/downloads/commitment-for-human-rights](http://www.vemission.org/en/downloads/commitment-for-human-rights)



Our interfaith dialogue is based on our common aspiration for a more just and peaceful world. In the context of intensifying violent conflicts, accelerating climate change and the growing threat of religious and political extremism, we see it as a powerful and inspiring sign of hope that people of different faiths sit together to share their visions for a better world.

The papers presented at the conference highlight the need to:

- Identify the potential for peace-building within our religious traditions
- Develop contemporary theologies relevant to the realities of this world
- Give more room to young leaders and grassroots activists
- Turn words into action.

The participants produced a joint statement, “Peace be with you: Discerning Respect and Diversity – The Jakarta Call”, which was presented to the public at an event in the Pantai Indah Kapuk Mangrove Forest in Jakarta. At the event, religious representatives prayed and read the Call for Peace, and 300 mangrove trees were planted as a symbol of hope for a more peaceful and just world. In the Jakarta Call, the participants commit themselves “not only to speak about peace, justice and preservation of creation but to take concrete steps towards peace, more justice and more climate justice.” Suggestions for practical steps are included in the document, which is published in this book along with contributions from participants.

As representatives of the UEM, we express our sincere gratitude to all the partners from different religions who participated in the conference and the public action in Jakarta, thus strengthening the interreligious motivation, cooperation and joint engagement for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

We thank our cooperation partners, the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, the Zanzibar Interfaith Center, and GreenFaith for their important contributions.

We are especially grateful to the PGI for hosting the meeting in the capital of Indonesia, where the challenges of climate change and environmental contamination are a serious and obvious concern for millions of people.

As UEM, we feel motivated and strengthened in our actions and in our support for people in our communion who are engaged in interfaith action, as recommended by the conference.

Sabine Hübner – Andar Parlindungan – Jochen Motte

# PEACE BE WITH YOU: DISCERNING RESPECT AND DIVERSITY THE JAKARTA CALL

## Preamble

We, the 51 participants of the 3rd International Interfaith Conference, gathered at the invitation of UEM and PGI<sup>1</sup> in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 21-23 November 2023.

We are representatives/members of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and NGOs from nine countries around the world.

We share a deep concern about the threat to human life and nature by violent conflicts and climate crisis in today's world.

We are called to unite our wills to take responsibility and action for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

We do this on the basis of our faith in humanity, Holy Scriptures, and according to the mission given by our calling as people of faith.

## Our Lamenting World Is Longing for Peace and Inclusion

Our lamenting world is longing for peace between people, peace with the planet, and respect for the rights of all.

Our meeting took place at a time of violent conflict, accelerating climate change, and the growing threat of religious and political extremism. The ongoing violence between Israel and Hamas and the suffering and death of many civilians grieves our hearts, as does the increase in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. At a time when there are more than 100 other violent conflicts taking place around the globe, the shared vision of a world rooted in peace, where human rights are upheld and communities are protected, propels us forward with a sense of purpose and determination for change.

Next month's UN climate negotiations, whose president is the chief executive of a major fossil fuel corporation, is unlikely to produce progress at the necessary

---

1 UEM (United Evangelical Mission) - PGI (*Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia* or Communion of Churches in Indonesia).

speed and scale. At the same time, the impacts of climate change inflict suffering and loss on ever-larger numbers of people.

And on every continent, threats to our freedom and rights stem from the leaders of governments and influential corporations who continue to rule with greed for resources and power. Aggravating this is the rise of religious extremists and right-wing nationalists that pose a threat to the rights of women, ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities, LGBTQIA people, Indigenous communities, and the planet. It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of the human family and the planet presently hang in the balance.

## **Our Contributions for Peace and Inclusion**

On the basis of our intensive, international, and interreligious dialog, and with regard to the challenging question of how religions can *actually* contribute to peace in the world, we would like to state the following points: Religions can only truly contribute to peace if they respect and value the diversity of humanity on a theoretical and practical level. We agree that diversity must be understood as given by God (or *dhamma*, in Buddhism) in order to meet each other on an equal level in a global context, to show solidarity and to fight against suffering and peace-threatening situations together in different contexts, and to form inclusive communities.

However, the recognition and appreciation of diversity does not only refer to people. Appreciating God-given (or *dhamma*-given, in Buddhism) diversity also includes plants, animals, and all of nature and requires all of us to make a serious commitment to their preservation. Religious actors must become practical, which means that we must take action in our communities, stand up to various political interests and claims to power, and consider ethical issues where politics does not. Religious actors, all of us, must therefore engage rigorously with politics in the global context when it comes to issues of peace and the preservation of our environment for generations to come. This is our responsibility as believers, beyond the question of which religion we belong to.

## **A Call for Peace and Inclusive Communities**

Trusting into the reconciling, transforming and encouraging power of God (and *dhamma*, in Buddhism), we call our respective faith communities, countries, and contexts to re-orient priorities to the following commitments:

- to pray and work for world peace, especially for ceasefires and reconciliation

in conflict areas such as Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine, the DR Congo as well as West Papua; and to urge the international community to implement cessation of violence and open corridors for the entry of humanitarian aid in the affected areas;

- to explore scriptural texts and teachings that promote justice and peace and open space for dialog to discuss problematic interpretations of religious texts that undermine religious freedom, the rights of many, and the protection of the earth;
- to insist on the continuing importance of the principles of human rights and human dignity, to demand that all governments fulfil their legal and moral responsibility to ensure the unbiased and consistent application of these principles in all contexts, and to refuse to be misled by malevolent politicians and demagogues<sup>2</sup>;
- to insist that global governments and political actors abolish discriminatory laws and regulations and remind them of their duty to work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation;
- to open spaces for dialog between polarized people and transform our societies towards inclusive communities, embracing diversity, gender justice, and care for the integrity of creation;
- to provide responsible education and encourage interfaith communities to accelerate learning programs of interfaith and intra-faith dialog specifically at the grassroots level;
- to be with young people to strive for peace and the integrity of creation through inclusive education, local wisdom, digital technology and to encourage them to participate in the struggles of the people;
- to build an environmentally just society through greening the operation of our religious facilities and our own lives, advocacy with political leaders to rapidly phase out fossil fuels and ensure universal access to clean energy, and participation in civil society movements for climate justice.

We commit ourselves not only to speak about peace, justice, and preservation of creation, but to take concrete steps towards more peace, more justice, and more climate justice.

---

2 Peter Prove, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/at-peace-conference-in-jakarta-wcc-shares-positive-examples-of-interfaith-action-for-peace>

## Supporting Scriptures

*“Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world”*

**- Sanhedrin 37a - Judaism**

*“For this reason; We decreed for the Descendants of Israel that whoever kills a human being [...], so it shall be as if he had killed all mankind; and whoever saves the life of one person, is as if he had saved the life of all mankind; [...]”*

**- Sura 5:32 (al-Maida) - Islam**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God”*

**- Matthew 5:9 - Christianity**

*“7 He raised the sky high, and has placed the scale, 8 so that you do not defraud the scales, 9 and weigh with justice, and skimp not in the Balance”*

**- Sura 55:7-9 (ar-Rahman) - Islam**

*“Leave the path of hatred. Choose the path of love”*

**- Dhammapada 5 - Buddhism**

**INTERFAITH DIALOGUE  
AND PEACEBUILDING**



# LEARNING PLATFORMS FOR PEACE:S THE ROLE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN ASIA, EUROPE, AND AFRICA

*Abednego Keshomshahara*

## 1. Introduction

The Bible gives us the mandate and responsibility to make sure that peace prevails among us and between us and all people. Hebrews 12:14 puts it very clearly that we should make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. Living in peace with everyone means that we should be inclusive, not exclusive, we should be harmonious and love one another without discrimination, segregation and hatred. Many major religions have a special greeting of wishing peace to all people. Jesus often greeted his disciples by saying “Peace be upon you”, the same greeting is echoed in Islam: “Wa salaam aleyikum- Aleykum salaam”. The same greeting is found in Judaism. Wa Shalom Alekemu. It is very unfortunate that religious people who proclaim peace with their mouths do not reveal peace in action and life at large. Many conflicts and wars happen among religious people and are waged by people of religions. In most cases, politicians use religions to reach their goals, in other words, some politicians abuse religion to realize their political ends or goals. The effects of these wars are enormous like death, hunger, illiteracy, backwardness, long term hatred, etc. In all continents, Africa, Asia and Europe, there are people of different religions and cultures, especially nowadays when globalization has led to rapid movements of people. Such movements and contacts are embedded with both positive and negative effects of encounter.

It is in this context that the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) makes every effort to ensure that Christians and community members of different religions and cultures are given the opportunity to discuss issues through interfaith dialogues aimed at living together peacefully.

## **2. Need for Interfaith Dialogues in Asia, Europe and Africa**

### *2.1 The Context of Asia and the Need for Interfaith Dialogue*

When we start with Asia, I can say that almost all big religions originate from the continent of Asia. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have their origins in Asia. This blessing comes with the challenge of failure to realize a harmonious peaceful life. The majority tends to suppress the minority, and sometimes the minority tends to react in a way that leads to more catastrophe on their side. Hence, the Asian continent needs more interfaith dialogue for coexistence and development, given the presence of many religions on the continent. Each religion has some potential for peace and harmonious living. Such aspects of peace should be emphasized rather than emphasizing the differences. Such efforts should go hand in hand in collaboration with governments, which are mandated to ensure peace and harmonious life among people of different religions and cultures. Governments ought to be impartial in order to serve all without siding with one side at the expense of others.

### *2.2. The Context of Europe and Need for Interfaith Dialogue*

Given the high level of development and democracy in Europe, many people tend to migrate from Africa and Asia to Europe in search of green pastures (employment), while others go there as refugees who flee the wars and political instabilities. As a result, Europe is receiving many migrants each year, to the extent that they have become a burden to the economies of Europe. Moreover, some migrants commit criminal acts like killing people, and as a result, the right-wing people in Europe are hating all the foreigners to the extent of harming some of them. The challenge is that not all the crimes are committed by foreigners, but because of the fallacy of generalization, all foreigners are hated by right-wing extremists. Again, there is sometimes a fear that foreign religions will dominate the accustomed religion. In such a context, there is a need for inter-religious dialogues through which prejudices and stereotypes can be overcome. These prejudices exist not only among Europeans but also among foreigners. It is only through interfaith dialogue that harmonious, peaceful living can be attained.

### *2.3 The Context of Africa and the Need of Interfaith Dialogue*

Africa has two main religions that are competing to get followers. Both religions were imported by Arabs (Islam) and by western missionaries (Christianity). In Africa, there are families in which both religions have members. These family members are together during secular and religious festivals, funerals and development projects for communities. They use the same schools, hospitals, sports

grounds, sources of water, etc. Hence, living together in peace is of cardinal importance. However, there are extremists on both sides who choose the radical texts of their books to radicalize followers, who struggle to make sure that everybody should follow their ways. Further, some radicals may even harm other people or burn the places of worship, things that trigger violence, hatred, etc. Other conflicts arise over the question who should slaughter animals for butchery. Other conflicts arise from intermarriages between people of different faiths. In some cases, conflicts arise from accessing political power during elections.

Through UEM intervention in collaboration with UEM member churches, awareness for peaceful living and interfaith dialogues have been initiated whereby people of different religions meet, discuss, know each other, and focus themselves on peacebuilding. Some church and mosque leaders teach youths together in schools and colleges about the relevance of interfaith dialogue and harmonious life among people. Such efforts ought to be supported. Also, there should be platforms of learning from each continent about what is done to enhance peace among people of different religions and backgrounds.

### **3. Conclusion**

I am thankful to the UEM department that deals with justice, peace and the integrity of creation for its commitment to run seminars and conferences pertaining to interfaith dialogues and interreligious peacebuilding worldwide. Peace conferences have already been held in Europe and Africa at a UEM level. Now we are here in Indonesia for the same peace conference. I have a firm conviction that such conferences will produce more fruit regarding peacebuilding worldwide. Such conferences are a kind of provoking UEM member churches to continue with peacebuilding at various levels, from the grassroots, where the majority lives, up to the national and international levels, where policies are made.



*Speakers from left: Sumanarathana Thero Rev Bulumulle, Rev. Volker Dally, Hanim Ezder, Bishop Dr. Alex Malasusa, Paul Yuval Adam, Rev. Dr. Andar Parlindungan  
Video-Address by Rev. Dr. Jochen Motte during the opening session*

# CHURCH AND WIDER ECUMENISM: CHURCHES IN INDONESIA RESPONDING THE CALL TO PEACE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

*Jimmy Sormin / Rosiana Indah Purnomo*

It is with great pleasure and honour that the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) collaborates with the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) to advocate for the establishment of a more inclusive and just community. This advocacy was actualized through the organization of “Peace among the People - Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive Communities,” on November 19-23, 2023.

The challenge of coexisting in diversity has long been a focus for churches in Indonesia. Diversity is an inherent and divine blessing bestowed upon Indonesia. Embracing this ethos, PGI fulfills the mandate of its member churches by fostering relationships, friendships, and cooperative initiatives with other religious and faith-based institutions, including Islamic, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and indigenous religious entities.

PGI staunchly upholds the belief that the earth is the shared abode of all creation, and the church is thus called to actively pursue the welfare of all existence. In line with this belief, PGI forges relationships and collaborations with indigenous communities, advocates for environmental conservation, and supports other marginalized groups. Notably, the “Church Friends of Nature (Gereja Sahabat Alam)” program has been developed to encourage churches to guide Christians in adopting a church life and culture oriented towards environmental sustainability. The involvement of young people, children, and women plays a significant role in PGI’s various service initiatives in these areas, enriching the institution’s perspectives and ethos as an ecumenical entity.

Furthermore, PGI acknowledges its pivotal position as a religious institution in Indonesia. As such, PGI not only engages in cooperation with the government but also adopts a critical partnership role, providing prophetic guidance to the government and relevant stakeholders through moral and ethical discourse pertaining to Indonesia’s national journey and the multifaceted social and community challenges it faces.

From this vantage point, PGI expresses gratitude to UEM for initiating the “Peace among the People” endeavor. This conference serves as a platform for

dialogue, mutual learning, and the development of ideas and concepts toward a more inclusive and equitable world. The collective activities, culminating in a joint effort to safeguard the earth through mangrove planting, underscore our unified commitment, transcending cultural, religious, and national boundaries, to the preservation and nurturing of the earth as our shared home. This collective commitment unites us in a global movement for environmental sustainability, and it is hoped that this event will inspire all participants to continue its vital work within their respective spheres of influence.

# FAITH LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE: INSIGHTS FROM WCC INTERFAITH INITIATIVES

*Peter Prove*

Last week I took part in a meeting of the WCC Executive Committee in Abuja, Nigeria, a context in which inter-communal violence is a widespread concern and a daily reality. In a statement<sup>1</sup> we adopted on the situation in Nigeria, we highlighted – among other things – the consequent importance of inter-religious initiatives for peace and social cohesion. Indeed, the WCC, together with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (Jordan) and Christian and Muslim partners in Nigeria, has sponsored the establishment of the International Centre for Interfaith Peace & Harmony (ICIPH) in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, for this reason.

The interreligious challenge and the interreligious response is the similar in many other contexts in which the WCC is engaged or concerned. One emblematic example is Iraq. One of the first missions I undertook after starting work at WCC was to northern Iraq in August 2014, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Mosul to the so-called ‘Islamic State’. In a conversation with an Iraqi Kurdistan government minister in Erbil, reflecting on the origins of that crisis, he observed that “if we were to base our opinions and actions on what we learn at school, we would think that there was no history in this country before Islam, and that there are no communities in Iraq other than Muslims – obviously a poor basis for living together in a diverse society.”

This conversation planted the seed for a project in which the WCC has been convening representatives from all the religious communities and components of Iraq – all the Christian churches, Muslim Shia and Sunni, Yazidis, Kakai’is, Shabak, Turkmen, Jews – to revise the official school curriculum so as to present the historical and current diversity of Iraqi society, in the interests of greater social inclusion and cohesion. We are very proud that the Iraqi government has

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-nigeria-in-the-regional-context-of-africa>

accepted and adopted this revised curriculum, and that teachers are now being trained for its utilization in schools nation-wide.

WCC has also been privileged to participate in inter-religious advocacy for nuclear disarmament, along with secular members of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Advocates from different religious communities played key moral leadership roles in the campaign that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). This treaty is establishing a new normative principle in international law against not only the use of nuclear weapons but also the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer and threat of use of this most catastrophically, indiscriminately and intergenerationally destructive category of weapons.

Another very positive example of interfaith action for peace relevant to the context here in Indonesia is the 'Call for Peace in the Land of Papua'<sup>2</sup> recently issued by an inter-religious Eminent Persons Group, comprised of the former First Lady Ibu Sinta Nuriyah, Alissa Wahid (Nahdlatul Ulama); Rev. Gomar Gultom (PGI), Marzuki Darusman (former Attorney-General of Indonesia), and Catholic Bishop Siprianus Hormat. (PGI General Secretary Rev. Jacky Manuputty and the first ever indigenous Papuan Catholic Bishop Yan You also joined in the launch of this initiative.) The call summons the parties to the conflict in West Papua back to the negotiation table. Members of the group have offered a frank assessment of the situation in Papua and the failures of the Indonesian government to address the escalating conflict and the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in the region.

Both the content and the 'body language' of such initiatives offer extremely precious examples and leadership towards sustainable and inclusive peace, in an increasingly divided, confrontational and conflict-affected world.

At its 11th Assembly held in Karlsruhe, Germany, in September 2022, representatives of the WCC's member churches reflected on the current perilous state of the world, and adopted - among other important policy statements - a statement on "The Things That Make For Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity"<sup>3</sup>. The Assembly observed that ours is a time of "renewed and escalating global polarization, reconfiguration of governance and geopolitical alignments, division, confrontation, and militarization... with all the appalling risks that attend this context." It also acknowledged grave concerns about "the instrumentalization of religious language, authority, and leadership to justify,

---

2 <https://en.jubi.id/collective-calls-for-humanitarian-ceasefire-in-papua-urging-immediate-peaceful-dialogue/>

3 <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-things-that-make-for-peace-moving-the-world-to-reconciliation-and-unity>

support or ‘bless’ armed aggression or any kind of violence and oppression, in sharp contrast to the Christian calling to be peacemakers”.

These threats to peace, the Assembly declared, “fundamentally violate the core tenets of the Christian faith” and stressed that “[t]he calling to dialogue, encounter and the pursuit of mutual understanding is the very essence of ecumenism and central to peace-making.”

In its response to these realities, the Assembly expressed its rejection of “the polarization and division of the human community” and declared the churches’ “commitment... to grapple with the threats and challenges to peace, justice, human security and environmental sustainability through dialogue, encounter, the pursuit of mutual understanding, and cooperation, rather than through exclusion and confrontation.”

Importantly for our current discussion, the Assembly strongly affirmed “the commitment of the WCC and its member churches to peace-making through inter-religious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, as a key contribution to countering the forces of division, confrontation, polarization, and injustice”.

Indeed, religion is one of the many diversities in the human family that has in some places and at some times been instrumentalized by divisive forces. But to my knowledge it’s very rarely the case, if ever, that a conflict can be said to be fundamentally religious in nature. Much more often, ethnic divisions or political ambitions lie behind conflicts that are presented in religious terms. Even more important than for religious leaders to guard against being instrumentalized in this way, and to act together to counter it and to provide a more positive example for their communities.

A tragically current case in point: As part of its reaction to the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine and the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe there, the WCC Executive Committee meeting in Abuja refuted “all those who seek to portray the current conflict in religious terms, misusing scripture to justify violence, killing, cruelty and oppression; we reject and denounce all such efforts to distract from the root causes of the conflict in the region.”<sup>4</sup> In such a desperate and acutely dangerous situation, Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders must work together to prevent religion being deployed as a weapon in this terrible war.

Returning to the WCC 11th Assembly statement, the Assembly was careful to describe “The Things That Make For Peace” much more comprehensively than the simple cessation of violence. Indeed, it called for “greatly increased in-

---

4 <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-war-in-palestine-and-israel>

vestment by governments and other actors in the foundations of true human security and global stability, including for urgent action to achieve climate justice and to avert the threat of catastrophic climate change, and for a just transition to renewable energy, for the elimination of extreme poverty, for sustainable development, and for measures to control rampant inequality... all of which if not addressed will fuel conflict.”

In this regard, I would like to highlight an important initiative – the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)<sup>5</sup> – which seeks to bring an interfaith constituency of faith-based actors together with governments and UN agencies, to promote partnerships across these sectors for accelerating progress towards the SDGs. It is a means of trying to engage the capacities of the faith leaders and communities for building the “foundations of true human security and global stability”.

Finally, I observe that the many different conflicts that have proliferated around the world in recent times are symptomatic of one common malaise: declining respect, even open contempt, for the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. These instruments of international law were negotiated in the aftermath of the Second World War precisely to protect the world from the sort of horrors that we are now seeing again in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, and elsewhere. Is our collective memory really so short? How can we be so ready to unlearn the lessons of the past, and to abandon principles created for the protection of all members of the global community?

International humanitarian and human rights law offer our best and only protection against the brutal rule of ‘might makes right’. In the current geopolitical context, it should be the common first priority of faith leaders from every religious tradition to insist on the continuing importance of these principles, to demand that all governments fulfil their legal and moral responsibility to ensure the unbiased and consistent application of these principles in all contexts, and to refuse to be the pawns of politicians and demagogues.

---

5 <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/>

# BEYOND WORDS: THE NEED TO TRANSLATE ISLAMIC THEOLOGY INTO ACTION FOR GLOBAL PEACE

*Mouhanad Khorchide*

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for this opportunity to reflect together on the role of our religions for peace. Especially in the current times, when war is being waged in the name of religions, it is important that representatives of different religions come together at the same table and demonstrate a common desire for a global life in peace.

However, this should not remain just *a desire* or *a wish*. Peace needs to be lived and experienced. It is not enough for representatives of religions merely to make statements about peace. I am therefore concerned with *how* our religions can *actually* improve the world.

I would like to address this question from my perspective as a Muslim theologian. I will summarize my positions in the following arguments, referring specifically to my religion, Islam:

**Argument 1:** Before discussing Islam's contribution to global peace, we need to ask ourselves: Which Islam are we talking about? There is a wide range of interpretations of Islam. Supporters of IS are Muslims, the Grand Sheikh of Azhar is a Muslim, opponents of IS are also Muslims. Thus, not every interpretation of Islam will contribute to peace.

**Argument 2:** The interpretation of Islam that can in fact contribute to peace must critically reflect on some positions within Islamic theology: Which concepts of God are we dealing with in our religion? Which God do we believe in? A selfish God, who is only concerned with himself, or a loving God, who cares for mankind?

The Qur'an tells an impressive story about the creation of man. In Sura 2 from verse 30 onwards, the story of Adam is told. The word Adam means "man" in Arabic. This entire narrative is symbolic of the significance of man. When God created Adam, the Qur'an says, God asked the angels to prostrate – but this time *not* before God, but *before Adam*. Before man. Thus, God took two steps back, to make room for man. The angels prostrated before Adam. Only one refused, saying that he had no problem prostrating to God, but he had a problem

prostrating to man – Why? Because man is different. He was created from earth, not from fire like him. What has become of this being? According to the Koranic narrative, God threw him out of paradise, and he became the arch-devil Iblis. From angel to devil. He had no problem with God, but with recognizing the other in his or her otherness. He had a problem with recognizing diversity.

**Argument 3:** Recognizing diversity in creation is the way to get closer to God. And vice versa, the non-recognition of diversity is the way of the devil.

**Argument 4:** Recognizing diversity means that there are *different* pathways to God. Different religions and world views are paths to God. The Qur'an emphasizes that *it is God's will* that there should be different religions.

**Argument 5:** Recognizing diversity does not mean randomness. The main criterion of truth is contained in the story of Adam's creation: *Every* religion or worldview that *believes in* and *honors* man, is a true path to God. In other words, we can say that the path to God cannot ignore our fellow human beings. God is not concerned with himself, but with people. We are not dealing with an egoistic God, but with a God who loves people.

**Argument 6:** This opens up a space to reflect on the concept and the practice of “worship” in a new way:

Worship is service to God's creation. One serves God by serving his creation. The following story by the Prophet Muhammad sums up the idea that worship can be realized in its practical dimension:

“In the hereafter, God will ask a man: ‘I was sick and you did not visit me, I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, and I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. The man will then ask in surprise: ‘But you are God, how can you be sick, thirsty or hungry? Then God will answer him: ‘On such and such a day, an acquaintance of yours was ill and you did not visit him; if you had visited him, you would have found me there, with him. On one day an acquaintance of yours was hungry and you gave him nothing to eat, and on another day an acquaintance of yours was thirsty and you gave him nothing to drink.’” (Hadith 18, 40 Hadith Qudsi)

This story is reminiscent of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, which contains a similar story and emphasizes at the end: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40b).

**Argument 7:** The *measure* and *indicator* of religiosity is therefore how much of God's love becomes a *perceivable reality* through my actions in the world. The Qur'an emphasizes in Surah 5:54 that God created people because he loves them and they love God. Accordingly, the God-human relationship is not a relation-

ship of submission, but a relationship of love. However, loving God means being the hand of love *here and now* in the world.

**Conclusion:** Religions *can* contribute to global peace – *if* they define themselves as *instruments of love* and call their followers to be hands of love and mercy.

Most believers will have no problem with these thoughts, and yet we ask ourselves today: where is the contribution of religions to global peace? Why does the theory sound so nice, but as soon as we look at the practice, it is often overshadowed by war, poverty and misery?

**I answer this question in argument 8:** Religions must take their political mission seriously. As long as religions *only preach* love, mercy, peace and justice, but *do nothing* to put them into practice in the real world, they will remain a purely abstract theory. Religions must thus engage political. This, in no way, means that they should strive for power, but rather that they implement their desire for love and peace through concrete action.

**Argument 9:** In the course of Islamic history, Islam has repeatedly been instrumentalized for political purposes and to justify power. Although religions have a political mission to transform society in a more peaceful and just way, they must at the same time protect themselves from any form of instrumentalization and abuse of power. This can best be achieved, if religions separate themselves *institutionally* from political institutions, but not *morally*.

**Argument 10:** Religions are a source of identity, here Muslims, there Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus ... The diversity of identities is part of human history; identities only become problematic when they think they are *better than other identities*. The task of nation-states, as well as the global community today, is to create spaces in which people of different religions and world views can *meet as equals* in respect. This begins in the education system, in kindergarten and at school.

It is the small, concrete steps that are ultimately crucial as to *whether* and *how* religions can realize their contribution to global peace.



*Speakers from left: Rev. Dr. Dyah Krismawati, Prof. Dr. Syafiq Mughni, Meryne Warah, Abdulla Talib Abdulla, Prof Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide, Peter Prove, Bishop Dr. Abednego Kehomshahara  
Dr. Fransina Yoteni, peace activist from GKI-TP in Westpapua/Indonesia*

# EXPERIENCING PEACE AMIDST CONFLICT: REMARKS ON THE JAKARTA PEACE CONFERENCE 2023 FROM AN INDONESIAN JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

*Yaakov Baruch*

It was with feelings of extreme worry that I finally decided to continue attending the Peace Conference in Jakarta, organised by UEM, PGI etc. Of course this is not the first time that I have attended an interfaith event, but to be honest, the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has been going on since October 7th, 2023, has really brought serious problems to the Jewish Community around the world, as there has been a very high increase in anti-Semitism against the Jewish Community and Jewish facilities everywhere.

Of course, it was not easy to get permission from my family to travel in the midst of a situation that was still very heated, considering that Jakarta is a city known for its strong support for Palestine, so it was also quite risky if someone discovered the presence of a Jew in Jakarta.

But everything turned out to be untrue when I arrived in Jakarta, where the atmosphere I was worried about was almost completely invisible, because the atmosphere in Jakarta was very safe and did not show an atmosphere that was uncomfortable for Jewish visitors, I even met a Jew who was part of the delegation from Germany, and we exchanged stories about the background of life as a Jew both in Germany and in Indonesia.

The atmosphere of the first night of the Peace Conference began with introductions and short interesting conversations between the participants who came from various backgrounds, each participant came with a very interesting story about the life of their community in their respective countries, from there we learned about the life of Christians in Africa, Muslims in Europe etc.

In addition, the opening of the conference was filled with various very warm moments, where we could see the beauty of Indonesian dancing, as well as listen to speeches by various peace figures and, of course, the German Ambassador Ina Lebel.

Throughout the event we kept getting new insights from each resource person, especially in the group dialogues where stories we had never heard before

slowly started to emerge, ranging from human rights issues to how the way we care for nature is in accordance with the teachings of each religion that we adhere to.

I realized that during the event there was something that was really bothering all of us, which was the war between Israel and Hamas, so on several occasions we tried to discuss it with various emotional feelings that existed in each of the participants present. I know these have not been easy discussions to have because the situation itself is really very heart-breaking. So I respect the different opinions that exist and try to understand those opinions from different points of view, because we have to understand the feelings of the person we are talking to when we are discussing with them so that we can understand what we are discussing.

We know that no one wants war, and even if there is war, it is something that must be avoided immediately because in war it can be said that there are no winners because there will be many casualties on both sides. War only brings destruction and trauma to civilians. It will only add to the trauma of children who have lost their parents and parents who have lost their children.

I am very grateful that we are able to hold this Peace Conference in the midst of a very heated situation due to the conflict between Israel and Hamas, because at least this Peace Conference can bring a warm atmosphere and can reduce various tensions that exist, especially in relations between the Jewish Community and the Muslim Community throughout the world.

There was something very touching during the event when I met one of the representatives of the Muslim delegation from Germany, who was a professor coming from Palestine. We discussed a lot about Israel, Palestine, the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Europe, etc., and I didn't forget to hug the professor, because I wanted to consider him a cousin, or Bnei Dodim in Hebrew, because we come from the same source, namely Avraham Avinu or Prophet Abraham, we don't have to be enemies just because of this conflict.

I had a new experience when I attended a mangrove planting event in Jakarta, because planting trees is something that is required in Judaism as part of Tikkun Olam or repairing the world, because by planting trees we help to green the world, which is very important for the sustainability of our nature.

This world has had enough of the various tribulations that exist and it is an obligation for us, whatever our religion or background, to take good care of it through various positive activities that can preserve this universe so that in the future our next generation can inherit a world that is environmentally friendly, and I believe this is part of the teachings of various religions in this world.

Gathering people from various backgrounds is not an easy task, so I am amazed that UEM has organized this activity, because it is like an oasis in the

middle of a very hot and scorching desert. Apart from the extraordinary discussions during the event, there were also warmer follow-up discussions among the participants who gathered at the Hotel after the sessions.

There were many ideas and concepts that had only crossed our minds before that we were finally able to discuss and take action on. For example, the idea of a Jewish Muslim Committee in Indonesia, which I had wanted to set up for several years, was finally realized during the Peace Conference, where I and several colleagues from Muslim communities agreed to establish. With this Committee, we expect to contribute to making the life of the nation more intelligent through education.

I hope that in the future there will be more interfaith activities, especially like this Peace Conference, so that good relations can be established between religious believers both inside and outside Indonesia. We have had enough of various propaganda that likes to pit Indonesian society against each other.

I am grateful that we have Pancasila, which is powerful and has so far proven to maintain the identity of our nation, so that the life of religious communities can continue well in Indonesia, although there are still small frictions or various incidents of intolerance that occur in Indonesia, where things are very unfortunate for various parties.

On this occasion, I would like to thank UEM for inviting me to be one of the participants of this Peace Conference, this will be a very valuable experience for me. I hope that UEM will always be at the forefront of bringing peace to the earth.

Thank you UEM, G-d bless you.



*Working group discussion*

**INTERFAITH DIALOGUE  
IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**



# CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND UEM PROGRAMS

*Volker Martin Dally*

Honorable participants coming from South and North and East and West, dear sisters and brothers who believe in a supernatural power!

First of all I thank GOD that he has granted me to be with you these days. And thereafter I thank the steering committee for inviting me to be part of the program.

After the years of the pandemic, it feels good to finally meet in person again and to be able to embrace each other. I assume we all experience it that way.

And at the same time, we all put ourselves in a difficult situation, because we know that our meetings and air travel also contribute to the increased emission of CO<sup>2</sup>.

When we use the word creation today, we as Christians cannot but express our concern for it. For we experience the cry of creation in so many places. Please allow me to express it briefly with personal examples.

In November 2008, I personally encountered the instant consequences of climate change for the first time in a church service. I had traveled to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) from Indonesia to get to know another member church of UEM while I was placed as a missionary in Indonesia. On one of the days there was a church service in the late afternoon in a village on the coast near Cebu. And during the service, water came into the church building. Naive as I was, I thought of water damage somewhere. But it turned out quickly, the entire area in which the church was located was about 3 cm under water. In the discussion of that fact it became clear very quickly that the rise in sea level as a result of climate change was responsible for this. The Philippines is one of the countries in the world most affected by climate change. Our member church, like all the local people, are increasingly suffering from natural disasters as a result of climate change. Typhoons and gigantic rainstorms are shaking the country.<sup>1</sup>

The ocean is warming up and the rise of the sea level by about 1 meter threatens not only Cebu, but hundreds of towns and villages. Indonesia also suffers

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/11/06/1966508/30-years-rising-seas-will-threaten-philippine-cities-towns-home-68m>

drastically because of that fact as a result of human exploration of the earth. Estimations have determined that about 15 million people will have to be relocated if something is not done soon.

Change of location to northern Hesse in Germany where I will live after retirement: On June 22, this year, very heavy hailstorms hit northern Hesse. Hundreds of houses have experienced glass and roof damage, streets were under water. Insurance companies will take care of all that.

But what insurance cannot regulate is our food security. Within hours, a video clip of a young farmer standing in despair in front of a destroyed soybean field was viewed millions of times. “What we’re seeing here is the climate crisis,” he says in the video. “This is not something unforeseen that just happens and that we can’t control, ... this is man-made. ... We have to act now. If it continues like this, then there is no stable future. For anyone.”

Only in the two month of May and June this year in the region of Hesse in Germany, hailstorms and heavy rains caused damage in the agricultural sector summing up to 20 Million Euro.<sup>2</sup>

It will quickly become clear to everyone that agriculture in particular is suffering extremely from climate change. When the weather goes crazy, agriculture can no longer keep up. In Indonesia, we are experiencing that the once reliable alternation of rainy seasons with dry weeks is no longer reliable, making rice cultivation much more difficult to plan.

If in one region, for example in Europe, the fields are drowned and destroyed by massive rainfall, they are now increasingly drying out even in the once reliable region of Central Africa.

Estimations go up to 2 billion people who already currently face food insecurity around the world because of climate change.

Around the world, no doubt about that, climate change is already causing food insecurity, life becoming increasingly unstable. Of course, the poorest of the poor suffer first, but eventually it will affect everyone. What can we do about it in our faith communions?

First, draw attention to the problem. In a joint meeting initiated by the UEM, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), among other participating organizations, called for action with the declaration: “Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth - The Wuppertal Call” in June 2019. “The urgency of the crisis calls us to read the signs of the time,

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.agrarheute.com/pflanze/hagel-starkregen-schaeden-hoehhe-20-mio-euro-535198>

to hear God's call, to follow the way of Christ, to discern the movement of the Spirit and, in response, to recognize the positive initiatives of churches all around the world. ... We recognize the urgency of the years that lie ahead, nevertheless express the courage to hope and are compelled to call the global ecumenical movement towards a comprehensive ecological transformation of society ... The urgency of the situation implies that a comprehensive response cannot be delayed. The next decade will be decisive to allow the Earth a time of rest."<sup>3</sup>

Second, we must proceed from words to action.

The UEM communion has been supporting the commitment of the members of the UEM in the area of responsibility for creation not only since the topic has been on everyone's lips, but for many years already. With our sisters and brothers in Africa and Asia, we experience the suffering of people and of the whole of creation. In solidarity with those who suffer, member churches from the southern regions then also supported the German members of the UEM when a flood disaster happened in the Ahr Valley in Germany and other regions.

From our point of view, however, it is extremely important to raise awareness at grassroots levels in addition to all the conferences and discussions on an academic level. If we succeed in offering convincing alternatives to conventional agriculture, energy and infrastructure on the grassroots level, then appeals to political decision-makers will be strengthened accordingly from the people from the grassroots level.

I am extremely grateful that this conference is addressing the challenges of climate change at an interfaith conference. Beyond all differences in faith we have a common task: striving for rethinking and changing habits. At the same time, I am concerned about where our oral discussions will lead to. Genesis 2:15 says that we are "to care for creation". But that could NOT be done in mere words and prayers. But it takes more. It takes our tireless efforts in all places of the world. It needs words and deeds. It needs prayers and action!

Our action cannot be postponed. The groaning of all creation, as described by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans (Romans 8:18-22), can be experienced daily. The hope he also describes will only remain if we act, as individuals, as a communion of faith gathered in this conference and as people of all faith worldwide.

May GOD ALMIGHTY bless all our endeavors and lead us together to pray and act for inhabiting creation differently.

---

3 <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/kairos-for-creation-confessing-hope-for-the-earth-the-wuppertal-call>



*Input by Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith  
Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam, General Secretary National Christian Council of Sri Lanka*

# GREENFAITH, A MULTIFAITH MOVEMENT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE, CALLS FOR ACTION

*Fletcher Harper*

It is a pleasure and privilege to be with you together at this conference. I am particularly grateful to UEM and to my friend Jochen Motte, a colleague and friend to many of us, who is not able to be with us at this meeting.

GreenFaith is an international, multi-faith climate justice organization. For more than two decades, we have worked with people of diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds to protect the environment. Our team members today are in Indonesia and Japan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Nigeria, Germany and France, Brazil and the United States. We have volunteer members from more than 40 countries.

I am an Anglican priest and before leading GreenFaith served as a parish priest for a decade. Twenty two years ago, when I first started working on the link between religion and the environment, awareness about climate change was very low, everywhere. We spent a lot of time and effort speaking with people, giving guest sermons and talks at different places of prayer and worship. We explained why it is natural for people of faith to be concerned with protecting the planet – because the nature world reveals something deeply sacred to us all, because our religions all call on societies and people to conserve and to consume responsibly, and because the people who suffer pollution's most damaging effects are the poorest in society, who have done the least to cause the problem in the first place.

When we look into the sacred writings of the world's faiths, we see countless passages that provide a religious foundation for these topics.

- From the Bible: God saw all that God had made and behold, it was very good.
- The Holy Qu'ran: And Allah has sent down rain from the sky and given life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed in that is a sign for people who listen.
- From the Metta Sutra: Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, So with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings, Radiating kindness over the entire world, Spreading upward to the skies, and downward to the depths, Outward and unbounded.

These teachings represent what I call eco-theology 101. They are a reminder that

underneath, beyond, and alongside all human ingenuity and power is a sacred source of awe, sublime majesty, and creative wonder. As a Christian, I know this power by the name of God the Creator.

Eco-theology 101 is important. But it is not enough.

In 2009, all rational hope for addressing the crisis ended at the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen. I use the word rational on purpose. There had been 20 years of education and awareness raising about climate change. Scientists had done a good job of understanding that burning fossil fuels is responsible for climate change and had communicated that to governments, financiers and industry leaders around the world. In many cases, this would have been enough to generate a change in policy that would put the world on the course towards a more secure and sustainable future – one not marked by the heat, fire, smoke, floods, droughts, displacement, loss of livelihoods, loss of lives that characterize a future marred by climate change. Science, after all, can be enormously convincing. Look at how fast the world changed in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why did this negotiation process fail? Why, with the sole exception of COP21, has this process failed at an international level? Why does fossil fuel production continue to grow, with abundant financing that far outstrips funding for renewable energy?

Because of cultural, political and financial power.

The power of a fossil fuel industry that retains enormous wealth and that uses violence to secure its continuation.

The power of financial institutions which, since the Paris Agreement, have invested more than \$60 trillion dollars into new fossil fuel infrastructure projects.

The power of governments that are either ineffective or corrupt.

And, the power of fundamentalist, extremist religious groups. A pro-extractive, anti-environment, anti-women, anti-poor, anti-LGBTQ agenda unites the US white Evangelicals who elected Donald Trump, the Evangelical Bench in the Brazilian government that supported Jair Bolsonaro, Islamic leaders who serve the interests of wealthy petro-states and Hindu nationalists whose Modi government in India erodes environmental protections at the same time that they deny basic rights to people of different religions. There are many other examples of this dangerous perversion of our faiths. They must be recognized alongside the political and economic forces that destroy life.

Because of this realization, and because of the stories of grassroots people who are suffering unfairly from the climate crisis, we shifted our work from an enlightenment orientation that assumes that education alone is enough to one of active engagement and social movement building. I want to suggest today

that scaling up this approach to the climate crisis is the primary ingredient in its solution.

We developed a theory of change that expresses our understanding of how we can help change society for the better.

If we

- build a multi-religious base
- deepen religious motivation, activism and communications skills for climate justice
- campaign to stop fossil fuel development and to accelerate universal access to clean energy and loss and damage funding

We will build collective power to

- Erode the fossil fuel industry's ability to launch destructive new projects
- Build support for a global fossil fuel phase-out and accelerated renewable energy development
- Win commitments for universal access to clean energy, and loss and damage funds

This way of thinking represents a shift for many religious organizations. We all know the anxieties that emerge in our churches and mosques and temples when we start to move from education and worship into public activism. There are concerns, understandably, related to safety and security. There are worries about mixing religion and politics. There are also instances of religious organizations with ties to cultural, political and economic interests that favor the status quo.



But that reality, which is ever present, is one that people of faith have always had to face at times when God calls us to work for social change. Today, the climate crisis calls us to face this challenge with urgency and commitment. So, based on these convictions and theory of change, GreenFaith campaigns to stop new fossil fuel development and related financing. We advocate for a rapid acceleration of renewable energy development, with a particular focus on clean energy that is owned by local communities and women. We also call for funding from the world's historic polluters for climate change related permanent loss and damage. From our perspective, we believe that these three focal points represent vitally important priorities that can unite people of diverse faiths around the globe.

And – this is exactly what we are seeing. Here are some photos of members of our extended community in action. What I would like to ask is that you look not only at the signs and banners - which are beautiful expressions of our religious and spiritual values. Also look at the faces of the people. See their passion. See their joy. See their determination. This is the spirit of life in action. It is what sustains us in the course of this challenging work.



Every 12-18 months, we organize a global, multi-faith mobilization for climate justice. I will finish by referring to a video of the last Faiths for Climate Justice mobilization – which had over 700 grassroots actions in more than 40 countries.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the work of Ibu Hening Parlan and our team here in Indonesia, over 200 of those actions were in this country.

Our next Faiths for Climate Justice will be in early 2025. We invite you to join us.

---

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4aK4ldRB5U>



**CASE STUDIES  
AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES**



# CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN SALATIGA-CENTRAL JAVA FOR INTERFAITH ACTIONS

*Suesthi Maharani*

Tolerance comes from the Latin word “tolerantia”, which means looseness, gentleness, leniency, and patience. Tolerance generally refers to an open, swilling and friendly attitude. Tolerance or as-samahah (Arabic) is a modern concept to describe mutual respect and cooperation among ethnically, linguistically, culturally, politically, and religiously diverse groups of people. Religious tolerance refers to tolerance of the issue of human beliefs related to the creed or divinity held by a person. A person must be given the freedom to choose his own religion and respect the teachings he adheres to. In the context of inter-religious tolerance, Islam has a clear concept that there is no compulsion in religion as mentioned in QS al Kafirun verse 6, *لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ* which means for you your religion, and for me my religion. These historical facts show that the issue of tolerance in Islam is not a foreign or *ghorib* concept.

Indonesia itself has six official religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The diversity of religions embraced does not rule out the possibility of intolerance frictions that result in conflict. Conflict can be defined as any conflicting interaction between two or more parties. Conflict also includes actions taken by the party, which is shown by various types of subtle, controlled, hidden, indirect resistance as well as open forms of opposition. In Java, history has recorded the existence of intolerance described in a rhymes that is popular among the abangan community, "mendung-mendung cap gomek, kudung-kudung digawe lemek" means that a headscarf that covers the head is just a symbol and does not mean that one has really good morals. It shows the hatred of the abangan towards the santri or people who are considered pious. Abangan is a group of Javanese who tend to follow local belief systems in a customary manner rather than pure Islamic law or sharia. Over time, the term abangan came to refer to someone who did not believe in, or fulfill, religious obligations.

Salatiga "Mini Indonesia", a small city in Central Java whose people consist of various religions, ethnicities, cultures, races and groups, is a reflection of a tolerant city that has almost zero conflicts related to intolerance issues. This is evidenced by the first rank as the most tolerant city in Indonesia by the Setara Institute in 2021 and now the second most tolerant city after Singkawang in 2023. There are many factors behind the religious tolerance upheld in Salatiga, ranging from community leaders, education, mass organizations, etc.

Community leaders have a big impact on developing local wisdom among the community. Many efforts have been made by Salatiga's community leaders to maintain the principle of tolerance, such as tolerance seminars or interfaith dialogues that serve as intermediaries in the prevention of interfaith conflicts, which are held in organizations such as the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). In terms of education, the synergy of universities in Salatiga such as UIN Salatiga and UKSW in holding joint activities related to interfaith activities also greatly affects interfaith harmony, especially among young people.

People have also come to understand that differences are very common. In other words, tolerance has developed into a "lifestyle" in Salatiga City. A clear example of religious tolerance in Salatiga can be seen during the celebration of religious holidays in Salatiga City, such as *merti desa*, *saparan*, *pawai ta'aruf* to commemorate the Hijriah New Year, etc. People have a high sense of awareness to be supporters of peace regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, and class. Their role is not even just as spectators. During the fasting month, for example, churches distribute free *takjil* to Muslims. During Christmas celebrations, Ban-ser and Kokam, an arm of the Islamic organization NU and Muhammadiyah, also volunteered to be security guards. Klenteng Hok Tek Bio, which is the oldest temple in Salatiga City, often organizes social services that are open to everyone in Salatiga or by holding cultural carnivals that involve all levels of society. Even, there is also a temple mosque, which is a marriage between cultural acculturation and religion in Salatiga as a symbol of tolerance.

Therefore, in particular, there is no place for intolerance in Salatiga City and throughout Java. With the above examples of religious moderation, it is hoped that a tolerant, inclusive society can be created and that religious harmony in Indonesia can be strengthened to reduce conflict and increase national unity.



*Tempel Mosque in Salatiga*

## REFERENCES

- Casram, C. (2016). Membangun Sikap Toleransi Beragama dalam Masyarakat Plural. *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya*, 1(2), 187–198. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v1i2.588>
- Haga, C. S. L., Prianto, Y., & Putra, M. R. A. (2022). Toleransi Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat di Kota Salatiga, Jawa Tengah. *Binamulia Hukum*, 11(2), 139–149. <https://doi.org/10.37893/jbh.v11i2.701>
- Jufri, M. (2020). POTENSI PENYETARAAN AGAMA DENGAN ALIRAN KEPERCAYAAN DI INDONESIA. *Jurnal Yudisial*, 13(1), 21. <https://doi.org/10.29123/jy.v13i1.360>
- Muharam, R. S. (2020). Membangun Toleransi Umat Beragama di Indonesia Berdasarkan Konsep Deklarasi Kairo. *Jurnal HAM*, 11(2), 269. <https://doi.org/10.30641/ham.2020.11.269-283>
- Shonhaji. (2010). KONFLIK DAN INTEGRASI SOSIAL (Agama Jawa dalam Perspektif Clifford Geertz ). *Al-Adyan*, V (1), 24–25



# RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE, DISCRIMINATORY REGULATIONS AGAINST MINORITIES IN INDONESIA

*Andreas Harsono*

On August 16, 1945, the day after Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in World War II, a 21-member independence preparation committee finished debating Indonesia's proposed new constitution in Jakarta, the former Dutch colonial capital of Batavia. The debate was about whether an independent Indonesia should be an Islamic state or a secular one.

The committee reached a compromise. Islam would not be the state religion but could be interpreted to mean that the state had a special responsibility to uphold Sharia, or Islamic law. The draft contained seven words in Bahasa Indonesia that, when translated, meant, "Belief in the one and only God with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Sharia." They called this sentence, along with four other principles, the Jakarta Charter.

## Early Debates on Religion and State

During the debate, held at the residence of a sympathetic Japanese admiral, who still occupied Indonesia, the committee also agreed to declare independence on the morning of August 17. The members assigned Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta, two leading committee members, to sign the declaration "in the name of the nation of Indonesia." The meeting ended at 5 a.m. on August 17. Five hours later, Sukarno and Hatta read out a brief statement, proclaiming Indonesia's independence outside Sukarno's house – a few blocks from Rear Admiral Tadashi Maeda's residence.

The statement didn't confront the Allied Forces, who expected a return to the status quo in what had been the Netherlands Indies, but also didn't seek a legal transfer of sovereignty from the Japanese. Instead, it unleashed the energy and emotion of millions of people in the former Netherlands Indies to defend the independence declaration, exploiting the power vacuum and the exhaustion from living a hard life under Japanese occupation since 1942.

The Dutch Kingdom had taken over the administration of the archipelago since 1800 after nationalizing the Amsterdam-based Dutch East India Company

– a huge joint-stock company that had established a monopoly of spices in the islands, while also trying to accommodate multiple religious groups, especially Muslims and Christians.

Many young activists soon used the telephone and telegraph to spread the news. Radios and newspapers were still under the control of the Japanese Army. The activists sent word to the cities of Bandung and Yogyakarta. They moved along the streets of Jakarta, putting up banners and scrawling graffiti in English on the walls.

“We fight for freedom, sovereignty and independence.”

“Go to hell, imperialism! *Merdeka!*”

“We are free, Indonesia is free.”

“Indonesia will never again be the lifeblood of any nation.”

The Malay word “*Merdeka*” or “Freedom” was soon widely used in urban areas throughout the main Indonesian island of Java.

The same evening, at the elegant Hotel des Indes, several delegates from the islands of eastern Indonesia, covering a vast region from Borneo to Bali, and the Maluku Islands, discussed the new charter and found themselves troubled by those seven words. Andi Pangerang, an aristocrat from the Bone sultanate in southern Sulawesi, said the new state should be separated from Islam. Samuel Ratu Langie, a Minahasan leader from northern Sulawesi, agreed and said, “Eastern Indonesia will make its move.”

Ratu Langie then accompanied Johannes Latuharhary from the Malukus Islands, I.G. Ketoet Poedja from Bali, Pangerang, and two other politicians from Kalimantan to a student dormitory and asked the mostly medical students to approach Mohammad Hatta and tell him that if this draft constitution was not changed, “Eastern Indonesia would not join Indonesia.” They demanded a secular nation-state that separated religion and state.

The group eventually asked three students – Piet Mamahit, Moeljo Hastrodipoero and Tan Tjeng Bok – to meet Hatta. Hatta met with them that evening and found the message important enough to pass on to Sukarno. The students told Hatta that the Sharia provision would relegate religious minorities “to live as second-class citizens in Indonesia.” Separately, Mohammad Hasan of Aceh, another committee member, also told Sukarno that Ratu Langie had said Eastern Indonesia would not be willing to join Indonesia unless the draft constitution was changed.

On August 18, Hatta, who was also not in favor of a state based on Islam, met with four Muslim politicians – Mohammad Hasan of Aceh, Bagoes Hadikoesoemo, Wahid Hasjim, and Kasman Singodimedjo, who represented Islamic groups on Java Island. Hatta, a devout Muslim who believed that Islam could

help Indonesia achieve greater social justice, also held a deeply rooted belief in secularism. This reputation helped Hatta persuade the four Muslim politicians. Hasan stressed the importance of national unity. It was imperative not to drive important Christian minorities – Batak, Minahasan and Ambonese – into the arms of the returning Dutch through discriminatory provisions. They agreed to remove the Sharia phrase.

Sukarno announced the removal of the Islamic provisions in the plenary session on August 18. Instead, the plenary agreed on five principles, but it still included the phrase regarding “Belief in the one and only God.” Thus, the Pancasila – a Sanskrit expression meaning “five pillars” – was adopted and included the principles of a just and civilized humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy under the wise guidance of representative consultations, and social justice for all the people of Indonesia.

Hasjim, a committee member and leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama, the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia, proposed that a Ministry of Religious Affairs be established as a substitute for the reference to Sharia that was deleted. He said that it would be “a bridge” connecting the state and Islam. Latuharhary rejected the idea, but Sukarno and Hatta accepted it.

## A Dangerous Definition

In January 1946, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established. It marked the beginning of a state institution designed to serve the Muslims – with Islamic schools and universities, the haj management and other Islamic affairs – but also facilitates discrimination against religious minorities in Indonesia. However, the new republic first had to deal with the Allied Forces, including the Dutch, negotiating the transfer of power, which would finally take place in 1949. The Ministry’s initial task was to define what *religion* meant.

In 1952, the Ministry, under Wahid Hasjim, issued a definition to differentiate between “*kepercayaan*” (faith) and “*agama*” (religion). In Indonesian vocabulary, “*kepercayaan*” is officially used to cover multiple minor religions and spiritual movements. The ministry decreed that “*kepercayaan*” are “dogmatic ideas, intertwined with the living customs of various ethnic groups, especially among those who are still underdeveloped, whose main beliefs are the customs of their ancestors throughout the ages.” Meanwhile, “*agama*” was defined according to Jewish, Christian and Islamic understandings. If a community was to be recognized as “religious,” it had to adhere to “an internationally recognized monotheistic creed; taught by a prophet through the scriptures.” This discrimi-

nated against non-monotheistic religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism and hundreds of local religions and spiritual movements in Indonesia.

On Bali Island, the definition created confusion, even political disputes, among many Balinese whose traditional belief worships their ancestors, local deities, and multiple gods and goddesses, including those that originated from Hindu religion in India such as Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva. The French anthropologist Michel Picard wrote in a 2021 essay that the Balinese had formerly “no generic name to designate that which would later on become their *religion*.” They simply used the word “agama Bali.” The construction of Balinese religion has been framed by Islam and Christianity “to ward off the pressure of Muslim and Christian proselytizing,” Picard wrote. In 1952, they renamed their religion “agama Hindu Bali,” referring to Hinduism, and adopted the name “Sang Hyang Widi” to designate the one and only God of the renamed religion. In Kalimantan, ethnic Dayak took steps like the Balinese, reorienting their Kaharingan belief to Hinduism to avoid being associated with Christianity or Islam. “The Hindus have helped us,” said a Dayak leader. “They’re like our umbrella.”

In June 1964, in Kuningan, western Java, the local government declared marriages of members of Sunda Wiwitan, an ethnic Sundanese religion, to be illegal. That move prompted 5,000 Sunda Wiwitan believers to convert to Catholicism, believing that joining the Roman Catholic Church would spare them from religious persecution.

As the Ministry of Religious Affairs grew powerful, various religious factions competed to gain control over it – “traditional Muslims” such as the Nahdlatul Ulama, and “modernist Muslims” such as the Muhammadiyah competed to fill posts at ministerial as well as lower positions, and inside various Islamic education institutions.

Problems for religious minorities escalated in January 1965 when then President Sukarno issued a decree that prohibited people from being hostile toward religions or committing blasphemy, which is defined as “abuse” and “desecration” of a religion. Sukarno decreed that the government would steer “mystical sects ... toward a healthy way of thinking and believing in the One and Only God.” The decree, which gave official approval only to Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, was immediately incorporated into the Criminal Code as article 156(a), with a maximum penalty of five years in prison. This has had disastrous effects until the present. The blasphemy law has been used to target religious minorities, including Christians, Ahmadiyah, Shia Muslims, and political opponents. Hundreds of people have been detained and tried under this law since 1968.

## Religion Under Soeharto

In October 1965, Major General Soeharto rose to power, replacing President Sukarno, ruling with the military's backing, repressing opponents, seizing naturally rich lands, and abusing people's rights. This was a period of mass killings by Indonesian soldiers, paramilitary groups, and Muslim militias. They killed as many as a million suspected Communist Party members, ethnic Chinese, and trade unionists, teachers, activists, and artists.

Soeharto started out as a different type of leader when it came to religious freedom. David Jenkins' book, *Young Soeharto: The Making of a Soldier, 1921-1945*, delves into Soeharto's early life. What emerges from the details is the story of a man who was not just a Muslim, but also a practitioner of Javanese folk religion, Kejawen, that married animism, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. Soeharto appeared determined to limit the power of Indonesia's Islamists. In 1978, he created a directorate within the Ministry of Education to service traditional religions, including Kejawen, telling the Indonesian parliament, "These beliefs are part of our national tradition, and need not to be opposed to [established] religions." Soeharto did not push the Ministry of Religious Affairs to serve local religions like Kejawen, Sunda Wiwitan or Kaharingan, but instead put the mandate under the Ministry of Education, changing its name to the Ministry of Education *and* Culture. His education minister, Daoed Joesoef, a devout Muslim from Aceh, issued a regulation on state school uniforms to ban the hijab – the head, neck, and chest covering worn by many Muslim women and girls in fulfillment of their religious beliefs. He issued the ban amid the growing influence from the Middle East, first coming from Iran, which promoted mandatory hijab regulation for Muslim women and girls.

In 1991, President Soeharto reversed his approach toward the Islamists, though, after starting to lose the military's backing. He made a pilgrimage to Mecca, promoted his Islamic credentials, embraced political Islam, and extended his support for the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals, where many Islamists channel their political aspirations. He also backed the Indonesian Ulama Council. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued new guidelines on school uniforms that allowed "special clothing," which gave birth to policies making state schools allow their female teachers and students to wear the hijab. This marked the beginning of the slippery slope toward greater Islamization in Indonesia, all to protect Soeharto's continued rule and his accumulated wealth. In 1998, after 33 years in power, Soeharto was forced to step down in the face of massive public protests at the height of the Asian economic crisis.

## Post-Soeharto Discrimination and Violence

President Soeharto's actions of 1991 strengthened the Indonesian Ulama Council, which he had set up in 1975, and it became more powerful and intolerant of other religions. It used its growing influence to promote Sharia, with the more hardline Islamists using violence to advocate their agenda, including multiple bombings against religious minority communities on Bali and Java islands.

In 2004, the Ulama Council supported Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired Army general, to win the presidential election, defeating the incumbent, Megawati Soekarnoputri. In return, Yudhoyono promised to consult the Ulama Council in policy making, further decreasing the separation between the state and the mosque. Yudhoyono accommodated the demands to promote Sharia in more than two dozen Muslim-majority provinces, including Aceh, using a new regional autonomy law. His administration strengthened the blasphemy law of office – namely, the Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society (Bakor Pakem), under the Attorney General's Office. It eventually led to the prosecution and imprisonment of 125 people in his decade in power – a steep rise from only 8 cases in the three decades during Soeharto's rule.

The Yudhoyono administration also encouraged the proliferation of Sharia-inspired local regulations, ranging from mandatory hijab ordinances to discriminatory rules against religious minorities including Christians and non-Sunni minorities such as the Shia and the Ahmadiyah communities. The first mandatory hijab regulation was issued in West Sumatra province in 2001. Aceh issued the second one in 2002. By 2023, according to the National Commission on Violence Against Women, Indonesia had 120 mandatory hijab regulations. Dress codes forcing women and girls to wear a hijab have fueled widespread bullying that has caused many women and schoolgirls psychological distress. Girls who do not comply have been forced to leave government schools or have withdrawn under pressure, while female civil servants have lost their jobs or resigned to escape constant demands to conform.

In 2006, the Yudhoyono administration issued a so-called “religious harmony” regulation, essentially permitting regional governments to license the construction of houses of worship. It states that the construction should be based on the “real needs” and “composition of the population” in the area. Among other things, a permit requires written recommendations from the local branch of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and from the local branch of the Religious Harmony Communication Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama or FKUB).

The problem lies mostly with the FKUB. Governors, regents and mayors decide who will be members of the forum. According to the regulation, the com-

position of members should be “proportionate” to the percentage of worshippers in each area, creating a mostly Muslim-ulama dominated forum. Jakarta, for example, is 85 percent Muslim, meaning that 85 percent of the 21 members should be Muslim clerics. Most minorities in predominantly Sunni Muslim Indonesia have difficulties establishing or renovating their houses of worship, including Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists as well as Ahmadiyah and Shias but also some Muhammadiyah and Salafis.

The 2006 regulation allowed intolerant Muslims to use intimidation and violence to shut down what they claimed to be “illegal churches.” It’s not clear how many churches were forced to shut down as the Religious Affairs Ministry has not published data on this since 2006. According to data from several non-governmental organizations, between 1,500 and 2200 churches were closed in almost two decades.

In 2008, the Yudhoyono administration issued an anti-Ahmadiyah decree following a 2005 anti-Ahmadiyah fatwa by the Indonesian Ulama Council, de-



An Ahmadiyah mosque was closed in Depok, a suburb south of Jakarta, Indonesia. Ahmadiyah is a small Islamic community. It’s widely discriminated against in Indonesia. In 2008, the Indonesian government limited the activities of the Ahmadiyah community

claring that it is a deviant Islamic group and must not propagate their teaching. The first fatwa was issued in 1980 but the Soeharto government simply disregarded it, assuming, correctly, that it was only for internal usage among Muslims. It did not see it as government business. Sunni militant groups used the 2008 decree to justify attacks on more than 30 Ahmadiyah mosques. One raid became deadly in Cikeusik, Pandeglang, in February 2011, when more than 1,500 Sunni militants attacked an Ahmadiyah house, killing three men and wounding several others.

Those two regulations worried many intellectuals in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, a former president and the eldest son of Wahid Hasjim, a very influential Nahdlatul Ulama cleric, publicly defended religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyah, blaming the Yudhoyono government for such violence. In 2019, Wahid and three other Muslim clerics, plus seven non-governmental organizations, filed a petition against the blasphemy law at the Constitutional Court. They wanted the blasphemy law to be repealed. They argued the blasphemy law is more a political weapon than a law-and-order tool and has been used to incite anger among Muslims. The Constitutional Court ruled against them, in an 8-1 decision on April 19, 2010, stating that the blasphemy law was a lawful restriction on religious freedom because it allows for “the maintenance of public order.”

Human Rights Watch in 2013 published “*In Religion’s Name: Abuses against Religious Minorities in Indonesia*”, documenting the Indonesian government’s failure to confront Islamist militant groups, whose thuggish harassment and assaults on houses of worship and members of religious minorities, had become increasingly aggressive.

Four government institutions have played a role in the violation of the rights and freedoms of the country’s religious minorities – the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society, the Religious Harmony Forum, and the semi-official Indonesian Ulama Council.

## **Rise in Discriminatory Regulations Under Jokowi**

In 2014, Joko “Jokowi” Widodo’s win in the presidential election brought hope to many rights defenders and progressive religious leaders that he would try to defend the rights of religious minorities and undo the regressive measures of his predecessors. Jokowi did not do that. In fact, the biggest rally in support of the blasphemy law took place under his administration when his ally, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian who succeeded him as the governor of Jakarta, was accused of committing blasphemy against Islam. A politically motivated smear

campaign against Purnama led over 500,000 people to attend the rally on December 2, 2017.

Ma'ruf Amin, the chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council, issued a statement against Purnama, declaring that a non-Muslim like Purnama should not comment on Quranic interpretation. It put pressure on the Jokowi government to accommodate hardline Muslims and to send Purnama to prison, altering the political landscape in Indonesia and moving it even further toward religious intolerance.

Jokowi later recruited some of those involved in the rally to join him in his second term, including appointing Amin vice president. Jokowi also appointed Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, a dismissed Army general who was involved in kidnapping activists in the 1990s, to be his defense minister. Prabowo had backed the 2017 rally in support of the blasphemy law. In 2024, Prabowo won the presidential election to succeed Jokowi. His running mate was Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Raka.

The mandatory hijab regulations also victimized more women and girls. In thousands of state schools, non-Muslim girls have also been forced to wear the hijab. In January 2021, Elianu Hia shared a video on Facebook recording his meeting with his daughter's teacher in Padang, West Sumatra, during which the teacher pressured him to make his daughter, herself a Christian, to wear a hijab. The video went viral, resulting in the Ministry of Education telling the school to end the discriminatory policy against Christian girls. But a social boycott against Elianu Hia caused him to lose his small business.

Meanwhile, continuing Yudhoyono's foreign policy, Jokowi directed Indonesian diplomats to present Indonesia internationally as a "moderate" Muslim nation, an alternative to the "despotic" and "chaotic" Middle East. But the reality could not have been more different. The number of discriminatory regulations kept growing during the Jokowi administration.

In December 2022, the Indonesian parliament, with the support of President Jokowi and Vice President Amin, passed a new criminal code. Its blasphemy chapter was increased from one to six articles, albeit with a shorter prison term providing for a maximum three years for blasphemy instead of five years. It also includes an article outlawing leaving a religion or a belief as apostasy. Anyone who attempts to persuade a person to be a non-believer in a religion or belief can be prosecuted and imprisoned. The new criminal code is another serious setback to protecting freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. It bucks the global trend toward decreasing enforcement of blasphemy laws or scrapping them altogether.

The new law also provides that the government will recognize "any living law" in the country, which is likely to be interpreted to extend formal legality

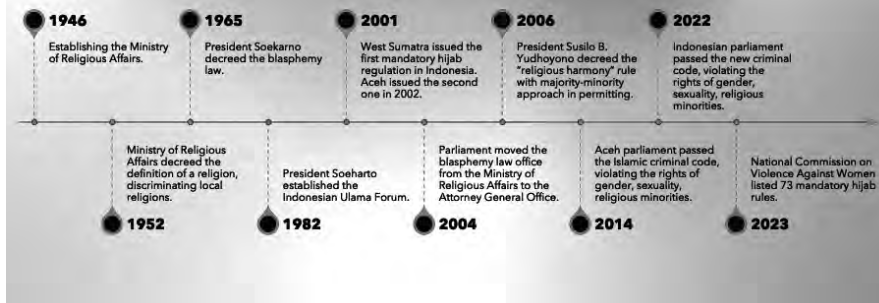
to more than 700 Sharia-inspired regulations across the country. Many of these regulations discriminate against women and girls, such as providing for curfews for women, female genital mutilation, and mandatory hijab dress codes. Many of these regulations also discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

## A Way Forward

In February 2023, the Nahdlatul Ulama made a surprising, yet positive decision. Mustofa Bisri, a senior Nahdlatul Ulama cleric, at the end of a conference in Sidoarjo, East Java, read their conclusion: “NU is of the view that the old view rooted in classical jurisprudence, namely the ideal of uniting all Muslims under a single worldwide umbrella or a caliphate state, must be replaced with a new vision.” The Nahdlatul Ulama decided to support the United Nations Charter, the founding document of the UN and an instrument of international law, saying the UN served all people equally, “not only Muslims.” “For this reason, the UN charter can be the basis for developing new jurisprudence in order to uphold a peaceful and harmonious human civilization,” Bisri said. Ahmad Suaedy, also a Nahdlatul Ulama scholar and a former aide to Abdurrahman Wahid, wrote in *The Jakarta Post*, “Even in Indonesia, whose constitution is not based on a particular religious identity but on the state ideology Pancasila ... the Muslim majority is still often involved in discrimination by forcing the state to support them.” This decision by Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization to develop a new approach with the UN Charter in mind should bring fresh air toward religious freedom in Indonesia.

Now, whether Indonesia’s religious minorities will enjoy equal rights, including to practice their religious belief, will depend on what the Indonesian government and the Nahdlatul Ulama, will do to reverse the eight decades of discrimination and violence against them. The government should begin by withdrawing hundreds of discriminatory regulations and taking measures toward accountability for violence and abuse faced by millions of Indonesians simply for practicing their religious belief. They should also redefine what Indonesia considers to be “religion,” using UN standards rather than the narrow definition adopted in 1952.

# Discriminating gender, sexuality and religious minorities



Graphic by Andreas Harsono

## References

- Belford, Aubrey: "Borneo Tribe Practices Its Own Kind of Hinduism," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2011.
- Engelen, O.E. / Lubis, Aboe Bakar: *Lahirnya Satu Bangsa dan Negara*, Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press, 1997.
- Harsono, Andreas: "Forced from Home for Protesting Indonesia's Mandatory Hijab Rules," *Human Rights Watch*, March 17, 2023.
- Harsono, Andreas: *Race, Islam and Power: Ethnic and Religious Violence in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, Melbourne: Monash University Publication, 2019
- Hoesterey, Jim: "Saints, Scholars and Diplomats: Religious Statecraft and the Problem of 'Moderate Islam' in Indonesia," in: *Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: Threats and Opportunities for Democracy*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 2021 (editor Chiara Formichi).
- Human Rights Watch: "I Wanted to Run Away". Abusive Dress Codes for Women and Girls in Indonesia, March 18, 2021.
- Human Rights Watch: "Indonesia: Court Ruling a Setback for Religious Freedom," April 19, 2010.

- Iman C.Sukmana, Menuju Gereja Yang Semakin Pribumi: Analisis Konflik Internal Dalam Gereja Eks-Ads, Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Atma Jaya, 2011.
- Jenkins, David: Young Soeharto: The Making of a Soldier, 1921-1945, Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021.
- Media Jatim, “Bacakan Rekomendasi Muktamar Internasional Fikih Peradaban I, Gus Mus: NU Tolak Negara Khilafah dan Dukung Piagam PBB,” February 7, 2023.
- Nakamura, Mitsuo: “Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia, a New Era with the ‘New Gus Dur’,” in: *Islam Nusantara*, Volume 4 No. 3, Jakarta 2023.
- Noer, Deliar: Administration of Islam in Indonesia, Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1978.
- Picard, Michel: “Agama Hindu Under Pressure from Muslim and Christian Proselytizing,” in: *Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: Threats and Opportunities for Democracy*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 2021 (editor Chiara Formichi).
- Suaedy, Ahmad: “A century of NU: Aswaja, ‘fiqh’ of civilization, a new platform of Islam,” in: *The Jakarta Post*, February 6, 2023.

# FRAGILE SOLIDARITY AND INTERFAITH RESPONSIBILITY: CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM AS AN ONGOING TASK

*Antje Menn*

When I think about the respective responsibilities of state and religion in strengthening justice, peace and the integrity of creation, one issue that immediately comes to mind in my German context is the growing antisemitism in our country. Since the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7th and the Israeli counteroffensive, we have seen an alarming increase in antisemitic messages, rallies, threats, and violent acts, even in our country. What can politics do, what can government do, and what is the role of religious communities and especially of our church? What can we do?

I would like to share my perspective on the situation, as one among many, even in the interreligious dialogue. I do this as the dean of a church district of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland in Germany. People of different religions live in our region.

For weeks we have now seen with great concern that our Jewish fellow citizens feel increasingly unsafe and are threatened. We must admit that we did not recognize this development sooner, now that it has become so obvious: Jewish homes in Germany are being marked, and members of Jewish congregations are scared to go to synagogues. It is unacceptable, it must not happen, that people celebrate in the streets of Germany as though the terror were a day of joy and justice. That is for me the truly shocking realization: Solidarity is fragile.

Fortunately, many people – including my three children – are asking how this can be.

In a much-noted and rousing speech on November 2nd, 2023, the German Vice Chancellor, Robert Habeck, reminded the German people of their historic responsibility grounded in the Holocaust with 6 million murdered Jews. He unequivocally stated: „The Second World War was a war of extermination against Jews. For the Nazi regime, the annihilation of European Jews was always the main goal.“

Therefore, the German Vice Chancellor stressed the right of existence for Israel, and the protection of Jews on German ground as a requirement for the state

to maintain its moral integrity. The Vice Chancellor has received much positive feedback. We need more clear positioning.

Where, now, lies the responsibility of religion, and how does this responsibility express itself?

I will focus first on my own church and cast a brief look back: our church has a history of theological antisemitism, which has its root in the birth of Christianity, when Judaism and Christianity diverged and became competitors. The first Christians built on the religious traditions and scriptures of Judaism. They soon transferred the Judaic prophecies onto themselves and denied the religion from which they emerged the right to exist. For centuries, it was preached and believed that the church was the substitution for the people of Israel, and, therefore, the Jewish community was seen as having no right to exist. This origin of antisemitism – and this is important in the current analysis – makes it different from other forms of hostility and xenophobia, because it provides a scaffold for antisemitism which is laden with Christian-salvation-religious beliefs.

Unfortunately, even the Reformation, which in Germany is mostly connected with the name of Martin Luther, did not contradict antisemitism, but further promoted it and contributed to the National Socialist antisemitism and determination to exterminate all Jews in the 20th century.

Following the Holocaust, the Ecumenical Council of the Churches pledged in its founding meeting in 1948 to denounce “antisemitism as a sin against God and humanity”. Since then, the thinking in our theology and churches has changed. Important steps of insight and understanding of our churches’ guilt have been taken. We are grateful for connections and dialogue that were extended by Jewish partners, and for the learning that ensued, learning from each other and with each other.

As the Protestant Church of Rhineland, we drew up a statement in 1980 affirming that we understand the state of Israel to be the home and protection of Jewish Life, and that we are thankful that God kept faith in his people during the centuries of persecution in Christian Europe. And it is because we affirm the state of Israel that we as church support the Jewish-Arab dialogue and projects of encounter and understanding such as Nes Ammim.

We have said that we know we are not alone on the path of faith and hope, but we are walking with Jews in the face of God. In 2018, my church added that we are walking together with you, our Muslim brothers and sisters, on the path of faith and hope. Moreover, we want to be in encounter with other religions, to listen and learn and take responsibility in the world together.

What could that mean? – Let me name a few concrete examples, some for us as Christians, and others perhaps for all of us:

1. The prophetic tradition of repentance and renewal is central for Christianity with the gospel of Jesus. For repentance and renewal, we must continue to look at the century-old antisemitism in the churches and religions. Especially in Germany, and not only in Germany, but worldwide in the ecumenical context. It is still there, in sermons, hymns and otherwise. We need a new and sensitive language.
2. Repentance and renewal, born out of historical responsibility, respect for human dignity, and our theology, require us to stand against any form of antisemitism, whether secular or religiously motivated. Repentance leads us to openly talk and stand up for the Jewish community as a whole.
3. It also means that we intentionally bring these insights, which have often remained on a scientific-theological level, into the broader congregations to all members and adherents.
4. At the same time, it is good to know about each other, to open spaces for dialogue between different viewpoints and groups. Religious communities are a resource for an informed and interconnected society that is able and willing to have constructive dialogue and a peaceful coexistence.
5. We must prevent that over and over again, future generations are imprinted with hatred in their heart. Our religions have the vision of peace. We have been tasked to break through the vicious circle of violence and hatred and revenge, to forge paths of peace out of and beside those vicious circles, and to act as peacemakers. We want our children to know that.
6. We need to share and promote what we learn here in this conference and everywhere in the experience of ecumenical and interfaith encounter: It is about unity in the reconciled multiplicity of identities. One is happy that the other is there in his otherness.
7. And lastly: We are unified by prayer. Everyone according to their tradition and religion. Prayer can contribute to see oneself in relation to others, to put ourselves into perspective, to leave the last word to God. Prayer requests for the many victims and those who are suffering, prayer and action of the righteous both belong together. I am thankful that next week, we will hold another interfaith prayer in the community of Jews, Christians, Muslims and Baha'i, in the city where I live.

And I am thankful for our togetherness and our partnership in these days, that we learn together and that we share the hope for peace.



*Exposure programme in Jakarta: Visit of the Istiqlal Mosque with Jakarta Cathedral in the background*





# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIONS REGARDING QUESTIONS OF JUSTICE AND PEACE – A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

*Bilgehan Asena Ayvaz*

My contemporary Muslim perspective on the responsibility of religions regarding questions of justice and peace – the probably biggest questions of all times, and of course our time – first of all needs an identification of restrictions and its limitedness: The following ideas about *the responsibility of religions regarding questions of justice and peace* are not only given from my personal Muslim perspective, but also from my perspective as a Muslim theologian, as an academic, and also as a Muslim woman of Turkish origin who was born and raised in Germany. It is important for me to emphasize the limited nature of my perspective at the beginning, its narrowness (and at the same time its multidimensionality) – because I understand my perspective as *one possible* perspective, a *subjective* perspective, a *theological* perspective – and also, I have to add in the context of the 3rd International Interfaith Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia – a in many ways *privileged* perspective on questions of justice and peace.

Perhaps, in view of the last few weeks – and by that I mean, among other things, the latest escalation of the Middle East conflict – it is necessary to start with a few critical remarks:

If we look at the history of religions and theologies and ask ourselves to what extent they have actually contributed to the establishment of justice and peace in various societies, our verdict could be as follows: Religions and their protagonists have attempted to establish peace and justice *at some points* in human history; religious protagonists, and especially theologians, have tried to articulate peace and justice as themes of their religious self-understanding and crucial parts of their theologies *at some points* in human history.

In the European-German-Muslim context, for example, I can tell that it is often emphasized by Muslims, that in the pre-modern era, before the formation of nation states, Muslim interaction with the so-called *Religious-Other*, such as Christians and Jews, was quite tolerant in Muslim-ruled areas. The literature on Christian and Jewish life under Muslim rule here often speaks of *peaceful*

*coexistence, religious freedom and religious tolerance.* The Muslim rule in Spanish Andalusia from the eighth to thirteenth century often serves as a prominent and proud example here.

Apart from the fact that the declaration of a *peaceful coexistence of religions* in Spanish-Andalusia is at some points controversial from the perspective of today's historical research, it can at least be said that many Muslims in the German-European-Context – and I am quoting the German jurist and scholar Mathias Rohe – “...are proud of their tradition of not (usually) killing, expelling or forcibly converting members of other religions to Islam [...]”<sup>1</sup> Muslims in Germany today are mostly proud of their dealings with the Religious-Other in the past, they are proud that their history can be understood – at some points – as a testimony to the fact that their Holy Scriptures, their religious-theological tradition and their religious self-understanding served the establishment of justice and peace.

Now, of course, it would be incorrect and reductive to stop at this point. In our original question about the extent to which religions and their protagonists have actually contributed to the establishment of justice and peace in various societies, numerous counterexamples could be cited in which, for example, the Muslim self-image and also the theological use of religious sources did *not* lead to just and peaceful action. Today, from a Muslim perspective, and also from the perspective of a Muslim woman, a glance at Afghanistan, for example, at the actions of the Taliban, as well as the actions of Hamas in Israel, is enough to see that various religious protagonists display a religious self-image that clearly does *not* serve the establishment of peace and justice. Atrocities are the result of some religious – and here Muslim – self-perceptions.

Precisely because religions are a reality carried and experienced in the world *mainly* through the actions of believers, it is sometimes - and I am now quoting the Lebanese and Christian author Amin Maalouf – “...pointless to ask what Christianity [or] Islam [...] >>in truth<< say.”<sup>2</sup> This is also the reason why I did not begin this contribution as a theologian with quotes from the Koran, in which it can be seen that the establishment of peace and justice are core objectives of the divine message. Of course, they are, at least in my opinion.

But instead, I will continue to quote Amin Maalouf, who says: “If you are looking for answers and not just the confirmation of positive or negative prejudices, you should not look at the essence of the doctrine [or: at the scripture

---

1 Rohe, Mathias: Das Islamische Recht. Eine Einführung, München 2013, p. 44.

2 Maalouf, Amin: Mörderische Identitäten. Aus dem Französischen von Christian Hansen, Frankfurt a.M. 2020, p. 47.

alone], but at the behavior of those who have invoked it through history.”<sup>3</sup> Amin Maalouf focuses here in particular on religious protagonists and emphasizes their immense responsibility when it comes to establishing peace and justice. It is in their hands, in our hands, to make sacred scriptures and our religious self-understanding a *medium* of peace and an *instrument* of justice. As believers, as theologians, as activists, we are in demand.

Now I am not an activist, not a social worker, not a pastor, but an academic theologian. I would therefore like to address all theologians from all religious traditions – and encourage them to look for peace-promoting potential in their sacred scriptures and religious traditions. I would like to encourage them to generate contemporary theologies that – in the long term and on a practical level – actually can lead to peace and justice becoming a perceptible reality in this world.

Today, there are many perspectives on how exactly this can be implemented. Some ideas are given, f.e., by my colleague Mouhanad Khorchide, in this publication. I would like to add my humble perspective here briefly: In my opinion, it is essential to finally overcome the exclusivism that all theologies have carried to a greater or lesser extent with regard to their own religious self-understanding and self-image. Within Islamic theology, for example, we have long held the view that the revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, has ‘abrogated’ all previous scriptures – especially Jewish and Christian scriptures – and that our holy scripture is the final and most correct one.<sup>4</sup> We are most of the time, until now, convinced that God in some way revealed himself, that he shared his word with humankind – but *only* within the Quran, we find the original of that divine message. The Koran is often understood here as the *most original* and *only true word* of God.

In my opinion, this inconsistent theology and quite arrogant self-conception has sometimes led us not to see the Religious-Other as *a part of ourselves*, not to meet it *on an equal level*, and sometimes to despise it where it does not share our theological view.

This does not lead to a path that promotes a peaceful and equality-based life on this earth for all human beings. It is a path that, in the most drastic cases, opens the door to the instrumentalization of holy scriptures for waging wars and stirring up hatred between people. So let us – especially as actors within theology – finally ask ourselves *seriously* how we can use our Holy Scriptures, our religious traditions and our different schools of thought, as an intellectual

---

3 Ibid.

4 Cf. Schmidt-Leukel, Perry: Wahrheit in Vielfalt. Vom religiösen Pluralismus zur interreligiösen Theologie, Gütersloh 2019, p. 77f.

resource to promote peace and justice within theology, and then, in a second step, within theological practice.

Perhaps the following report about the Prophet Muhammad is an inspiration for all of us in this regard: “A man came to the Prophet and asked him: ‘What is the best Islam?’ The Prophet replied: ‘That you feed the hungry and spread peace among those you know, and those you do not know.’”<sup>5</sup>

---

5 This translation of the Hadīth is presented by Annemarie Schimmel: Muhammad. Kreuzlingen/ Munich 2002, p. 33, and is cited by Ahmad Milad Karimi in his recent work titled Frieden stiften, Frieden sein, published together with Father Anselm Grün in 2023: Grün, Anselm & Karimi, Ahmad M: Frieden stiften, Frieden sein, Münsterschwarzsach 2023, p. 84.

# STRENGTHENING COEXISTENCE: HOW THE BFmF ASSOCIATION ENHANCES MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS TO GERMAN SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATION, CARE, COUNSELLING AND ENCOUNTERS

*Hanim Ezder*

As you know, religions stand for a number of values, such as charity, compassion, and justice, among others. These values are the cornerstones of a strong, successful and content society. Although religious motivation is not the only basis for a peaceful life, it still plays an important role. Of course, there are also secular organizations and secular values that pursue similar goals. Nevertheless, religious motivation can be a driving force and an inspiration for many people. It can encourage people to strive for a better life. Religious communities often provide a space for people from different backgrounds and beliefs to come together, to put aside their prejudices, live together and learn from each other. They also learn to stand up for the rights and the needs of all.

Our association, BFmF (“Begegnungs- und Fortbildungszentrum muslimischer Frauen e.V.”), is considered an example of a Muslim welfare association in Germany. I would like to take this opportunity to explain how our association contributes to German society and fosters a peaceful coexistence. When we started as a Muslim organization in 1996, we were inspired by the Hadith “The pleasure of ALLAH prevails only over brotherhood”. Dr. Erika Theissen, the founder of the association and a German Muslim convert, brought women from different countries together so that they could learn from and support each other. This aligns with the Hadith of our Prophet (peace be upon him): “The Parable of believers regarding their love, mercy an affection for one another is like that of a body. When one member aches, the others respond with insomnia and fever.” (Sahieh Muslim)

When we founded BFmF 27 years ago, it took us a while to find a suitable name, and instinctively we chose BFmF. These initials stand for “Meeting, Education, and Training Center from Muslim Women”. Our name reflects our mission. Our goals are to provide opportunities for encounters and offer education

for women from various countries and different religions living in Germany. As Muslim women, we wanted to become visible and make our own contribution to German society. For us, being Muslim means not only going to the mosque, fasting, and praying, but also being an active part of society and helping to shape it. Initially, this association was intended solely for women. However, due to the immense response and demand, we had to expand. From then on, men also became part of our target group, both as course participants and as employees.

QURAN quote (49:13) “O people! We created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you might know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you before God is the one who fears God the most. Verily God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” This quote makes it clear that ALLAH created us differently. Neither gender nor race nor ethnicity should be an obstacle to our cohesion. In our association, we mainly support refugees and immigrants. It doesn't matter what religion they belong to or where they originally come from. Our only concern is to offer them support by providing educational opportunities, advice and assistance so that they can become active members of German society, by fulfilling their duties while also claiming their rights.

We do have four main areas. The first is *education*, the second is *care*, the third is *counselling*, and last but not least, *encounters*.

Regarding *education*, we offer about 20 German courses every day. Additionally, we provide special classes for women who have not had the opportunity to attend school and obtain a school degree. We are particularly proud of seeing these women succeed. Another very important educational program are special courses for refugees and immigrants. These courses aim to equip participants with substantial life skills for everyday situations, such as how to purchase a ticket for public transport, and more.

The second area is the *Care Department*. Here, we offer extracurricular activities for teenagers. They can have lunch together and receive help and tutoring for school-related issues. We also provide childcare for children whose mothers attend German language classes. We operate a kindergarten, which is the first Muslim-run daycare center in our city Cologne. I would like to emphasize that the children come from various religious affiliations and are cared for in a trilingual environment. It is important to us that the children feel appreciated for their native language while learning other languages. They experience the Muslim faith as a normal part of their environment, and non-Muslim children are also included in the daycare center with their own faith. On special occasions such as Lent or festivals, parents are encouraged to participate. This year, the Christian and Muslim periods of Lent overlapped, and all

parents were invited to a breakfast before Ramadan, where they discussed their fasting practices in detail. This dialogue is very crucial for fostering peaceful coexistence.

The third area of activity is *counselling*. We offer counselling in various areas such as combating poverty, family issues, discrimination, racism, debt counselling, unemployment, refugee-related issues, and more.

Our final area of work is *encounters*. Since all of us founders are Muslims, interreligious dialogue has been very important to us from the start. We consistently cooperate with the Catholic and Evangelical churches, as well as the Jewish community in Cologne. We organize training courses together, such as “Abraham’s Children” for educators and storytelling workshops for women. These formats include speakers from all three religions. We also strive to bring participants together in an interreligious manner as much as possible. Here, we don’t talk about the “other” but with each other. This means that fears are reduced more quickly because the other person is no longer a stranger over time.

An important part of these encounters are visits to religious sites. We organize visits to mosques, churches and synagogues. We consider this to be very important in Germany, especially for fostering peaceful coexistence. In Germany, there are many primary schools run by churches, and Muslim children also attend these schools. Problems often arise when Muslim parents do not allow their children to attend the weekly service that takes place in churches. Frequently, ignorance about what happens in church causes fear. If the family is not very confident in their own faith, the fear that their child might be proselytized increases. However, when we visit a church with parents and they can address their questions, they feel more reassured, which positively affects their child’s everyday school life.

Visiting a mosque with various professional groups, such as police officers and teachers, also has a positive effect on coexistence. Many people hesitate to go to a mosque on their own and may have limited understanding of what is practiced in a mosque. Often, visitors can observe people praying in the mosque and report that they find it very meditative and non-threatening. This contrasts with their usual perception of Muslims praying in mosques, which is often shaped by negative media reports.

With our efforts, we aim to create a new understanding of Muslim life in Germany. The Prophet said that a Muslim must be an asset to the society in which he lives. He should be an exemplary citizen and a good neighbor in many ways. He is obliged to promote what is good and to prevent what is bad, no matter where he lives.

“By Him in Whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you believe. And you will not believe until you love one another. Indeed, let me inform you of that which produces such things for you: spreading peace among you.” (Sahieh Muslim)

This Hadith can refer to spreading greetings of peace, as well as to actions that foster peace, unity and togetherness. Muslims and Islam are an integral part of Germany, so we naturally take responsibility. Problems affecting society as a whole in Germany also impact us. Through our institution, strengthened by our Muslim faith, we strive to contribute to a just and peaceful society and to help solve these problems.

Peace be with you and come from you!

# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THE ABRAHAMIC CLUSTER: INSIGHTS FROM SRI LANKA ON ENGAGING OTHER WORLDVIEWS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

*W. P. Ebenezer Joseph*

This paper is being presented at this consultation, which brings together Jews, Muslims and Christians to reflect on interreligious dialogue and our common quest for justice and peace from a Sri Lankan Christian perspective.

Sri Lanka is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country where Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity coexist. The socio-economic and political context in Sri Lanka is characterized by the unfortunate Easter Sunday bomb attacks on churches and major tourist hotels in the year 2019, followed closely by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019-2020. As the country was recovering from these two devastating developments, it plunged into severe political turmoil and economic bankruptcy, which has severely affected the poor and the rural people of our country, who constitute nearly 70% of the population. The country is caught in the claws of a debt trap and the geopolitics of the region, while experiencing the indirect effects of the Russia-Ukraine war, and now the outbreak of violence in the Israel-Palestine region. Such economic upheavals and political uncertainty provide an ideal fertile ground for religious extremism, and majority-minority syndromes to thrive. It leads to an increase in crime and violence, while the day-to-day struggle for existence of the ordinary poor and the marginalized people becomes more acute.

It is in the midst of such a fluid and complicated environment that this reflection on interreligious dialogue in the quest for justice and peace is shared. The quest for justice and peace may unite all of us. We may identify common threads prevalent among religions, within the diverse social, political and economic complexities in which we live. But it is important to identify and keep in mind some unique characteristics of the interreligious encounters experienced in Sri Lanka.

## An encounter of different worldviews

The interreligious encounter between Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus is primarily an encounter of different worldviews. The worldview of Buddhists and Hindus is different from that of Christians and Muslims, and therefore the perceptions and understanding of words like *peace*, *justice* and even of *interreligious dialogue* can differ though we use the same vocabulary.

Primarily the worldview of Buddhists and Hindus is cyclical and not linear like that of Christians and Muslims. The cyclical view on the surface may give a repetitive perspective, but we need to understand that it is the basis of hope, that nothing is lost forever. There is always the possibility to review and re-construct the past for which another opportunity will rise in the future, whereas in the linear perspective you leave the past and move on, carving something new. The linear perspective moves away and delinks from the past, whereas in the cyclical perspective there is hope for restoration of the glorious past.

The cyclical worldview considers the individual as an integrated part of the social grouping. Therefore, it tends to give priority to the rights and privileges of the social grouping over individual rights and privileges, as opposed to the linear worldview. The welfare and rights of the community take precedence over those of the individual.

The cyclical worldview also entails that the individual is rooted or is part and parcel of nature. The interconnectedness of the individual person not only to the human community but to all living beings and the nature as a whole, is something central in its worldview. It is not human-centered but rather connected to all animal and plant life as well as to nature as a whole.

This fundamental difference in the worldview leads to different conceptualizations of peace and justice as well.

In the cyclical understanding, inner peace is intrinsically connected to social or outer peace. It focuses on the inner liberation of the person from worldly cravings and desires, which is the basis for all injustice, restlessness, and the loss of peace in the world. The process is that inner contentment and peace lead to a sustainable social order rooted in peace and justice. Both inner peace and outer peace are also closely knit with each other, and the root causes of craving, selfish desires and greed are addressed as essential means to create a just and peaceful society.

Therefore, there is a fundamental difference from the contemporary understanding of justice and peace in the so-called Abrahamic religions, consisting of Jews, Christians and Muslims, which has influenced the thought patterns of the Western world, which are linear, individualistic, and centered around the 'self'.

disconnected from the wider community, as well as from the animal and plant life, along with nature and the whole of the cosmos as well.

It is important that we understand there is a deep divide in how we perceive and conceptualize our understanding of justice and peace amidst diverse worldviews. Hence the challenge for interreligious dialogue or relationships among the religions in Sri Lanka is to have a good grasp of the different worldviews while interpreting the uniqueness of your own faith.

### **Discovering our own faith in the context of another “worldview”**

Authentic interfaith dialogue, which fosters constructive interreligious relations in the pursuit of justice and peace, can only emerge when we discover our own faith and express it within the prevailing thought processes of a worldview that differs from ours. This does not entail a syncretistic approach or compromising the uniqueness of our faith; rather, it is a process of discovering our own uniqueness and learning to articulate it within the framework of a different worldview.

This demands a creative but challenging process of primarily knowing what your own faith is and then giving intelligible expressions of it within the thought process of another worldview. This is possible only for those who are sure of their own tenets of faith and possess a spirituality of deep commitment to the core of their faith. It is a delicate move of formulating authentic and genuine expressions of one’s faith, made intelligible to other worldviews, so that the dialogue is deepened and enriched, fostering genuine relationships.

### **Discovering deeper insights into our own scripture**

This process strangely enables us to discover deeper insights into our own scriptures in the Holy Bible. For example the Nazareth Manifesto of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18-19) is often quoted as a basis for human rights, justice and peace. However, a deeper re-reading from a worldview of the individual connected to the entire social order, including nature and all living beings, will reveal greater and richer insights into the text. The Nazareth Manifesto does not refer to the rights of the prisoners but envisages a future where there will be no prisons. This can happen only if there is harmony in the social order. Similarly, it does not envisage the rights of the disabled, the blind and the lame, or even their inclusiveness, but refers to a state of a restored social order where there will be no disabled. It is not an issue of inclusion or exclusion but a state where there will be no disabled. The year of the Lord does not refer to debt restructuring by

powerful economies but to debt cancellation and redistribution of wealth based on the needs of all living beings than the greedy needs of individuals.

This complete transformation and the interconnection of all nature and living beings (the whole inhabited world) is echoed in the vision of Isaiah concerning the Reign of God (Isaiah 11:1-8) portraying harmony with all living beings where there is no hurt or destruction. This interrelatedness to the entire cosmos is also reflected in the creation story (Genesis 1 and 2). Everything created is good and interconnected. The process for justice and peace to flourish rests in the responsibility and accountability bestowed on humankind to protect and care for the entire creation.

### **The Sri Lankan experience: From debate to dialogue – from dialogue to relationships**

Sri Lanka has a rich experience in interreligious dialogue amidst diverse world-views, spread over many centuries. It has over the centuries moved from debate to dialogue. Confrontations have emerged when there has been a lack of understanding of the diverse worldviews. However, there are many constructive examples of moving from dialogue to authentic relationships. Numerous instances of authentic relationships have led to a way of life based on trust and friendship. Unfortunately, such positive developments are not the ones that catch the attention of the public discourse and the media. Even amidst three decades of war and violence related to ethnic issues, there are numerous examples of a way of life based on trust and relationships, which led to a way of life anchored in justice and peace.

Therefore, it is imperative that interfaith dialogue for justice and peace transcends from being merely a program or a project to becoming a way of life. It cannot be confined to an agenda for seminars and conferences but must be practiced and acted out in our real daily lives. Unfortunately, in the past decade, interfaith dialogue in the name of peace and justice has been virtually hijacked by Western-driven NGOs, which has nullified the rich encounter of inter-religious dialogue in Sri Lanka and sadly transformed it into a time-bound project.

### **A challenge to the cluster of Abrahamic Religions**

In the specific context of this forum, which revolves around the interactions between Jews, Muslims and Christians, allow me, in a spirit of goodwill, to present some concerns as consider interfaith dialogue from a global context.

Very often in such gatherings confined to Jews, Christians and Muslims, we find the binding phrase “Abrahamic religions”. This phrase is a volcano waiting to explode, as this sets the three religions as bonded by the faith of Abraham, in contrast to other religions in the world. This could lead to a bi-polar religious confrontation based on worldviews in the global context in the future.

We also need to keep in mind the negativity of using such a phrase. It clearly shows that these three religions, which have their roots in the Middle East, cannot find a binding platform beyond Abraham. That is a tragedy, whereas in my view, there is much more interrelatedness in seeing creation and nature as a whole. There is more that binds these religions beyond Abraham.

Further, the call of Abraham was essentially a call to shed all your constructed identities and become a ‘non-entity’ so that he may be blessed and be a blessing to all. (Genesis 12:1-3) It was a call – to leave your country, which is tied to your national identity, to leave your kindred, which implies moving away from constructed identities of race, clan, and caste; and to leave your father’s home, which clearly meant leaving behind your inherited family identity, along with inherited wealth, inheritance and so on. Abraham was called to become a non-entity and to be a blessing to all, yet now we use the same name to strengthen the identity of three religions that are so divided and confrontational.

From a social analysis perspective, we also need to acknowledge that the so-called Abrahamic religions account for 90% of the war and violence experienced in the world. The countries rooted in Abrahamic faith are those that amass greater wealth, plunder nature more than others, and consume most of the world’s resources to satisfy their individual greed and cravings for luxury and comfort, at the expense of others whose basic needs are denied. We need to confront these these hard realities as we stand together under the banner of the so-called ‘Abrahamic religions’.

In conclusion, authentic interfaith dialogue in pursuit of peace and justice needs to rediscover the uniqueness of our faith, find new paradigms of expression in other worldviews, and be more inclusive of all life and nature. It is a courageous faith journey to be a critique of ourselves, which entails a deep spirituality that sustains such an experiential journey. It is not an academic exercise confined to seminars and conferences but a call to live out where life interacts and integrates.



*Exposure programme in Jakarta: Visit of the Istiqlal Mosque*  
*Exposure programme in Jakarta: Meeting with interreligious community*  
*in GKP Kampung Sawah*

# YOUNG CLERGY AS CATALYSTS FOR UNITY AND PEACE IN SRI LANKA

*Sujithar Sivanayagam*

Sri Lanka, an island nation in South Asia, boasts a rich tapestry of ethnic and religious diversity that deeply influences its cultural and social landscape. According to the 2012 census, the country's population is primarily composed of four major ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, and smaller communities such as Burghers, Malays, and others.

## **Ethnic Composition**

**Sinhalese:** The largest ethnic group, constituting approximately 74.9% of the population. Predominantly Buddhists, the Sinhalese have a significant influence on Sri Lanka's cultural and political spheres.

**Tamils:** Representing around 15.3% of the population, Tamils are divided into two groups:

- Sri Lankan Tamils: Indigenous to the North and East, forming about 11.2% of the total population.
- Indian Tamils: Brought by the British during the colonial period, to work on tea plantations, comprising around 4.1%.

**Moors (Muslims):** Making up about 9.3% of the population, the Moors primarily practice Islam and are scattered across the island, with significant communities in the Eastern Province.

**Other Ethnic Groups:** Including Burghers (descendants of European colonists), Malays, and smaller indigenous groups like the Veddas, these communities collectively constitute around 0.5% of the population.

## **Religious Composition**

**Buddhism:** Practiced by the majority (around 70.2%), primarily by the Sinhalese population. It profoundly influences the country's cultural heritage and political framework.

**Hinduism:** The faith of most Tamils, especially in the Northern and Eastern provinces, comprising about 12.6% of the population.

**Islam:** Practiced by the Moors and Malays, accounting for approximately 9.7% of the population.

**Christianity:** Representing around 7.4%, with Roman Catholics and various Protestant denominations. This includes both Sinhalese and Tamil Christians, as well as the Burgher community.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition has significantly shaped its historical and socio-political narrative. The island's cultural diversity is celebrated through numerous festivals and traditions, reflecting its pluralistic society. However, this diversity has also led to ethnic tensions and conflicts, most notably the civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2009, primarily between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the Tamil minority seeking autonomy. Despite past conflicts, contemporary Sri Lanka continues to strive for reconciliation and unity, recognizing its rich cultural heritage as a source of strength and identity.

## Challenges

**Political Influences on Religious Places (Unequal Treatment):** In Sri Lanka, political influences often lead to unequal treatment of religious places, with favouritism towards certain religious communities. This bias can result in preferential allocation of resources and protection for some religious sites, while others face neglect or even encroachment. Such disparities undermine religious harmony and fuel intercommunal tensions.

**Economic Crises and No Sharing Responsibilities:** Sri Lanka's recurring economic crises are exacerbated by a lack of shared responsibility among political and economic leaders. This absence of collective accountability often results in the burden falling disproportionately on the lower and middle classes. Corruption and mismanagement further deepen the crisis, hindering sustainable recovery and the equitable distribution of resources.

**Lack of Awareness of Religious Dialogue:** A significant barrier to interfaith harmony in Sri Lanka is the lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of religious dialogue. Many communities remain isolated within their own religious and cultural boundaries, leading to misconceptions and prejudices. Promoting awareness and facilitating open dialogue are essential steps toward fostering mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

---

1 <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/StatisticalInformation/CPH2011/CensusPopulationHousing2012-FinalReport>

## The way forward...

In Sri Lanka, a country with rich religious diversity, fostering interfaith dialogue among the younger generation is essential for promoting peace, unity, and mutual understanding. Children and youth clubs offer a unique opportunity to cultivate these values from a young age. Integrating religious dialogue within these clubs can help young people appreciate diverse perspectives, develop empathy, and build lasting friendships across religious boundaries.

To achieve this, a structured yet flexible approach is needed, to ensure that all participants feel respected and valued. Here are several strategies the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka has implemented:

**Inclusive Programming:** Design activities and programs that celebrate the religious and cultural diversity of Sri Lanka. This could include interfaith festivals, cultural exchange days, and collaborative community service projects that highlight the shared values and common goals among different faiths.

**Educational Workshops:** Organize workshops and discussion sessions where knowledgeable speakers from various religious backgrounds can share their beliefs and practices. These sessions should be interactive, allowing children and youth to ask questions and engage in meaningful conversations.

**Storytelling and the Arts:** Utilize storytelling, drama, music, and other arts to explore religious themes and narratives. This can make learning about different faiths more engaging and relatable for young people, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation.

**Dialogue and Reflection:** Create safe spaces for dialogue and reflection where children and youth can share their thoughts and experiences related to their own and others' religions. Encourage them to discuss the similarities and differences respectfully and constructively.

**Leadership Development:** Train youth leaders in interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution skills. Empower them to facilitate discussions and mediate any misunderstandings that may arise, promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity.

**Collaboration with Religious Institutions:** Partner with local religious institutions to organize joint events and activities. This can help bridge gaps between different communities and provide children and youth with real-world examples of interfaith cooperation.

**Curriculum Integration:** Work with educators to integrate interfaith dialogue into the club's curriculum. This could include lessons on the history of religions in Sri Lanka, the importance of religious tolerance, and the role of faith in promoting social justice and the common good.

## The importance of young clergy leadership in present-day Sri Lanka

By incorporating these strategies, children and youth clubs in Sri Lanka can play a pivotal role in fostering interfaith understanding and harmony. Through regular and meaningful religious dialogue, young people can learn to respect and celebrate their differences, paving the way for a more peaceful and united future.

The importance of young clergy leadership in present-day Sri Lanka is multifaceted, addressing both spiritual and socio-cultural needs. Here are several key aspects:

### 1. Engagement with Contemporary Issues

- **Relevance:** Young clergy are more in tune with current societal challenges, including economic hardships, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. They can address these issues in ways that resonates with the younger generation.
- **Innovative Approaches:** They bring fresh perspectives and innovative methods to ministry, making religious practices more engaging and relatable.

### 2. Fostering Youth Involvement

- **Mentorship:** Young clergy can serve as mentors and role models for youth, encouraging their active participation in church activities and leadership roles.
- **Empowerment:** By involving young people in church leadership, they help empower a new generation of leaders who can contribute to the growth and sustainability of the church.

### 3. Promoting Social Justice and Reconciliation

- **Advocacy:** Young clergy are often at the forefront of advocating for social justice, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and human rights. Their leadership is crucial for promoting peace and reconciliation in a post-conflict societies like Sri Lanka.
- **Community Building:** They play a vital role in fostering unity and collaboration among different ethnic and religious communities, contributing to national harmony.

### 4. Utilizing Technology and Media

- **Digital Evangelism:** Young clergy are adept at using digital platforms and social media for evangelism and community outreach, expanding the church's reach beyond traditional boundaries.
- **Communication:** Their ability to communicate effectively through modern channels helps bridge the gap between the church and the digital-native generation.

## 5. Addressing Mental Health and Well-being

- Support Systems: They are more aware of mental health issues and can create support systems within the church to address these concerns, offering counselling and guidance.
- Holistic Care: By emphasizing holistic care, they address the spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs of their congregations.

## 6. Ecumenical and Interfaith Initiatives

- Collaboration: Young clergy often lead ecumenical and interfaith initiatives, promoting dialogue and cooperation among different religious traditions in Sri Lanka.
- Unity: Their efforts help strengthen the bonds between various Christian denominations and other faith communities, fostering a spirit of unity and mutual respect.

## 7. Educational and Vocational Training

- Capacity Building: By offering educational programs and vocational training, young clergy contribute to the personal and professional development of their congregants, particularly the youth.
- Empowerment: These initiatives empower individuals to make positive contributions to their communities and society at large.

The leadership of young clergy is vital for the spiritual growth and socio-cultural development of present-day Sri Lanka. Their ability to engage with contemporary issues, foster youth involvement, promote social justice, utilize technology, address mental health, and lead ecumenical initiatives makes them indispensable in shaping a vibrant and inclusive church that responds effectively to the needs of the modern world.

In Sri Lanka, the prophetic ministry of religious leaders is of great significance as it provides a moral and ethical compass for the nation. This ministry involves advocating for justice, peace, and reconciliation in a society marked by ethnic tensions, economic challenges, and social inequalities. Religious leaders, through their prophetic voice, can address the root causes of societal issues, call out injustices, and inspire collective action toward the common good. By engaging in prophetic ministry, they help to bridge divides, foster interfaith dialogue, and promote a vision of a harmonious and just society. This role is crucial for guiding the nation toward healing, unity, and sustainable development.



*Public Action: Visit of the Pantai Indah Kapuk (PIK) Mangrove Forest*

# THE IMPACTS OF “WAR ON TERROR” ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUES IN THE PHILIPPINES

*Amirah Ali Lidasan*

## Introduction

The most challenging issue for interfaith organizations in the Philippines has been the ‘war on terror’ and its local implementation. This was because the anti-terror campaign targeted not only Muslims and the Bangsamoro national minority, but also those who provided humanitarian assistance and those who helped explain the context of the struggle.

War terror was first used against Muslim and Bangsamoro communities, before expanding the attacks to include communists, activists and critics, and areas of armed conflict. Anti-Muslim prejudice was used to carry out the bloodiest military operations and human rights violations. The campaign was then extended to non-Moro areas, where the majority of the population is indigenous and Christian.

The Philippines has a diverse population of various ethnic and religious groups, but many share a history of colonization, injustice, and government-led oppression. The interfaith movement has helped to promote understanding and cooperation among different religious communities, and to enrich the unity of the people’s movement for liberation and democracy in the Philippines.

However, long-term displacement, land dispossession resulting from colonization, plunder, land laws, development aggression, military operations, and the government-sponsored migration of Christian landless farmers for the economic opportunities brought by agricultural colonies and plantations, logging concessions and extractive mining investments have marginalized the Katutubo and Bangsamoro people. The government’s counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism policies have also undermined the interfaith movement.

## Common Issues, Common Struggles

The majority of the population in the Philippines are Christians, converted to Roman Catholicism during Spanish colonization and to Protestantism during

American colonization. However, there are also many indigenous peoples, or Katutubo, who have retained their culture and practices.<sup>1</sup>

Post-independence, national minorities continue to face discrimination, government neglect, and marginalization. This situation has been further aggravated by endless military offensives, militarization and even massacres in our communities during the Martial Law period. Thousands of families were forcibly evacuated; there was indiscriminate strafing, burning of houses and destruction of their properties, ravaging of their villages, and other human rights violations.

The government and the landowners responsible for land grabbing are promoting the resource conflict as a religious one, pitting the Bangsamoro farmers against their Christian counterparts. During the Martial Law period, big landlords financed these vigilante groups, which were later used by the Philippine government as paramilitaries for their counter-insurgency programs. Some of these vigilante groups have associated themselves with Christianity and have committed human rights violations against Muslims and even Christians.

This has prompted a collective response by the Moro people to assert their inalienable right to land and self-determination, giving rise to Moro national consciousness and political movements. The Bangsamoro people fought an armed campaign for their right to self-determination in defense of their ancestral lands, villages, and people as well as for secession from the Philippine government under the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) has made it clear in its program that it acknowledges and defends the rights of the Moro and other indigenous peoples to self-determination, including the right to secede through armed struggle. In Mindanao's shared borders, the NDFP has even encouraged alliances with the MNLF and MILF.

The interfaith movement in Mindanao began in the 1980s, during Martial Laws, to contradict the narrative of a Muslim-Christian conflict. Catholic and Protestant religious leaders initiated dialogues with Muslim leaders to promote peace and understanding in the context of resource and political conflicts. The first to emerge was the Silsilah dialogue movement, initiated by Catholic missionaries, which talked about the harmony of religions. Then the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) implemented work known as the Program to Assist Christians in Education about Muslims (PACEM), with the aim of increasing Christian understanding of the Moro people. Members of the NCCP

---

1 Muslims in the Philippines are estimated to be around 7 million, while the Bangsamoro or Moro people, who are concentrated in Mindanao, comprise around 5 million of the population. The Moros and Katutubos have historically fought against Spanish and American colonialism, with blood pacts and the 1896 Philippine Revolution uniting efforts.

as well as Catholics promoted the practice of *Duyog Ramdahan*, which encouraged Christians to accompany Muslims in their communities during fasting.

There were interfaith movements supporting the peace process and campaigning for regional autonomy. Some of these initiatives were taken by the government, such as the formation of the Bishop-Ulama Conference in 1996. The government also proclaimed an annual activity called the Mindanao Week of Peace in 1999 to promote peace and reconciliation in Mindanao.

Over time, these interfaith dialogues have evolved to include not only Christians and Muslims, but also indigenous peoples in Mindanao, collectively known as Lumad, who are also asserting their right to ancestral lands and self-determination. These groups include Kalinaw Mindanao (Peace in Mindanao), Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao, Moro-Christian Peoples Alliance (MCPA), and Sowing the Seeds of Peace in Mindanao - which are grassroots-based interfaith and ecumenical movements for justice and peace. Groups like MCPA have also initiated interfaith activities such as *Duyog Ramadan* (Together during Ramadan) and Interfaith Solidarity Iftar as a platform for interfaith dialogue.

In the context of the peace negotiations, religious leaders also formed the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform, which was established in 2007 with the assistance of the Norwegian Ecumenical Peace Platform (NEPP). This came about as a result of the Royal Norwegian Government taking on the role of Third Party Facilitator for the peace negotiations between the GRP and the NDFP.

The goal of these dialogues is to promote unity, collaboration and understanding among different peoples of faith, and to find common ground in addressing issues such as human rights, rights to land and resources, peace negotiations, and the recognition of minority peoples' struggle for self-determination.

However, the government consistently undermines these initiatives when implementing its counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency programs. Discrimination against the Moro people escalates whenever the Philippine government implements new counter-insurgency strategies, such as full-scale military operations or 'all-out wars' and the US-led international 'war on terror.'

In order to justify its aggression in Mindanao, the Philippine government uses the propaganda portraying military action against the Moro liberation movements as a Muslim-Christian conflict, even using symbols such as waving flags on top of a bombed-out mosque.

The "war on terror" has further vilified the Moro people's struggle by suspecting religion, culture, communities and even the texts (Qur'an and Hadith) of promoting terrorism. The anti-terror policy has been used to violate the civil and political rights of the Muslim population through terror-tagging, illegal arrests, detention and torture.

Each administration has its own military operation that caused damage to Moro civilian communities, deaths of many civilians, and a halt to the peace process: President Joseph Estrada's "all-out war" against the MILF in the year 2000, resulting in 800,000 to one million evacuees; President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's own version of "all-out war" against the MILF in 2003, resulting in half a million evacuees by the end of 2004; and President Benigno Aquino Jr's military operations against the MILF and MNLF in 2013 and 2015.

President Rodrigo Duterte's war policy against "extremists" in the Philippines has resulted in massive displacement, deaths of Bangsamoro civilians, and the destruction of communities. He made remarks that appeared to be directed at the Meranaw people, a group that primarily resides in Marawi City, for allowing radical ideologies to infiltrate their community.

For five months, the government used military airstrikes, aided by US soldiers and arsenals, to subdue a small band of self-proclaimed ISIS-affiliated group that held hostage Marawi City in May 2017 in response to the military raid. The airstrikes and group operation left more than 400,000 evacuees and millions of properties destroyed, including mosques and madrasahs.

At the end of his term, he was able to pass a law that gave a broad definition of terrorism and terrorist acts, gave an anti-terrorism council power to designate terrorist groups and individuals and allowed warrantless arrest and prolonged detention without a formal charge.

Humanitarian efforts by faith-based organizations to help victims of anti-terror may be seen as acts of terrorism, leading to the filing of charges such as financing terrorism, terror-tagging, and risking the lives of humanitarian workers. Interfaith dialogues are under strain as groups that have long worked with groups arbitrarily labeled as terrorists by government fear putting themselves and their organizations at risk.

Members of organizations such as the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines have been labeled terrorists, imprisoned, and incarcerated on trumped-up charges. Officers and staff, including nuns and lay people, have been indicted for financing terrorists, which carries a 40-year prison sentence and a million peso fine.

For more than a decade, the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines have assisted Moro communities in Mindanao with relief and rehabilitation projects, particularly those affected by the floods caused by Typhoon Sendong and military operations in conflict areas of Mindanao. They have also been instrumental in establishing Lumad Schools in the rural areas of Mindanao. The Lumad is a collective term used to describe the 18 indigenous peoples groups in Mindanao.

If we do not actively oppose these attacks, if we do not reveal the political and economic motivations behind these operations, and if we do not continue to defend the legitimacy of the struggles of the peoples and the minorities, we will fall prey to the trap set by the “war on terror” and the government’s counter-insurgency program. We find common issues and common struggles such as human rights and peace as the basis of our unity. This is the context of the formation of our group, the Moro-Christian Peoples Alliance<sup>2</sup> and the SANDUGO Movement of Moro and Katutubo for Self-Determination.<sup>3</sup>

---

2 Moro-Christian Peoples Alliance, a network of civil libertarians and religious leaders who identify as Muslims and Christians, was established in August 1999. It promotes and defends the human rights of the Moro people and provides assistance to those who have been the victims of violations of their human rights. The network also supports the collective rights and aspirations of the Moro people for self-determination.

3 SANDUGO, a network of various organizations and individuals representing the various tribes in the Philippines, was founded in October 2016 with the goal of bringing the nation’s minorities together in their collective struggle for self-determination and just peace against the expansion of corporate plantations that resulted in landlessness and violations of minority rights, as well as destructive mining operations.



*Public Action: Mangrove planting as a symbol of hope for a more peaceful and just world*

# FACING THE CHALLENGES OF INTERFAITH ACTION IN AFRICA: EXAMPLES FROM TANZANIA

*Rebecca Muhoza*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tanzania's history has been marked by a remarkable level of religious tolerance and coexistence. With over 120 ethnic groups and multiple religions, including Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs, our country stands as a beacon of peaceful religious cohabitation in a world often torn by religious conflicts. However, this harmony is not without its challenges. Through this discourse, I aim to provide insights, provoke thought, and foster a deeper understanding of the complex yet crucial realm of interfaith relations in our nation.

### *Objectives*

The objective of this paper is to explore the multifaceted perspectives and challenges of interfaith action in Tanzania. We will investigate how interfaith dialogue contributes to national unity and identity, analyze its impact on socio-economic development, and understand the vital role of youth in shaping the future of interfaith relations. Concurrently, we will confront the significant challenges – the socio-political dynamics, the threat of radicalization and extremism, educational and misinformation issues, and the effects of economic polarization and the politicization of religion. By addressing these issues, we will not only pave the way for a more cohesive society but also set a precedent for global peace and understanding.

## Part I: Perspectives of Interfaith Action

### *Unity and National Identity*

Let us first explore the familiar Tanzanian concept of Umoja, which means unity, not just a word but a foundational principle that has guided our nation through various challenges. Interfaith initiatives serve as a powerful tool in reinforcing this principle. In a landscape where multiple religions coexist, the concerted efforts of these diverse groups to work together for common goals strengthens the bonds of national identity.

### *Socio-economic Development*

Socio-economic development in the context of interfaith initiatives also plays a crucial role here. The intersection of these initiatives with socio-economic progress can be seen in various parts of Tanzania. For instance, interfaith groups collaborating on community projects such as health clinics, schools, or environmental conservation efforts contribute to the social and economic upliftment of local communities. These collaborative efforts underscore the potential of interfaith action as a catalyst for positive change and development.

### *Youth Engagement and the Future*

Next, let's discuss youth engagement. According to the 2022 Population Census report, 70% of Tanzanians are under the age of 30. Therefore, in a country where a significant portion of the population is youth, engaging them in interfaith dialogue and activities is not only beneficial, but essential for our future. Involving young people in interfaith initiatives serves multiple purposes. It educates them about the importance of religious tolerance, equips them with skills to navigate a religiously diverse world, and most importantly, it embeds the values of respect and understanding from an early age. The long-term benefits of fostering interfaith understanding among young people are immense. It prepares a generation of leaders who are well versed in cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect, – attributes that are essential for the continued peace and prosperity of our nation. By investing in our youth through interfaith activities, we are essentially sowing the seeds for a future that is not only more tolerant but also more harmonious and united.

In summary, Part I highlights the significant impact of interfaith action in promoting national unity, contributing to socioeconomic development, and preparing our youth for a future of inclusive and peaceful coexistence.

## **Part II: Challenges of Interfaith Action**

### *Socio-Political Dynamics*

We now turn our attention to the challenges facing interfaith action in Tanzania, starting with the socio-political dynamics. The delicate balancing act between maintaining religious freedom and political maneuvering is a complex one. Political entities may sometimes align themselves with specific religious groups for support, which can unintentionally marginalize others. This delicate balance can influence how religious groups perceive each other and their roles in the society.

Furthermore, the effects of political instability on religious coexistence cannot be overestimated. In times of political turbulence, religious differences can be exaggerated or manipulated, leading to a breakdown in the mutual understanding and tolerance that we have nurtured over the years.

### *Radicalization and Extremism*

Another pressing challenge is the spread of radical ideologies. We live in an age where extreme views can be easily propagated, often targeting vulnerable or marginalized groups within our communities. This poses a significant threat to the fabric of interfaith harmony that Tanzania has long enjoyed. Protecting interfaith action from exploitation by extremists is crucial. We must remain vigilant and ensure that our efforts in fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation are not hijacked to further divisive or harmful agendas.

### *Education and Misinformation*

The role of education and the battle against misinformation are also critical areas of focus. Educational gaps in understanding different religions can lead to misconceptions and stereotypes. Addressing these gaps and integrating interfaith education into our schools and media can play a pivotal role in fostering a more informed and tolerant society. In addition, the challenge of combating misinformation is essential to maintaining the integrity of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, especially in the digital age where false narratives can spread rapidly.

### *Economic Polarization*

The recent case involving DP World's entry into a deal with the Tanzanian government, which resulted in sides being taken along religious lines, highlights the issue of economic polarization. It is essential to ensure that economic developments and agreements do not inadvertently cause religious divisions. Preventing economic deals from being perceived through a religious lens requires a concerted effort to promote inclusive growth and equitable benefits for all, regardless of religious affiliation.

### *Politicization of Religion and Religiozation of Politics*

Lastly, we must address the interplay between religion and politics. Analyzing how these two spheres influence each other is crucial to understand the broader context of interfaith challenges. The politicization of religion and the religiozation of politics often blur the lines between religious beliefs and political agendas, complicating interfaith relations.

## Part III: The Way Forward

In conclusion, it is imperative to not only recognize the challenges of interfaith action in Tanzania but also to chart a course for the future. Let us consider the strategies and steps necessary to strengthen and advance interfaith cooperation in our nations.

### *Strategies to Overcome Challenges*

#### 1. Fostering Inclusive Political Processes

To address the politicization of religion and vice versa, it is essential to advocate for and develop political processes that are inclusive and representative of all religious groups. This can be achieved through policy reforms and by encouraging religious leaders to remain neutral in political matters.

#### 2. Promoting Interfaith Education

Addressing misinformation and educational gaps requires a comprehensive approach to integrating interfaith education into our school curricula and public discourse. This includes developing educational materials that promote understanding and respect for different religions.

#### 3. Community Engagement and Dialogue

Regular interfaith dialogues and community engagements can help bridge the gaps caused by socio-political dynamics and economic polarization. These platforms allow for open communication and understanding of different perspectives, thereby fostering unity.

#### 4. Youth Involvement

Engaging the youth in interfaith initiatives ensures the long-term sustainability of interfaith dialogue. By involving young people in leadership roles and decision-making processes, we can cultivate a new generation of leaders committed to religious tolerance.

#### 5. Creating Economic Opportunities

To prevent economic polarization, it is vital to ensure that economic opportunities and benefits are accessible to all, regardless of religious affiliation. This involves creating equitable economic policies and ensuring transparency in economic dealings.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the journey of interfaith action in Tanzania is a continuous one, marked by both challenges and opportunities. The path forward requires a collective effort from all stakeholders – government, religious leaders, educators, the youth, and the wider community. By adopting inclusive policies, fostering open dialogues, engaging in community-driven initiatives, and prioritizing education, we can overcome these challenges and build a more cohesive, tolerant, and prosperous Tanzania.



*Presentation of the Interfaith Message to the public, read by Hanim Ezder, Rev. Rebecca Muhoza, Rabbi Jaakov Baruch and others*

# FIVE CENTURIES OF WORKING ON INTERFAITH & INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS IN ZANZIBAR

## Successes, Challenges and Future Prospectus

*Issa H. Ziddy*

### Introduction

The five centuries of interfaith & intercultural relations in Zanzibar can be divided into three phases. The **1<sup>st</sup> phase** can be dated back to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE when the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and his crew arrived in Zanzibar in 1499. At that time, Zanzibar was mainly populated by Muslims who benefited from the Indian Ocean and the monsoon winds that played a vital role in connecting Zanzibar and the region with the world's regions. Zanzibar was the center of a history of competition not only of traders in "materials" but also of traders in "ideas" who struggled to reach and gain more "customers" in the region. It is important to note that the influence of Islamic culture during this stage in Zanzibar and the region has found expression in different fields of relevant daily life. These fields include, among others, political institutions, political ideas, political vocabularies, law, concepts of times, linguistics, knowledge, religion, worship, trade, business, economy, marriage, and clothing.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> phase** of interfaith & intercultural relations in Zanzibar began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this phase, Christians returned not as occupiers as in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage but as missionaries who came and acquired assistance from the Sultans of Zanzibar to spread their religion. In this phase, the relationship between the Muslim Sultans who ruled Zanzibar and the Christian missionaries was good. They provided places to build mission stations and churches and, to a point, even donated items in the building of churches. During the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Zanzibar became a British protectorate. The Sultan of Zanzibar had powers to supervise religious matters on the Island and the ten-mile East African coastal strip that was considered to belong to Zanzibar. Even though he was given authority to oversee Islamic religious affairs, the rights of non-Muslims were protected. In December 1963, Zanzibar became an independent nation.

The Sultan gave special consideration to the peaceful coexistence that aimed to avoid conflicts between pluralistic Zanzibar communities.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of interfaith & intercultural relations in Zanzibar began in 1964 after the establishment of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, which in this year was merged with Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania. The Union stimulated the migration from both sides with their cultures, religions and traditions. In recent years, mainland Tanzania's migration to Zanzibar has increased with tourism in Zanzibar. The migrants from the mainland are mainly Christians.

Before the coming of Christianity in the area, the whole East African coast from Mogadishu to as far south as Mozambique and the East African islands was once known as Zanzibar. Evidence shows that traders from Yemen, the Shiraz region of Iran and the Western Indian coast have traded all along the Zanzibar coast of East Africa since at least the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Through a network of trade routes, Zanzibar was linked to vast areas of Asia, the Mediterranean, and Europe. Zanzibar was not particularly rich in the resources the traders sought, but its sheltered harbour was an ideal base for trade with the mainland. As a centre of cross-cultural exchange, Zanzibar not only realized remarkable economic growth and saw the creation of new land and sea trade routes; it also received different missionary groups from distant lands, thus coming into contact with all world religions. During the monsoon season, the sea (Indian Ocean) was a medium of transport and exchange of commodities, goods, ideas, and beliefs. The spread of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam was the best example of the spread of faiths and cultures on the East African Coast.

Trade development in East Africa and the emergence of Zanzibar Town as a regional business centre attracted different faiths and cultures worldwide. However, most of the first immigrants to this area were Muslim scholars from South Asia, Yemen, and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> phase of working on interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar**

Zanzibar thus became an important centre of Islamic learning with scholars of different religious orientations and traditions. Zanzibar also became an example of the region's religious tolerance and intercultural relations.

However, this religious tolerance and intercultural relations were trailed for the first time when the Portuguese power managed to control Zanzibar in 1499. They moved up from the south after successfully rounding the Cape of Good

Hope in 1488, and the Portuguese empire became the first European power to gain control of the Islands. For the next 200 years, European Christians would remain leaders of these islands and nearby towns.

In 1698, Zanzibar fell under the control of the Sultanate of Oman, ending the Portuguese control in the whole area. Zanzibar became the headquarters of the Sultanate of Oman when Sultan Sayyid Said moved his capital from Mascut to Zanzibar. When the Portuguese left Zanzibar, some Christians left with them, except a few Goan Christians who remained in the islands without either church or priests but maintained their community through private devotions.

In brief, we can say that Islam was the only world religion in the region for more than six centuries. It was followed by Christianity, which was first introduced in Zanzibar with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498. In 1567, the Augustinian order was established to counter the influence of Islam. The first small chapel was constructed in Zanzibar by the Portuguese in 1612. The chapel was demolished, and a little fort was built in 1710 (Sheriff 1995: 8).

While Christianity in Zanzibar can go back historically to the Portuguese explorations, there is very little in the line of buildings to show its existence. In the old Stone Town, there are only two Christian churches, located not far from each other, the two cathedrals built during the Arab Muslim era: one Anglican and another Roman Catholic. Rather than the evidence of buildings, there is the evidence of names in graveyards and the members of two notable segments of Christian populations today that indicate the roots of the Church in Zanzibar must be traced to Portugal. The oldest segment is that of the Goan community and the Makonde tribe, who came to Zanzibar as refugees from Catholic Mozambique, a Portuguese colony. In 1860, a large Roman Catholic Church was built in Zanzibar that still exists.

## **The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of working on interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar**

After the collapse of Portuguese leadership in Zanzibar, the spread of Christianity was not easy in Zanzibar and other East African coastal towns under the rule of the Sultans of Zanzibar, at least during their first years, because of the widespread belief in Islam in the region. As a result of this situation, Christian missionaries limited their first activities to education, pastoral work among the town's small Roman Catholic Goan community, and health care. Regardless of the hospitality of the Muslims in Zanzibar and the region, few of them showed any interest in converting to the new religion. The missionaries understood this,

and hence, in the beginning, they relocated their main activities to the areas of mainland Tanzania (Tanganyika) and interior parts of Uganda and Kenya. They set up missions in Bagamoyo in Tanganyika in 1868 and went to other parts of interior East Africa. It is important to remember that during this mission's expansion, they used Zanzibar facilities as headquarters to direct their mainland efforts. By making Zanzibar the base of their missionary activities, they advanced Zanzibar's claim to play a role in shaping the interfaith and intercultural maps in the region.

The Sultan then allowed people of all faiths to conduct religious services. Religious freedom was guaranteed, and people of different faiths interacted unhindered.

The arrival of Westerners to Zanzibar began to include the occasional passing of missionaries and clergy from ships in the harbour. In 1844, more permanent Christian missionaries arrived in East Africa, such as the Lutheran minister Dr. Krapf and his two companions working for the English Church Missionary Society. Based in Mombasa, they visited Zanzibar and requested permission to establish a church in Mombasa. Sayyid Said, the first Sultan of Zanzibar, agreed to their request and wrote a "historical" recommendation letter to his Governor at Mombasa, saying: "I am sending you Dr Krapf. He is a man of God who wants to spread the word of God. Do everything in your power to facilitate his work." (Ziddy: 2019)

The religious tolerance in Zanzibar during that time was not confined to heavenly religions. Still, the Sultan allowed the establishment of several Hindu Temples and their holy cows and a place on shore where they could burn their dead. Not only was that, but in the 1840s, Sayyid Said bin Sultan forbade his Muslim subjects to slaughter cows in the residential areas of minority Hindus in deference to their religious sensitivities.

Bishop George Tozer and his assistant Rev. Edward Steere of UMCA moved to Zanzibar in 1864, and they got a welcome reception from the second Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Majid bin Said. The Sultan gave them five young people to help in the work of the mission. They were baptized on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1865 with four other converts. In 1873, the Bishops Steere and Tozer completed the construction of the Anglican Cathedral at Mkunazini, which was allowed in 1863. Sayyid Barghash bin Said, the third Sultan of Zanzibar, was so impressed that he donated a large clock to put in the structure's bell tower. Although there was no clock in the original plan, the Church leaders agreed to install the Sultan's gift, which led to modifications of the tower to make it thinner and taller. That, in turn, affected another gift, a fine set of 25 bells carillon chimes which could play lengthy tunes, although their size and weight were too much for the slender

tower. Only 13 were installed, the rest of the bells being distributed to other churches and schools. The most we can talk about regarding the establishment of this Church is that part of the land where this Church was built was donated by the Hindu Customs Master.

Although Islam and the Kiswahili language comprise the cultural basis of the islands' social fabrics, other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Parsee Zoroastrians, as well as languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Arabic and local languages coexisted peacefully and respectfully. Regardless of individual beliefs and confessions, all Zanzibaris have always congregated together to celebrate Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Maulid*), Christmas, the Birthday of the Great Buddha, and the Hindi Diwali.

Sultans who were Muslims of the Ibadhi Sect did this to benefit all people in their empire and maintain and promote peace, religious tolerance and understanding between their people and others in their kingdom. Another thing that may catch the reader's attention is that religious denominations were free to follow their laws of marriage, divorce, and conducting funerals. This is to say that no one was left behind. Truly, the interfaith and intercultural relations between Christians, Muslims and other denominations of religions in Zanzibar and others can be explained much better than many other African places, which attracted the world to visit and live in Zanzibar. (Msungu 2017: 43-49)

The evidence of Zanzibar being the most famous centre for working interfaith and intercultural relations can be understood when one observes the formation of Zanzibar people in the Sultanate during the said period. The settlement of traders, religious leaders and labourers in more significant numbers in Zanzibar towns and its suburbs throughout the centuries, some of them intermarrying with the indigenous local people, established the most cosmopolitan population in the world. Ingram described this phenomenon: "The population of Zanzibar is one of the most sophisticated in the world. In the census of 1910 and 1921, the non-African (Swahili) population has been shown as belonging to the following peoples: British (the paramount power in East Africa since 1890), French, German, Portuguese, American, Norwegian, Italian, Greek, Dutch, Hebrew, Swedish, Goan, Indian, Cingalese (sic), Parsee, Arab, Baluchi, Japanese, Chinese, Armenian, Seychellian and Mauritian ..." (Ingrams: 1931, 28).

"Zanzibar was then a cosmopolitan metropolis. Its harbour was filled with square-rigged vessels from the West and dhows with their lateen sails from many countries in the East, carrying all the colours of the rainbow" (Sheriff: 1995, 1).

Issa (1995) explained the situation in Zanzibar town by saying: "Zanzibar Stone Town is a triangular peninsula along the western side of Zanzibar Island. During the nineteenth century, it was a complex metropolis that included peo-

ple of many religions and nationalities. There were Arabs, Indians, and Africans, but there were also Europeans, Americans, Persians, Turks, Egyptians, Chinese, Seychellois, and Sri Lankans. The town was predominately Muslim.”

Most likely, this type of cosmopolitan was no doubt established a long time ago during a process of exchange of goods and commodities (material or spiritual) brought by monsoon winds via the Indian Ocean and the maritime silk route. Indeed, those people have come with their own cultural beliefs, faiths and traditions, which they mingled with new spices in this new environment of cultures. In the end, everyone managed to gain, give and share his faith and culture in a way that blended the community with traditions of endurance, harmony, acquaintance and positive interactions despite their differences. The researcher believes this concept was in the head and mind of Sayyid Jamshid, the last Sultan of Zanzibar, when he received the country’s independence by producing the stamp that shows the importance of living together despite their differences. Their new culture and the known development were raised in respecting interfaith and intercultural, as mentioned in the independence stamp below as religious tolerance.



This stamp was first introduced on the independence day of Zanzibar. From left to right: The Cathedral of Saint Joseph, the Christ Church Cathedral, the Malindi Mosque, the Hujjatul Islam Mosque and the Hindu Temple.<sup>1</sup>

## **The 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of working on interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar**

This phase began in January 1964, when the revolution overthrew the government of Zanzibar. In April 1964, the Revolutionary Council merged Zanzibar with Tanganyika, forming the United Republic of Tanzania. The Union of Zanzibar and Tanganyika stimulated migration from both sides. In recent years, mainland Tanzania's migration to Zanzibar has increased with the establishment of a tourism economy. Migrants from mainland Tanzania sometimes come to Zanzibar with faiths and cultures that differ from popular culture.

Generally speaking, the interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar, mainly between Christians and Muslims, started with confrontation, occupation, and oppression in the Portuguese phase; it became friendlier and experienced peaceful co-existence during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when there were mutual understandings between the Sultan's political and Islamic religious leaderships on one hand and the Christian Missionaries with Western powers on the other hand, which continued during the colonial period. However, when the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century started, things in renowned interfaith and intercultural relations began to change openly regarding the existing relations between Muslims and Christians in Zanzibar in particular and Tanzania in general.

## **Challenges of working interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar's 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Some of the activities of extremists from both Muslim and Christian groups in Zanzibar were observed when some young people started teaching intolerance and polarization, and others started to politicize religion or to religionize politics!

Some Muslim groups arranged *Mihadhara* and some Christian groups arranged Crusades gatherings, which provoked the opponents. The debates about Union Politics also widened the fear about the positive relations between Christians and Muslims. Though this is more about the politics of a Mainland-Zanzi-

---

1 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamp\\_of\\_Zanzibar\\_-\\_1964\\_-\\_Colnect\\_582686\\_-\\_Religious\\_Tolerance\\_overprints.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamp_of_Zanzibar_-_1964_-_Colnect_582686_-_Religious_Tolerance_overprints.jpeg).

bar issue, it takes religious connotations in the eyes of religious people since one group is predominantly Muslim and the other predominantly Christian.

The political situation in Zanzibar, especially during the election seasons, also contributes to poor relations between Christians and Muslims in Zanzibar or those who are coming to Zanzibar from mainland Tanzania and those who are “Zanzibaris” in origin. Some members of the then-main opposition political party claimed that the ruling party had been importing voters from the mainland to win elections in Zanzibar.

When the government of Tanzania decided to review its constitution by collecting opinions on how to rewrite it in 2012, one of the religious organizations registered to advocate on religious issues in Zanzibar started advocating on issues translated by the ruling party that owned the government as political issues. Because their discussions touched on Zanzibar’s autonomy. When the police reacted toward this organization, the situation became a confrontation between Christian-Muslim relations / interfaith relations. Some religious properties were ruined, spiritual properties were damaged, and Christian and moderate Muslim leaders attacked.

Regarding these types of challenges that sometimes take the lives of some Zanzibar people or produce Zanzibar refugees in the name of religion or politics, it is obvious that today, as it was yesterday, Zanzibar’s future lies in their capacity to surpass the political manipulations which tend to divide them along racial and or religious lines. There is no future for Zanzibar people out of their feelings and maintaining Zanzibar’s dignity. This is clearly emphasized by Professor Sheriff, who once advised that: “It (Zanzibar) has a history of invasions and of assimilations of the invaders in the integrated culture of Zanzibar. It is a cultural mosaic with a pattern and a meaning that would be lost if the pieces were separated and identified individually as African, Arab, Indian, (Muslim, Christian) etc. It can only be identified as Zanzibaris” (Sheriff: 1996).

## Conclusion

As a member of the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC) that

- Supports the efforts of building relationships between Christians and Muslims in Zanzibar,
- Assists the joint committees of religious leaders works, by giving technical assistance and connecting the committee to local and international partners,
- Facilitates training and exchanges for the committee,

- Supports the joint committees of religious leaders in Zanzibar to promote peace and tranquility during elections and beyond,
- Mediates interfaith conflicts and makes joint statements in the media to address pertinent issues,
- Supports the work of the youth interfaith forum of Zanzibar (YIFOZA) by providing technical assistance, coordination, facilitation of workshops and connects YIFOZA to internal and external partners
- Brings together leaders of various Muslim and Christian youth groups,
- Enhances collaboration with Tumaini University, Dar es Salaam Campus (TUDARCo) that developed a Curriculum and established a Diploma in Intercultural Relations,
- Trains the youth of both religions to understand each other life peacefully and
- Organizes interfaith and intrafaith dialogue forums where religious leaders, youth, and women can discuss common issues in peaceful, open and clean ways; I see the positive prospectus on working interfaith and intercultural relations in Zanzibar if the following circumstances can be realized:
  - 1: Respect the faith and religions of others
  - 2: Accept the importance of faith and religion
  3. Establishment of Interfaith Committees on Socioeconomic, Human Rights, etc.
  4. Spreading the knowledge of working with sensitive issues among members of Interfaith relations
  5. Having the required knowledge, skills and experience of working in Interfaith/intercultural relations.

## References

- W. H. Ingrams (1931), *Zanzibar, its History and its People*, London.
- Amina Ameir Issa (1995), *The Burial of the Elite in Nineteenth Century Zanzibar Stone Town*, in: A. Sheriff 1995
- Umar Ahmad Kasule (2006), *Islam and African Culture South of the Sahara*, A paper presented at the Islamic Civilisation in Southern Africa Symposium, Johannesburg, 1-3 September 2006
- Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi (2013), *Islam and Early Globalization in the Indian Ocean World (An East African Perspective)*, A paper presented at the International Symposium on the History and Culture of the Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa, Zanzibar, Tanzania. 2-4 September 2013

- Abdulaziz.Y. Lodhi (2000), *Oriental influences in Swahili: A study in Language and Cultural Contacts*, Gothenburg, Department of Oriental and African Languages
- Roman Loimeier (2009), *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills: The Politics of Islamic Education in 20<sup>th</sup> century Zanzibar*, Leiden, Boston.
- Roman Loimeier (2013), *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology*, Indiana University Press
- A. Abu Mangah (2003), *Arab & Islamic Civilization in East and West Africa*, A paper presented at the Islamic Civilization in Eastern Africa, Kampala, 15-17 December, 2003
- S. Msungu (2017), *The Historical Relationship between the Christians and the Muslims in Zanzibar 1980s-1990s*.
- Gaudence Peter Mushi (2019), *Five Hundred Years of Christianity and Inter-religious Relations in Zanzibar*, In: Kambale J.-B. Kahongya Bwiruka, *Peace Among the People*, International Interreligious Peace Conference in Zanzibar, foedus-Verlag Solingen
- Allyson Purpura (1997), *Knowledge and Agency. The Social Relations of Islamic Expertise in Zanzibar Town*, Ph.D. Thesis, the City University of New York, Ann Arbor Microfilms.
- Abdul Sheriff (1995), *The History & Conservation of Zanzibar Stone Town*, London: Dept. of Archives, Museums & Antiquities, Athens: Ohio University Press
- Abdul Sheriff (1996), *Historical Zanzibar: Romance of the Ages*, HSP Publications, London
- Issa H. Ziddy (2019), *The Famous Southern end of the Silk Road: Zanzibar's role in shaping the world religions' map in the region*
- سلطان القاسمي (1989)، تقسيم الإمبراطورية العمانية 1856 – 1862، مؤسسة البيان للطباعة والنشر، دبي

# ZANZIBAR PEACE EXPERIENCE AND EXAMPLES OF INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES

*Alex Malasusa*

Islands, Unguja and Pemba, have been part of the United Republic of Tanzania since 1964. Before the union, Zanzibar was a separate state and had a long history of trade with the Arab world. The population of the islands is about 1.7 million, made up of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Bahias and other minority faiths.

Islam is the most prominent religion in Zanzibar. It is estimated that around 98% of the population is Muslim, but this has not prevented love between some Christians and Muslims from flourishing. Tanzanians are old hands at living in a multi-faith context, many of us Tanzanians have grown up in mixed families.

The current Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania section 19; about the right of freedom of religion (Act No.15 of 1984 Art.6; Act No.4 of 1992 Art.9; Act No.1 of 2005 Art.6) state that “every person has the right to the freedom to have conscience, or faith, and choice in matters of religion, including the freedom to change his religion or faith, and that to proclaim and promote ones religion is a fundamental human right and a religious duty.”<sup>1</sup> Both religions share this conviction and become missionary religions in this sense.

There are extremists on both religious sides, where anti-Christian propaganda by Muslim radicals is answered by anti-Islamic propaganda by Christian radicals. These religious radical groups started to slander each other and reached the stage of burning down places of worship such as churches and the death of some religious leaders such as: A prominent Muslim scholar who spoke out against extremist behavior in the islands had acid thrown in his face; some priests were shot and seriously wounded, while one was shot dead as he arrived at an outstation.

During the troubles, churches were placed under military protection. Priests sent their families to the mainland and stayed on the island to keep the church secure. Interfaith dialogue participants stepped in. These efforts by the government and religious leaders helped defuse the situation, but tensions are always present.

---

1 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA (CAP. 2), p.16. Consulted on <https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/constitution.pdf>; 11.6.2024.

This makes dialogue between Christians and Muslims and others indispensable. This has contributed to the existing interfaith activities in Zanzibar. For example, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese and Danmission constituted the Zanzibar Interfaith Center ZANZIC, which is used as a tool for interfaith action and has so far done the following:

### **Zanzibar Interfaith Center ZANZIC**

- ZANZIC runs an inter-generational dialogue series where young people dialogue with religious and community leaders on the question of peace, justice and economic rights.
- ZANZIC is a place where young people explore their potential to build a reliant society, while highlighting their intent to reject divisive ideologies of any form, be it political, religious or ethnic. Young people learn how older generations lived together in harmony to build a future peaceful society.
- ZANZIC facilitates the Campus Interfaith Leadership Conference for university students. It brings together young people of different faiths to address common challenges and promote common aspirations. Through ZANZIC, the idea was to create an interfaith association of university students at national level and interfaith forums in universities. This process will create a strong social cohesion, remove religious divides on campuses, while building future leaders with religious tolerance with the theme: “Tupo pamoja” Working Together for Peace and Humanity through Interfaith Cooperation.
- ZANZIC facilitates Interfaith Storytelling as one way to help overcome the narrow and inaccurate views of people from other religious backgrounds.
- ZANZIC organizes workshops and training on mediation and peace brokerage for members of the JOINT COMMITTEE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR PEACE. These peace committees strengthen amicable relations in times of stress or transition. The committees are made up of Muslims, Catholics and some other Christian denominations who work hand in hand with the government, civil societies and some international organizations to promote peace and intervene immediate when peace is threatened, such as in elections controversies.
- ZANZIC coordinates and provides in-kind support to the Joint Committee of Religious Leaders, whose Muslim, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran members promote peaceful coexistence through regular meetings and by establishing local peace committees. The Joint Committee offers pre-election

seminars and stays in touch with candidates, police and government leaders. Committee leaders aim to build trust, share concerns and dreams, and promote reconciliation.

- The committee is chaired by the Mufti of Zanzibar and vice-chaired by the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Zanzibar. This committee meets regularly to discuss matters relevant to maintaining peace and resolving conflicts arising from electoral disputes, religious misunderstandings or any other cause. However, the main purpose of this committee is to prevent conflict from occurring for whatever reason.
- ZANZIC organizes sport as a means of promoting integration, social cohesion and fighting all forms of discrimination. ZANZIC has teamed up with UEM to procreate awareness-raising activities for amateur athletes and youth as part of creating solidarity and social inclusion in Zanzibar. ZANZIC's interfaith youth soccer team begins each match with Christian and Muslim prayers and sports the slogan "Struggle for Peace" on its jerseys.
- ZANZIC has mobilized some resources to start a Girls Scholarship Fund, 10 girls from Pemba have benefited from this fund, enabling them to acquire vocational skills at Upendo Sewing School. Skills like these empower girls and make a difference in their future lives.
- More than 200 teachers from Muslim religious schools have completed ZANZIC training in non-violent teaching methodology, peace-building and interfaith skills, in the hope that they will pass on the spirit of coexistence to their students.<sup>2</sup>

### *Social services:*

We immediately got involved in providing educational, medical and many other social services that bring us into daily contact with people of other religions. In our nursery, primary, secondary schools and other educational institutions, in our dispensaries and medical centers, in our various seminars on entrepreneurship or counselling sessions, the vast majority of those who are the direct beneficiaries of these services are our Muslim brothers and sisters. This interaction provides us with an opportunity for dialogue at the level of action. When you bring people together to serve, specifically the youth and children, you are building future peaceful coexistence.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2018/12/the-art-of-coexistence/>

### *Upendo Women Empowerment Limited:*

Upendo Women Empowerment Limited, is a product of Danmission and the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania. These two partners saw the need to work on dialogue and building trust, good understanding, and peace between Muslims and Christians in Zanzibar. They set up Women Baraza, where women of different faiths could meet and discuss more about gender, sexual health and rights. The Baraza were successful and most women were able to realize their rights, even in the face of abuse.

Upendo Women Empowerment Limited, empowers women economically through sewing school and IR-VICOBA. Upendo provided ToTs training (Trainer of Trainees Training) to increase knowledge and capacity building for some of IR-VICOBA members from both Unguja and Pemba Island.

### *Challenges:*

- **Practicing tolerance:** Tolerance is a muscle that needs regular exercise, it requires respecting religious taboos and navigating sensitive issues. Taking time to understand others is at the heart of the Tanzanian tradition of tolerance. Once you understand how living in a majority situation that is not your faith affects Muslims, then slowly and slowly you understand each other and can move forward in harmony in our islands.
- **Generalization:** There is a tendency of both Muslims and Christians to generalize their perceptions of each other. This leads to stereotypes, such as “All Muslims are terrorists or support terrorists,” and “All Christians are decadent, immoral, or unjust.” Fortunately, our experience has taught us that the vast majority of Christians and Muslims are none of these things.
- **Self-sufficiency:** This is a false belief that we, Christians and Muslims, have nothing to learn from or offer to each other. While we Christians have largely accepted dialogue and its consequences, the vast majority of our Muslim brothers and sisters have not.
- **Sincerely striving for mutual understanding:** It should be noted that the negative perception arises from the narrow understanding of other religions. There is failure to read from others such as approaching other religions’ sacred books. This creates stigma and negative perception towards others as the pagan religions full of demons. Meanwhile, continuing with anti-propaganda, publishing materials that may be harmful, offensive, or disrespectful to others, inspires members to maintain a hostile attitude towards others.

- **Unawareness:** Here in Zanzibar, just as in most other places, some people are simply unaware of the need for interreligious dialogue. This group includes religious and political leaders on both sides. Some are simply not interested, while others actively oppose interfaith cooperation. These realities have not stopped us in our efforts to build interaction and understanding between Christians and Muslims.

I would like to end with a quote from the President of Zanzibar: “Our country is calm, peaceful and we have every reason to bring development in our country. I sincerely thank the Christian denominations for your huge contribution on fostering peace in our nation.” (H.E. Dr Hussein Mwinyi - President of Zanzibar)



# INTERFAITH DYNAMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN ZANZIBAR: NAVIGATING PEACE AND COEXISTENCE IN A CHANGING WORLD

*Abdulla Talib Abdulla*

In the name of God Most Gracious Most Merciful

## Introduction

Zanzibar is an archipelago in the Indian Ocean. It is one among the two states, which make the United Republic of Tanzania. It comprises two main islands and around 50 islets with a total land area of 2,332 square kilometres. It has a population of 1.8 million, in which about 98 % are Muslims, the rest are mainly Christians and there is a small number of Hindus. It was the starting point of Islam and Christianity in East Africa. It is the cosmopolitan society; however, Islamic culture plays an important role in shaping peoples' mode of life interactions in Zanzibar.

## Interfaith- and Intra-faith Interaction

All religions have a broad range of cultural and social values that form the basis of personal attitudes and peace. Religions are crucial for both individual emotional and physical well-being, as well as for national and international harmony and social integration. However, they can also be destructive forces of peace, tranquility and agents of deadly violence. Application and enforcement of religious teaching and values differ across different societies and levels.

Religious scripture and sources are often open to interpretation. A single verse in the holy book can be used to serve humanity and the environment, but it can also be used to justify cruelty to creatures. It mainly depends on how religious actors interpret and apply spiritual and material resources to influence public opinion and other pressure groups on religious teachings and values.

For decades, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and other faiths from different

schools of thought (despite some being a small minority) have lived together in peace as brothers of one nation. History has recorded some minor cases of discrimination on both sides, but these were few and were resolved peacefully. Zanzibar has been among the best examples of tolerance for the religious needs of others and peaceful coexistence among the major and minor branches of faith, religion and sects.

Tanzanian religious leaders' active intervention in peace building started in 2001 when state organs used excessive power against civilians after the general elections. The Zanzibar Interfaith Committee for Peace and Tranquility was established in 2005. It comprised four public Islamic institutions, three Christian churches, and media representatives. The committee is doing wonderful work and has been reformed and empowered according to contemporary needs.

## **Interfaith relations after the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Tanzania did not implement lockdowns as a strategy to combat the pandemic. Instead, it facilitated religious leaders to conduct rituals and special prayers. Religious actors and faith-based organizations mobilized people to take precautions, abide by medical personnel's guidelines, while participating actively in economic, cultural, social and political activities. The situation strengthened the cooperation between different religions, faith and sects.

The situation changed the local perspectives on interfaith action from religious and humanitarian interaction or positive peace to include negative peace, which involves development agendas such as the environment, good governance and social protection. Currently, the interfaith actors are key partners in implementing sustainable development goals in religious perspective. We have developed a culture of argument and debate. We don't hesitate to say that democracy is good, but the majority is not always right.

Environmental protection is an important aspect of religious teachings. It is a comprehensive concept that includes the physical environment, such as mother earth, the skies, and mountains; as well as creatures such as birds, mammals, and vertebrates, among others. The concept is broad and includes human motivations, emotions, and instincts. As stewards of the earth, it is the responsibility of the religions to care for it in a proactive manner.

Tanzania is blessed with natural resources, which it has decided to capitalize on to grow its economy. In particular, Tanzania is focusing on exploiting its extractive sector – minerals, natural gas, and carbons – as well as transport infrastructure. These projects are currently raising great concern among the en-

vironmental community. In Zanzibar, where I am from, oil exploration is currently ongoing. The island's economy is focused on tourism-related ventures, which are environmentally intensive. Moreover, Zanzibar's tourism market is mostly based in the west and is ill-suited to conserving the Isles' Islamic and cosmopolitan character.

I deliberately mentioned that Zanzibar is in the Indian Ocean to highlight the fate it shares with other island nations such as Madagascar and Mauritius. The ongoing impacts of climate change attest to the fragility of small island nations to disruptions in the ecological balance and systems. For example, residents in Pemba, the second main island of Zanzibar, have raised alarms over the last decade about the threat to their livelihoods due to rising sea levels.

## Challenges in Interfaith Dynamics

Religions can be used both positively and negatively because they play a central role in cultural setups, have flexibility in the translation of religious texts, and involve numerous actors at different levels. Graduates from foreign states return home with new and exclusive interpretations of religion and culture, often advocating for urgent changes, including in interfaith development.

The wide coverage of interfaith action has increased both internal and external opposition to interfaith work. This is because the initiatives have jeopardized the interests of some internal and external groups, leading them to oppose the movement.

The expanding use of social media has introduced new thoughts and interpretations. People are often blinded by religions and the discrimination it causes. Religious media has a powerful influence on people in the 21st century and can often be responsible for promoting stereotypes of particular groups, both locally and internationally.

The growing influence of extremist groups, Salafi and *Hizb ut-Tahrir* ideologies has led a number of Muslims to adopt more exclusivist interpretations of their religion, thereby changing their relationships with other Muslims, other faiths, and the state. The majority tend to seek religious hegemony, i.e. they seek to use their own societal influence as well as their government to maintain a religious monopoly. Religious monopolies provide more congregants, more funds, and more influence. This can involve government enforcement of religious precepts.

Peace and interfaith work have currently become educational specializations, with certificates to doctorate degrees being awarded by colleges and universities. However, many active peace and interfaith practitioners apply their

personal wisdom and religious traditions in engaging in their activities. The lack of enough professionals slows down the pace of interfaith initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The Zanzibar case study realized that the solution is to promote a heightened awareness of the positive peace-building and reconciliation role that interfaith efforts have played. It is believed that being educated may facilitate understanding and respect for other faiths, rights, and honoring of diversity. The mission is to change the situation by improving long-term relationships and attitudes among conflicting parties or people with conflicting interests.

It is also important to develop processes and systems that promote sustainable strategies to rebuild tolerance and solidarity domestically, as well as to curb the external influence of extremist ideology and actors. Inviting all peacemakers in the world to share ideas, exchange experiences, and support each other in order to approach a peaceful world.

Religion is a part of the problem, therefore, it should be part of the solution. Together, we can make possible what seems impossible to others.

## **CONCLUSIONS**



# LEARNING TO INTEGRATE DIFFERENCES FOR LASTING PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

*Kambale J. B. Kahongya Bwiruka*

The international interfaith conference held in Jakarta in November 2023 was the third after those in Wuppertal, Germany (2017) and Zanzibar, Tanzania (2019). Its main focus was on Religion and Peacebuilding in a changing climate context. The conference took place in a global socio-political context dominated by a division of the world around tragic events according to the direct or indirect interests of major states. On one hand, there are highly publicized conflicts, such as those in Ukraine and the Middle East, and on the other hand, there are forgotten conflicts, such as the fate of West Papua, the minorities in the Philippines, the conflict in Yemen, the Karabakh conflict, the Sudanese conflict, the conflict in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.

In addition to the human tragedies and the international frustrations that these conflicts generate, there are climate challenges whose consequences are equitably shared between rich, industrialized countries and poor, non-industrialized countries, although both do not contribute to this imbalance of the ecosystem in the same level.

During the conference, many things have inspired me, especially the developed thematic, the cases analysis, the visits of the old Jakarta city, etc. All these contacts made me feel that building inclusive communities, while currently facing many challenges, is still the only way to bring hope to the world.

Among these challenges the following might be highlighted: (1) The weak participation of youth and (2) the challenge on religious symbols. This paper will reflect on these two challenges.

## **1. Weak Participation of Youth**

In the three conferences organized from 2017 to 2023, the majority of the participations were religious leaders, a group that is often comprised of individuals mostly in the elder category. Consequently, the number of young people in attendance was notably low, although in some countries like Indonesians, religious leaders of the Buddhist and Jewish communities were relatively young. Having

high ranking religious leaders is a characteristic of such conferences, which target high personalities capable of influencing their communities and the wider society. In addition, in religious formation, the human experience, studies as well as age, are of capital importance in transmitting knowledge. Therefore, the limited presence of young people might be understandable. However, in each religion, specific areas are under the responsibility of women and children. Similarly, young people are also responsible for particular aspects of human life. Not involving young people in religious activities might be an obstacle to the rise of a religious, peaceful new generation. It is true that in Zanzibar in 2019 and in Jakarta in 2023, young people participated in public actions at the end of the conference. On this occasion, they listened to the public statement of religious leaders and their public prayers. In Jakarta in particular, a large number of youth took part in planting mangroves to protect the edges of the Indian Ocean and the ecosystem of the area. However, this participation cannot replace interactive involvement in the debate during the conference.

Since Zanzibar in 2019, it has been noted that young people were not sufficiently involved in the debate during the conference. Appropriate means have therefore been put in place to involve young people into the dynamic of inter-religious cohabitation. In this context, a series of activities was organized with young people. This included meetings, discussions, the printing of T-Shirts with peaceful messages, the organization of women's and men's football matches, and musical concerts in which young Muslims, Lutherans, Anglicans and Catholics took part over three days.

Furthermore, in order to maintain this peaceful interreligious cohabitation, young Muslims and Christians are regularly involved in joint activities to strive against global warming. In the same dynamic, this interreligious youth group helps to distribute and share meals with poor children from Muslim families during the month of Ramadan. This interreligious experience allows not only young people but also children to grow in the awareness that people of other religions are friends.

The public action in Jakarta inspired new ideas for Dr. Alex Gehaz Malasusa, Bishop of the Eastern Coast Diocese and current Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Tanzania. He found the mangrove planting initiative an inspiration to protect a similar area in the city of Dar es Salaam. The valley known as Jangwani connects the old city of Dar es Salaam with the rest of the densely populated districts, but is also the main exit to the other provinces along Morogoro Road. The problem in Jangwani is that during the rainy season the place is subject to severe flooding which prevents any vehicle movement. In March and April 2024, for example, the road on Jangwani place have been closed several times causing

a long traffic jam on other roads. The Bishop's idea is to organize a public action involving political and municipal authorities of the city to plant mangroves in this Jangwani valley, which will allow the water of the river to flow freely into the Indian Ocean. It is important to note that the cities of Jakarta and Dar es Salaam are located on the same Ocean and therefore share the same climate challenges. This project will be facilitated by the interfaith youth in Zanzibar who are already involved in mangrove plantation. They will contribute to the preparation of the mangrove trunks that are to be planted in Jangwani at the bishop's wish.

## 2. Challenge on Religious Symbols

Many things regarding religion are happening in the world. Some of these are relatively ignored while others are heavily covered by the media. These include the treatment of some religious symbols. In the constitutional context of countries where the events take place, and where secularism and freedom are highly respected, such acts might seem normal and understandable. However, due to the extensive media coverage, these facts lead to different interpretations and can subsequently result in violent reactions, including disruption of the peaceful "coexistence" of people of different beliefs.

One of the most eloquent examples is the burning of sacred books. The remarkable case is when in 2023 a man of Iraqi origin publicly burned a Qur'an in front of a mosque in Stockholm, Sweden and another one in front of the Turkish embassy. The act was filmed, the man had a microphone and a loudspeaker, as he wanted to be heard by the crowd. He was also surrounded by some police officers.

From a constitutional point of view, the act was done "in the name of Swedish freedom of expression". But from a religious point of view, the impact of the act goes beyond the Swedish constitution. It affected the Muslim religion wherever believers felt offended. This could be seen in the reactions of Muslim communities in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, etc. In some countries Swedish embassies were burned, in others the Swedish flag was desecrated and elsewhere there were other diplomatic acts of disapproval<sup>1</sup>. I am not sure whether this was the aim of the Swedish government which allowed this act to happen.

In African countries where the presence of several religions is recognized, there are principles of "good neighborliness" and mutual respect towards other people's religions.

---

1 "Quran burnings in Sweden", on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023\\_Quran\\_burnings\\_in\\_Sweden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Quran_burnings_in_Sweden).

For example, in Tanzania, a country where predominantly Christians and Muslims live together, it is prohibited to sell, to grill or to consume pork in public, especially during the month of Ramadan. Likewise, some kind of activities and attitudes are forbidden during Christian Lent. These principles promote “living together”, even if people don’t share the same beliefs.

It is desirable that the world live in the atmosphere experienced in Jakarta, where everyone, more than coming from his or her particular culture, was aware of the difference and the sensitivities of others due to different beliefs. These differences, however great they may be, do not prevent anyone from expressing his or her thoughts and choices. On the contrary the recognition and respect of these differences allows the “living harmoniously together” in a diversified society. In this way, the world could become the dreamed paradise, the home, where everyone has his or her place to joyfully live.

# INTERRELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY: BUILDING A MORE JUST AND PEACEFUL LIFE

*Irma Simanjuntak*

## Introduction

A total of 51 participants from 9 countries gathered in the tourist area of Ancol Jakarta, Indonesia. They represent Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and academia/university. The choice of this location is not without reason. This location is a tourist destination for many people, both from Jakarta and outside Jakarta. Behind the beauty of this place, many things are sacrificed by the existence of this tourist destination, such as the displacement of local residents to another area due to land acquisition and reclamation, and the loss of the livelihood of fishermen in this area.

It is also clear that around of Ancol, we can see the luxury buildings and housing that have been built today. During a visit to the Maritime Museum in Jakarta, participants also experienced how the land in Jakarta has been shrinking up to 5 cm per year. Data from the Geological Agency of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources show that the rate of land subsidence in the DKI Jakarta area reached 0.04 to 6.30 cm per year. The land subsidence rate in the capital city was obtained from the results of measurements during the period from 2015 to 2022. This is due to rapid development and urban management that pays little attention to sustainability. Therefore, the Indonesian government decided to move the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia to another island, Kalimantan. Currently, the construction of IKN (the new capital city) is underway, which is expected to have an environmental sustainability perspective.

The 3rd Interfaith Peace Conference focused on issues such as the extreme threats to creation and human life posed by the climate crisis, which is destroying human survival and the environment. The presence of participants from various religions is intended to strengthen interfaith networks, initiate various actions to make the world a better place, share challenges and solidarity, and exchange ideas and visions.

## **Global and Regional Challenges**

The global challenges are severe, with conflicts and wars in a number of countries causing death, separation, hunger, underdevelopment, and long-term hatred. Many civilians have become victims of infrastructure damage, long term trauma, disability and many diseases appearing in refugees' areas. The situation has also upset the global economic balance, with disrupted food chains, rising costs of living, energy crises, and the threat of hunger, especially for vulnerable groups.

The migration of people is also very fast due to the development of technology, communication and transport. All areas are in motion and have both positive and negative impacts. However, many people also have to migrate and be displaced because they are forced by circumstances such as disaster, conflict over natural resources, military and civil conflict, the unstable economic and political situation.

Land that should be allocated for the well-being of the people is controlled by multinational investors for the development of infrastructure, mines and large plantations, which cause increasingly limited opportunities for the residents to use these living spaces, forcing them to migrate elsewhere. The over-exploitation of nature has led to the neglect of the rights of indigenous peoples and farmers as their land and living spaces have been confiscated. Economic and legal systems tend to favor investment and marginalize human rights.

Wars and unstable political situations in several countries have caused millions of people to move in search of asylum and a better life. The war in Ukraine has caused millions of people to migrate to neighboring countries, while the political situation in Middle Eastern and African countries has caused migration to countries in Europe, Australia and the USA.

We are also experiencing various environmental crises due to the failure to mitigate climate change. Ecosystems are becoming increasingly damaged, threatening the availability of food and the loss of biodiversity on this planet. We are witnessing floods, fires, landslides, snowstorms in different parts of the world, forcing people to become climate refugees.

## **The Role of the Religions**

The challenges of the above situation cannot be solved by one country alone trying to survive. All countries need to collaborate because what happens in one country will affect other countries. The involvement of all stakeholders including faith-based organizations, is very important. The situation faced is also experienced by all people regardless of their religious and cultural backgrounds.

It is recognized that the role of religions in the development of human values, equality and justice is declining. The presence of religion may be more visible in forms of ritual worship and we should not leave behind the historical role of religion which is the bringing of peace and justice to the world.

In another context, the conference also looked at how religion has become a source of violence, with many human rights violations being committed in the name of religion, such as the closure of houses of worship in Indonesia which undermines the rights to freedom of religion and belief. Religion is also used to gain power and political support from citizens by using religious jargon in elections (politicization of religion), as happened in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Sharing from various regions gives hope that religions are still trying to build solidarity through dialogue to discuss and prepare concrete steps to mitigate and manage the crisis. The theological foundation became the religious motivation for building inclusive communities and acting together for a just and peaceful life. All religions share the same motivation to build a better world.

The efforts made by peace and justice actors from various religions around the world have had a positive impact. In some countries, living with differences and respecting each other is a way of life that needs to be maintained and managed. It has become a grassroots tradition. But in other countries, living in diversity is a challenge because they have not had the experience of living together with different groups. Some of the religious leaders who attended the conference developed further joint programs by addressing common issues. This is a way of opening dialogue and building awareness that we live on the same earth. The role of religious leaders is very important as role models for religious adherents to open up.

In addition to dialogue, several cases have reached the stage of advocacy, calling on the state to fulfil its duty to implement and protect human rights. For example, the case of human rights violations in Papua shows the role of religions in making statements to the Indonesian government and to international institutions.

## Closing

This Peace Conference has produced a call with eight key recommendations for world peace. In a public action at the Pantai Indah Kapuk (PIK) Mangrove Forest in Jakarta, religious representatives prayed and read the Call for Peace. This was followed by planting 300 mangrove trees as a symbol of hope for a more peaceful and just world.



# FOR HUMAN RIGHTS – UEM BOOK SERIES

## Publications of the Department for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation of the United Evangelical Mission

Over the last 30 years, the UEM has hosted numerous regional and international conferences on the challenging issues involved in standing up for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The contributions and recommendations of these conferences were published in the book series *For Human Rights*.



All volumes are digitally available:

[www.vemission.org/en/downloads/commitment-for-human-rights](http://www.vemission.org/en/downloads/commitment-for-human-rights)

Jochen Motte/Martin Breidert (eds.), **Schaffet Recht und Gerechtigkeit / Establish Law and Justice. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the General Declaration of Human Rights.** Contributions to a symposium hosted by the Protestant University Wuppertal and the United Evangelical Mission (For human rights 1), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 1999

Jochen Motte/Thomas Sandner (eds.), **Justice and Reconciliation.** Contributions to a Workshop on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (For human rights 2), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2000

Jochen Motte/Wolfgang Apelt (eds.), **Landrecht / Land law. Perspectives on conflict prevention in Southern Africa.** A symposium hosted by the Wuppertal Archives and Museum Foundation in collaboration with the United Evangelical Mission (For human rights 3), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2002

Jochen Motte/Michael Klessmann (eds.), **Gewalt erkennen – Gewalt überwinden / Recognise Violence – Overcome Violence.** Contributions to a symposium hosted by the Protestant University Wuppertal and the United Evangelical Mission (For human rights 4), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2002

Jochen Motte/Thomas Sandner (eds.), **Globalisation and Violence – A Challenge to the Churches?** Contributions to a Consultation of the United Evangelical Mission (For human rights 5), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2004

- Jochen Motte (ed.), **100 Jahre Beginn des Antikolonialen Befreiungskrieges in Namibia**. Beiträge zu einer Gedenkveranstaltung im Januar 2004 – Katalog zur Ausstellung „Erinnert Namibia!“ (For human rights 6/1), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2004
- Jochen Motte (ed.), **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beginning of the Colonial War of Liberation in Namibia**. Contributions to a ceremony of commemoration in January 2004 – Catalogue of the exhibition “Remember Namibia!” (For human rights 6/2), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2005
- Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (ed.), **Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in West Papua. A Study on Social reality and Political Perspectives** (For human rights 7/1), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2005
- Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland (ed.), **Wirtschaftliche, soziale und kulturelle Rechte in West-Papua. Soziale Realität und politische Perspektiven** (For human rights 7/2), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2006
- Theodor Rathgeber (ed.), **Autonomy for Papua – Progress and Failures in Implementing Special Autonomy**. Documentation of a consultation of the United Evangelical Mission, the West Papua Network and Watch Indonesia (For human rights 10), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2007
- Jochen Motte (ed.), **Kirche und Globalisierung / Church and Globalisation**. Documentation of a Strategy Conference on 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> March 2007 in the Evangelical Academy Iserlohn (For human rights 11), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2008
- Jochen Motte/Thomas Sandner (eds.), **Challenges to the Churches in a Changing World**. Texts from the 4<sup>th</sup> International Consultation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation – Batam/Indonesia, February 2008 (For human rights 12), Wuppertal: foedus-verlag 2008
- Jochen Motte/Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann (eds.), **Klima der Gerechtigkeit / Climate of justice**. Exhibition catalogue (For human rights 13), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2008
- Jochen Motte/Theodor Rathgeber/Angelika Veddeler (eds.), **Think BIG. Inputs and Reflections on Social Justice and the Basic Income Grant** (For human rights 13/14), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2008
- Jochen Motte/Peter Ohligschläger, Uwe Trittmann (eds.), **Religion(s) – Freedom – Human Rights**. Documentation of a conference hosted by the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and the United Evangelical Mission from 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> March 2010 (For human rights 15), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2010

- Jochen Motte/Theodor Rathgeber (eds.), **Peace with the Earth**. Documentation of the UEM International team visits to Papua, and Sumatra, Indonesia, 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May 2012 (For human rights 16), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2012
- Jochen Motte (ed.), **Menschenrechte – Immer noch eine Aufgabe für die Kirche! / Human Rights – Still a Task for the Church!** Documentation of a conference hosted by the Human Rights Platform on 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> April 2012 (For human rights 17/1), Hanover: foedus-verlag 2013
- Jochen Motte/Theodor Rathgeber (eds.), **Inclusive Communities and the Churches – Realities, Challenges and Visions**. Documentation of the UEM International Conference in Stellenbosch, South Africa, November 2014 (For human rights 17/2), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2016
- Jochen Motte/Andar Parlindungan (eds.), **“Mission still possible?” Global Perspectives on Mission Theology**. Contributions to a Conference of the United Evangelical Mission 20 Years after Internationalisation. Dumaguete, Philippines, 26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> June 2016 (For human rights 18), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2017
- Jochen Motte/Theodor Rathgeber (eds.), **Peace Among the People. Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive Communities**. Documentation of the International and Interfaith Conference on Peace and Inclusive Communities in Wuppertal, Germany, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July 2017 (For human rights 19), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2018
- Jochen Motte/Louk Adrianos et al. (eds.), **Kairos for Creation. Confessing Hope for the Earth**. The Wuppertal Call – Contributions and Recommendations from an International Conference on Eco-Theology and the Ethics of Sustainability (For human rights 20), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2019
- Jochen Motte/Theodor Rathgeber (eds.), **Peace among the People. Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive communities**. Documentation of the second International and Interfaith Conference on Peace and Inclusive Communities in Zanzibar, Tanzania, September 2019 (For human rights 21), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2020
- Jochen Motte/Andar Parlindungan/Sabine Hübner (eds.), **Building Inclusive Communities. How Can Churches Fight against Discrimination, Exclusion and Violence?** (For human rights 22), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2022
- Jochen Motte (ed.), **30 years for Human Rights. Striving together for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation**, (For human rights 23), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2023

Sabine Hübner, Andar Parlindungan, Jochen Motte (eds.), **Peace among the People. Interreligious Action for Peace and Inclusive communities.** Documentation of the third International Interfaith Conference on Peace and Inclusive Communities in Jakarta, Indonesia, November 2023 (For human rights 24), Solingen: foedus-verlag 2024

# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

## **Abdulla Talib Abdulla (Tanzania)**

Executive Secretary of Wakf & Trust Commission, Member of Zanzibar Supreme Council of Muslim Scholars. He specializes in Islamic law, peace and conflict resolution.

## **Bilgehan Asena Ayyaz (Germany)**

Research associate and Doctoral candidate at the Center for Islamic Theology, University of Münster. She was born in Aalen, Germany, in 1994. She studied Education and Islamic Studies at the University of Bamberg (Bachelor) and Islamic Theology (Bachelor and Master) at the University of Münster, Germany.

## **Rabbi Yaakov Baruch**

Leading Rabbi of the Sha'ar HaShamayim Synagogue, located in Tondano, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi. He is the founder of the Indonesia Holocaust Museum, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia.

## **Kambale Jean-Bosco Kahongya Bwiruka (Tanzania / DR Congo)**

Advocacy Officer in the United Evangelical Mission for the Africa Region in Dar es Salaam, he is ordained pastor of the Baptist Church in Central Africa (CBCA).

## **Rev. Volker Martin Dally (Germany)**

General Secretary of the United Evangelical Mission in Wuppertal from 2016 to 2024. Between 2006 and 2010 he worked on behalf of the UEM for the East Javanese church GKJW at IPTH Belewiyata in Malang/Indonesia as a theological study leader in pastor training and the training of volunteers.

## **Hanim Ezder (Germany)**

Managing Director of the BfMf e.V. (Meeting and Training Center of Muslim Women) since 2019. She studied German language and literature, education and Islamic studies. She has been active at the Muslim Women's Meeting and Training Centre since 2002, first as a project manager and then from 2006 to 2019 as head of the Muslim Family Education Centre.

## **Rev. Fletcher Harper (USA)**

Executive director of GreenFaith, a national interfaith environmental coalition headquartered in Highland Park, N.J. He served as a parish priest for 10 years and held leadership positions in the Episcopal Church before joining GreenFaith. Under his leadership, GreenFaith has developed innovative programs linking religious belief and practice to the environment.

**Andreas Harsono (Indonesia)**

Author, journalist and researcher for Human Rights Watch in Indonesia since 2008. He helped found the Jakarta-based Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information in 1995, and in 2003 he helped create the Pantau Foundation, a journalist training organization also based in Jakarta.

**Rev. William P. Ebenezer Joseph (Sril Lanka)**

President of the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka and the Co-Secretary of the Congress of Religions and the Secretary General of the Interfaith Coalition for Peace. He was the General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka for 14 years, promoting ecumenical relations among various Christian denominations and interfaith dialogue.

**Bishop Dr Abednego Keshomshahara (Tanzania)**

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania / North Western Diocese (ELCT-NWD). He holds a doctorate in theology. He has been a member of the United Evangelical Mission Council since 2016 and was elected to the position as moderator of the United Evangelical Mission in 2022.

**Professor Dr Mouhanad Khorchide (Germany/Austria)**

Professor of Islamic Religious Education at the University of Münster, Germany, and the head of the Centre for Islamic Theology. His research focuses on Islamic religious education and its didactics, new approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics, and Islam in Europe. He is actively involved in promoting interreligious dialogue and fostering understanding and cooperation between different religious communities.

**Amirah Ali Lidasan (Philippines)**

Secretary-General of the Moro-Christian Peoples Alliance and co-chair of Sandugo Movement of Moro and Katutubo for Self-Determination, interfaith organizations that promotes the rights and welfare of national minorities in the Philippines. She belongs to the Iranon tribe of Maguindanao, one of the thirteen tribes of Bangsamoro in Mindanao.

**Suesthi Maharani (Indonesia)**

Lecturer at the State Islamic University (UIN) of Salatiga, Indonesia; member of the Fatayat organization, an autonomous body of young Islamic women under the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia. Her focus is on the welfare of young women in the fields of religion, education, economics, social, and culture.

**Bishop Alex Gehaz Malasusa (Tanzania)**

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania / East-Western Diocese (ELCT-ECD). Between 2007 and 2016 he was President Bishop of the ELCT.

**Peter Prove (Switzerland/Australia)**

Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. He is responsible for activities related to peace, disarmament and human rights, and for WCC's relations with the UN system. As lawyer, he has experience in representing church organizations in the international political arena.

**Rosiana Purnomo (Indonesia)**

Coordinator for the Youth Desk at Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). She belongs to Gereja Isa Almasih (GIA) in Indonesia. She served as a programme consultant for Ecumenical Formation with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) prior to joining PGI. She is currently a member of the CCA Programme Committee.

**Irma Simanjuntak (Indonesia)**

Advocacy Officer in the United Evangelical Mission for the Asia Region in Pematangsiantar. She is an activist, particularly in the fields of environmental, social justice and promoting understanding and harmony among different religions.

**Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam (Sri Lanka)**

General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka. He is a graduate of the International UEM Master Programme in Diaconic Management at the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel with a master thesis on Human Rights.

**Rev. Jimmy M.I. Sormin (Indonesia)**

Executive secretary for Witness and Integrity of Creation at the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI). He belongs to the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB). He is an activist of interfaith dialogue, freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), and environment. He currently chairs the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative of Indonesia (IRI), is a member of the reference group of World Council of Churches (WCC), and serves on the program committee of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

**Professor Dr Issa Ziddy (Tanzania)**

Associate professor of Religious Education at the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) in Tanzania. He is also a member of the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC). He has participated in conferences in different countries on issues related to „current issues on Islamic perspectives“ and intercultural and interfaith relations in Zanzibar, Tanzania, and beyond.



*Participants of the Conference with group from Youth Climate Action Day 2023*



