



Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf

Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf is a distinguished Muslim scholar and the co-founder of a global movement (“Humanitarian Islam”) that seeks to reform obsolete tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that enjoin religious hatred, supremacy and violence, by restoring *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) to its rightful place as the primary message of Islam. As General Secretary of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—the world’s largest Muslim organization, with over 50 million members and 14,000 *madrasahs*—Mr. Staquf is bringing the civilizational wisdom and spiritual authority of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam) to the world stage, where a harsh, repressive and all-too-often violent understanding of Islam has predominated for decades.

Shaykh Yahya is descended from a long and illustrious line of Javanese *ulama* (religious scholars), including the renowned Bisri family of Rembang, Central Java. Educated from earliest childhood in the formal and esoteric (spiritual) sciences of Islam—by his father, grandfather and uncle—Mr. Staquf later became a disciple of venerated Islamic scholar and Chairman of the NU Supreme Council, Kyai Haji Ali Maksum (1915 – 1989), studying classical Islamic sciences under his direct tutelage at the prestigious al-Munawwir Krapyak *madrasah* in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. KH. Ali Maksum was himself a disciple of Shaykh Umar Hamdan al-Makki (1858 – 1948) and Shaykh Hasan Masshat al-Makki (1900 – 1979) of Mecca, and mentored several of Indonesia’s most influential modern figures, including its first democratically-elected head of state, H.E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (“[Gus Dur](#),” 1940 – 2009), and Shaykh Yahya’s uncle, the widely revered religious scholar, public intellectual, painter and poet, KH. A. Mustofa Bisri (“[Gus Mus](#),” 1944 – present), who also served as Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council.

In 2014, Shaykh Yahya co-founded the U.S.-based religious entity [Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da’wa al-Islamiyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin](#) (Home of Divine Grace for Revealing and Nurturing Islam as a Blessing for All Creation), to serve as a hub for the worldwide expansion of NU operations. A member of Bayt ar-Rahmah’s board of directors and its Director of Religious Affairs (*modir*),

Shaykh Yahya seeks to realize the vision of President Abdurrahman Wahid, who advocated marshalling the concentrated energies of the West to help bring Islamic teachings into alignment with the modern world of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Inspired by President Wahid's vision and a deep commitment to the truth, Shaykh Yahya has mobilized a large body of Sunni Muslim authorities to engage in a wide-ranging, concerted and explicit project of theological renewal (i.e., reform) for the first time since the late Middle Ages. A series of historic declarations drafted by Shaykh Yahya form the basis for this renewal, including the [ISOMIL Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration](#) (2016); the [First Global Unity Forum Declaration](#) (2016); the [Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam](#) (2017); and, most recently, the [Nusantara Statement](#) and [Nusantara Manifesto](#) (2018). Officially adopted by Bayt ar-Rahmah and Gerakan Pemuda Ansor—the NU young adults movement, with over 5 million members—through a [Joint Resolution and Decree](#), the *Nusantara Manifesto* builds on a centuries-old tradition of de facto renewal (*tajdīd*) practiced by Indonesian *ulama* as exemplified by President Wahid, whose seminal article, [“God Needs No Defense,”](#) is incorporated as Section §11.3 of the *Manifesto*.

Shaykh Yahya's vigorous promotion of *rahmah* as a basis for conflict resolution has been hailed by international experts and cited by sponsors of an international campaign to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the NU and Muhammadiyah. The book *Dua Menyemai Damai (Two Peaceful Forces)*—published in January of 2019 by Gadjah Mada University in cooperation with Indonesia's State Secretariat—describes the *Islam Nusantara* campaign; the *ISOMIL Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration*; Humanitarian Islam; the *Nusantara Manifesto*; and Shaykh Yahya's [historic trip to Jerusalem](#), which achieved “the seemingly impossible, in forging a path towards peace [between Israel and the Palestinians], through a mission initiated by Gus Dur and recently continued by K.H. Yahya Cholil Staqf.”

A former member of Indonesian President Joko Widodo's Presidential Advisory Council, with a protocol rank equivalent to Minister of State, Sheikh Yahya is regularly consulted on religious, domestic and international affairs. He currently serves as GP Ansor's Emissary to the Islamic World and as the Emissary for Indonesia's largest Islamic political party, PKB (which is rooted in the spiritual wing of the Nahdlatul Ulama) to Centrist Democrat International (IDC – CDI) and the European People's Party (EPP)—the largest political network in Europe and the world—as he seeks to build the societal consensus required “to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.” ~ *Nusantara Statement*

“Among Indonesia's most influential Islamic leaders.” ~ [TIME magazine](#)

“I don't see any other Muslim leaders coming to Europe, standing up like a tower and saying, [‘Look, we're prepared to take this on’](#)... breaking new ground by proposing to make changes to Islamic law to better fit the modern era.”

~ Terrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp on CNN