2019_10_16_NU Rejects the Relevance of "Infidel" as a Legal Category within Modern Nation States

Unprecedented Rulings Issued by the Highest Authority of the World's Largest Muslim Organization

Historic Effort to "Transform the Prevailing 'Muslim Mindset,' for the Sake of World Peace and to Achieve a Harmonious Communal Life for All Mankind"

BANJAR, West Java and JAKARTA, Indonesia: In a major break with Islamic conservatism, the world's largest Muslim movement—Nahdlatul Ulama—has abolished the legal category of infidels, those who do not adhere to Islam, which has long cast a shadow over the faith's relationships with other religions.

The Central Board of the Indonesian movement recently published documents, based on a gathering of some 20,000 Muslim religious scholars ("2019 Munas") that endorsed the concept of a nation state rather than caliphate and recognized all citizens irrespective of religion, ethnicity or creed as having equal rights and obligations.

The documents decreed that the modern nation state is theologically legitimate; that there is no legal category of infidel (*kafir*) within a modern nation state, only 'fellow citizens'; that Muslims must obey the laws of any modern nation state in which they dwell; and that Muslims have a religious obligation to foster peace rather than automatically wage war on behalf of their co-religionists, whenever conflict erupts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations anywhere in the world.

At the 2019 Munas, *ulama* (religious scholars) and their disciples witnessed or directly participated in the creation of new *fiqh* (Islamic legal rulings) adopted through a process of collective *ijtihad*, the use of independent reasoning to formulate Islamic law. Known as *al-istinbath al-jama'iy*, this process was authorized by the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board and its National Congress during the 15-year tenure of former NU Chairman H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, from 1984 – 1999.

With Indonesia being the world's largest Muslim nation and Nahdlatul Ulema wielding significant influence within the government of President Joko Widodo, the recontextualization of Islamic texts is likely to reverberate throughout the Muslim world at a time of rising religious ultra-conservatism.

This represents the latest step in a long-term, systematic and institutional process, through which Nahdlatul Ulama spiritual leaders are moving to address obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy often used to justify religious supremacism, hatred and violence.

The historic implications of these rulings may be glimpsed from the fact that—absent the category of infidel—there is no theological basis for Muslims to foster enmity or perpetrate acts of violence (e.g., jihadi terrorism) against those perceived to be non-Muslim.

As could be expected, these pioneering decrees elicited a negative response from Muslim extremists, who falsely accused Nahdlatul Ulama of seeking to "delete" certain passages of the Qur'an. In reality, NU theologians are moving to *recontextualize* (i.e., reform) obsolete tenets of Islamic orthodoxy, and bring Islamic teachings into alignment with the modern world of democracy and human rights, by using the very same principles of *usul al-fiqh* employed to create Islamic law during the Middle Ages.

In addition to these historic rulings, the 2019 Munas formally adopted a number of declarations previously issued by the NU's 5-million-member young adults movement Gerakan Pemuda Ansor and the U.S.-based NU affiliate Bayt ar-Rahmah. These public statements include the 2016 *First Global Unity Forum Declaration*; the 2017 *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*; and the 2018 *Nusantara Manifesto*. The 2019 Munas also endorsed and adopted the *Document on Human Fraternity*, which Pope Francis and Shaykh Ahmed al-Tayyeb of Al-Azhar signed in Abu Dhabi on February 4, 2019, just weeks prior to the NU gathering in West Java.

Following the 2019 Munas, members of a special committee—supervised by KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council—assembled these and other related NU statements adopted between 1984 and 2016. The NU Central Board published this extensive collection of documents—in Indonesian and Arabic—in September of 2019 under the title *Hasil-Hasil Musyawarah Nasional Alim Ulama Nahdlatul Ulama 2019* (*Findings of the 2019 National Conference of NU Religious Scholars*). An English translation of these documents is expected to be issued in early 2020 by Bayt ar-Rahmah.

What follows is a detailed report on the 2019 Munas and related developments within the Middle East to address the theological underpinnings of *jihadi* violence.

Major Sunni Institutions Lead Reform Effort

Developments in the Middle East and Indonesia Accelerate Efforts to Reform Islamic Orthodoxy

A Response to al-Sisi's Call for a "Religious Revolution"

Complex Synergy Between Governments, Major Sunni Institutions and the Vatican Leads to Unexpected Breakthroughs

The month of February 2019 witnessed a number of pivotal developments in the highly fraught and contentious field of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), that have the potential to disrupt the status quo within mainstream Islamic discourse and transform the prevailing "Muslim mindset" based thereon, which tends to view non-Muslims with enmity and suspicion. State and non-state actors throughout the Muslim world cynically weaponize certain obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy in their pursuit of political, military and/or economic power, while Western political and intellectual elites routinely ignore the existence of these tenets or deny their obvious links to Islamist terrorism. The dramatic events that occurred in February illustrate a growing—though largely unacknowledged—synergy between major Muslim institutions, governments and civil society in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim democracy, and Egypt, an ancient center of Islamic learning and culture in the heart of the Arab world, and its most populous state.

On February 4, 2019, Pope Francis and Grand Shaykh Ahmed al-Tayyeb of al-Azhar—Egypt's pre-eminent center of Islamic authority—jointly signed the *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (photo above). The

theological and conceptual framework of the *Document on Human Fraternity* reflects the groundbreaking *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning) of Kyai Haji Achmad Shiddiq, former General Chairman of the Supreme Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization. Kyai Shiddiq first articulated the concept of universal human fraternity—as a *shari'ah* basis for legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims—at the Nahdlatul Ulama National Congress held in Situbondo, East Java, in 1984. The adoption of Kyai Shiddiq's *ijtihad* by the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar has the potential to greatly accelerate the reform of obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy worldwide.

From February 27 – March 1, 2019, Nahdlatul Ulama held a National Conference of Religious Scholars in Banjar, West Java. In his opening address to this conference, Kyai Haji Said Aqil Siradj, General Chairman of the NU Executive Board, hailed Pope Francis and Shaykh al-Tayyeb for adopting the *Document on Human Fraternity*, which implicitly acknowledges, and builds upon, Kyai Shiddiq's and H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid's efforts in the 1980s to renew Islamic discourse and thereby ensure that Islamic teachings and practice embody the primary message of Islam: i.e., *rahmah* (universal love and compassion).

During their deliberations at the 2019 Munas, NU religious scholars issued two new documents that significantly elaborated upon these matters: *The Recontextualization of Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Transformation of the Prevailing "Muslim Mindset," for the Sake of World Peace and to Achieve a Harmonious Communal Life for All Mankind*; and *Findings of Bahtsul Masa'il Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation, Citizenship, State Law and Peace*.

The 2019 Munas also formally acknowledged and adopted the *Document on Human Fraternity* and three other declarations produced by the NU young adults movement, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, and Bayt ar-Rahmah. These Ansor/Bayt ar-Rahmah documents explicitly identify, and provide a detailed strategy to reform, obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy—something that NU *kyais* (religious scholars) noted is absent from the *Document on Human Fraternity*.

Through these actions, NU scholars at the 2019 Munas produced a detailed set of theological arguments in support of—and a practical road map to achieve—the aspirations expressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity*, including: prohibiting use of the term *kafir* (infidel) to describe one's fellow citizens; affirming the legitimacy of the nation state and laws created through modern political processes; committing Muslims to strive for peace as a religious obligation; and providing a detailed framework for bringing Islamic orthodoxy into alignment with 21st century norms.

The creation of the *Document on Human Fraternity* by Egyptian intellectuals; its adoption by al-Azhar; its affirmation and its further elaboration by Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama represent an emerging collaboration between the Muslim world's demographic, cultural and theological powerhouses to ignite the "religious revolution" called for by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt in 2015, which was envisioned—and has been progressively implemented—by the spiritual wing of the Nahdlatul Ulama between 1984 and the present.

Full Report on the 2019 National Conference of Religious Scholars, its Recommendations and Findings, and the *Document on Human Fraternity*

BANJAR, West Java: February 27 to March 1, 2019. Over 20,000 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) scholars and their followers—from all 34 of Indonesia's provinces—gathered at Miftahul Huda al-Azhar Islamic Boarding School in the village of Citangkolo to attend the 2019 National Conference of Religious Scholars (*Musyawarah Nasional Alim Ulama NU*), or Munas. These gatherings are held approximately every 18-20 months—in between the NU's quinquennial

National Congress—to address issues related to Islamic law (*fiqh*) that are of immediate and practical concern to Muslims.

President Joko Widodo of Indonesia officially opened the conference, while Vice President Jusuf Kalla delivered its closing address. Numerous national and international figures also attended the event, including cabinet ministers; H. Muhaimin Iskandar, Chairman of PKB, Indonesia's largest Islamic political party; foreign diplomats; Shaykh Mustafa Zahran of al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt; and Shaykh Taufiq Ramadan al-Bouti, Chairman of the Association of Syrian Ulama, whose father—the renowned Syrian '*alim*, Shaykh Mohammed Said Ramadan al-Bouti, was assassinated in a 2013 bomb attack while lecturing in Damascus.

In his opening address, Kyai Haji Said Aqil Siradj, General Chairman of the NU Executive Board, said:

> "In the final portion of my speech, Mr. President, I need to emphasize that Nahdlatul Ulama supports the commitment made by the Vatican and al-Azhar University, as expressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity* signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on February 4th. Why does the NU support this document? Our support is based on the concept of fraternity long articulated and embraced by the NU—i.e., the fraternity of Muslims (*ukhuwwah islamiyyah*); the fraternity of those who dwell within a single nation (*ukhuwwah wataniyyah*); and the fraternity of all human beings (*ukhuwwah insaniyyah*, or *ukhuwwah basyariyah*)—as formally declared by the Nahdlatul Ulama at the NU Congress held in 1984, at which Gus Dur (H.E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid) was elected Chairman of the NU for the first time.
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> "In the view of Nahdlatul Ulama, the *Document on Human Fraternity* is consistent with, and articulates, key elements of the concept of fraternity that the Nahdlatul Ulama has embraced and strived to implement for over 35 years. Our concept of universal fraternity inspires NU efforts to 1) end the state of enmity that has historically existed between Muslims and non-Muslims; 2) accept the existence of the nation state as theologically legitimate and reject [all efforts to establish] a caliphate; 3) theologically accept the existence of a nation's constitution and acknowledge that this does not conflict with Islamic shari'ah; and 4) resolve conflicts [between Muslims and non-Muslims] and establish a state of world peace. These fundamental elements of the Nahdlatul Ulama world view are compatible with the *Document* signed by Pope Francis and the Shaykh of al-Azhar. Whether they have emulated our example—and borrowed from our thoughts—I can't say. I only know that we were first [in articulating these ideas and have consistently done so] for over 35 years, since the Nahdlatul Ulama Congress held in Situbondo [East Java] in 1984."

Indonesian print and broadcast media provided massive, favorable coverage of Kyai Aqil Siradj's speech, including *Kompas*, the nation's leading newspaper, whose front page was dominated by a photograph of the opening session of Munas and the headline, "Defending the Trilogy of Human Fraternity." This headline refers to the 1984 Nahdlatul Ulama Congress, where the concepts of national and universal fraternity (i.e., complete equality and fraternity between Muslims and non-Muslims)—previously nonexistent within Islamic legal discourse—were first articulated by Kyai Haji Achmad Shiddiq, the newly-elected General Chairman of the NU Supreme Council.

In his opening address, delivered in Arabic, Kyai Haji Miftachul Akhyar, current General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council, called for the recontextualization of Islamic teachings to ensure their alignment with the realities of 21st century civilization.

Nahdlatul Ulama Adopts, and Begins to Implement, a Detailed Strategy to Reform Obsolete and Problematic Tenets of Islamic Orthodoxy

The actual working sessions of the 2019 Munas were conducted by *ulama* (religious scholars) deliberating issues divided among three distinct commissions of *Bahtsul Masa'il*, a division of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council. Its members are prominent scholars whose knowledge and mastery of *fiqh* qualifies them to issue authoritative rulings on matters related to Islamic jurisprudence.

Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Waqi'iyyah addressed issues related to the ecological crisis triggered by the irresponsible disposal of plastic waste in Indonesian rivers, which are a major contributing factor to the pollution of the world's oceans; the environmental impact of the bottled water industry, and especially the depletion of neighboring wells and fresh springs; problems related to the shipping industry; and pyramid schemes.

Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Qanuniyah addressed issues related to Indonesia's draft anti-monopoly law; business competition; and a draft law to eliminate sexual violence.

By far the most heavily attended commission was *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah*, which addressed issues related to obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that continue to shape the prevailing "Muslim mindset," contributing to the instability and violence that plagues much of the Islamic world, and threatens civilization as a whole. Among the issues examined by this commission were:

- The form(s) of government permitted by *shari'ah*;
- The rights, responsibilities and status of non-Muslims within society and norms concerning interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims;
- The relationship between Islamic law and state laws created through modern political processes; and
- How Muslims throughout the world should respond to conflicts that involve various Muslim groups (e.g., in the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, the Sahel, Nigeria, etc., etc.).

The *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah* commission was co-chaired by Kyai Haji Abdul Ghofur Maimoen ("Gus Ghofur") and Kyai Haji Abdul Moqsith Ghazali. Gus Ghofur—who holds BA, MA and PhD degrees from al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt—is Secretary of the NU Supreme Council and Chairman of the *Bahtsul Masa'il* division within the NU Central Board. He is the son of the pre-eminent and revered NU *'alim* (religious scholar) and *faqih* (jurist), Kyai Haji Maimoen Zubair (1928 – 2019), whose followers numbered in the tens of millions. Kyai Maimoen Zubair was a relative and close friend of the former Chairman of the NU Supreme Council, and current Bayt ar-Rahmah Chairman, Kyai Haji A. Mustofa Bisri.

Abdul Moqsith Ghazali is Deputy Chairman of the *Bahtsul Masa'il* and a member of the Council of Indonesian Ulama's (*Majlis Ulama Indonesia*, or MUI's) Central Board.

Virtually the entire senior leadership of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council and its Executive Board attended the *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah* commission, whose resolutions and findings were approved with unanimous consent by the commission itself, and at a subsequent plenary session of the 2019 Munas, which was attended by thousands of NU religious scholars from throughout Indonesia. These consist of:

1. A 6-page narrative analysis of critical issues addressed by the 2019 Munas *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah* commission, titled *The Recontextualization of Fiqh*

(Islamic Law) and Transformation of the Prevailing "Muslim Mindset," for the Sake of World Peace and to Achieve a Harmonious Communal Life for All Mankind;

2. A 9-page *fiqh* ruling titled, *Findings of Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation, Citizenship, State Law and Peace*;
3. Two seminal *fiqh* rulings issued by successive Chairmen of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council—KH. Achmad Siddiq and KH. Ma'ruf Amin—that conclusively affirm the theological legitimacy of the Republic of Indonesia as a multi-religious and pluralistic nation state. They are entitled *Edited Summary of the Principal Thoughts Conveyed by Kyai Haji Achmad Siddiq to Commission I (which addresses questions of Islamic law) at the 27th Nahdlatul Ulama National Congress on 11 December 1984* (6 pages) and *Rulings of the 29th NU National Congress* (20 pages);
4. A 12-page treatise authored by former NU Chairman KH. Sahal Mahfudh—*Solutions to Actual Problematics Within Islamic Law* (2010)—affirming the proper role and function of *Bahtsul Masa'il* as a forum for the practice of collective *ijtihad* to bring Islamic law into line with 21st-century norms; and
5. Adoption of a set of prior international declarations, whose content *Bahtsul Masa'il Maudluiyyah* and the National Conference of Religious Scholars (2019 Munas) acknowledged as an integral part of their findings. These consist of five documents in addition to those enumerated above, namely: the 2016 *International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration*; the 2016 *First Global Unity Forum Declaration*; the 2017 *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*; the 2018 *Nusantara Manifesto*; and the 2019 *Document on Human Fraternity*, signed by Pope Francis and Shaykh al-Tayyeb of al-Azhar.

Through these actions, the *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah* commission and National Conference of Religious Scholars (2019 Munas) officially incorporated and adopted, within their findings, the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*'s analysis of the threat posed by "obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law, which are premised upon perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam"; the weaponization of these tenets by state and non-state actors throughout the Islamic world; and its detailed road map for the recontextualization (i.e., reform) of these tenets.

The *Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah Maudluiyyah* commission and 2019 Munas also adopted the *Nusantara Manifesto*, which establishes a framework for the renewal of Islamic discourse and the development of *fiqh al-hadarah al-'alamiyah al-mutasahirah*—i.e., new tenets of Islamic law suited to the emergence of a single, interfused global civilization, based on cooperation rather than conflict.

The first document referenced above—*The Recontextualization of Fiqh and Transformation of the Prevailing "Muslim Mindset"*—expresses the Nahdlatul Ulama's appreciation to al-Azhar and the Vatican for having produced the *Document on Human Fraternity*. It goes on to state that "Nahdlatul Ulama specifically wishes to emphasize the significance of a viewpoint [implicitly] expressed in the Abu Dhabi *Document on Human Fraternity*: viz., that the prevailing 'Muslim mindset' contains certain views that foster conflict. These views are rooted in specific interpretations of Islamic teaching, which must change [if we are] to mobilize the Muslim world, to the maximum extent possible, behind efforts to foster world peace. This will entail 'recontextualizing' a number of *fiqh* views that are no longer compatible with, nor reflect, the realities of the contemporary world."

These obsolete and problematic *fiqh* views are precisely those addressed in the second document referenced above, titled *Findings of Bahtsul Masa'il Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation,*

Citizenship, State Law and Peace. In this document, *Bahtsul Masa'il Nahdlatul Ulama* and the 2019 National Conference of Religious Scholars ruled that:

1. No specific political system was prescribed by, nor revealed to, the Prophet Muhammad (saw.), and that a pluralistic, multi-religious nation state, characterized by equality among its citizens, regardless of their religious belief, is permissible according to Islam.
2. "The status of non-Muslims within a nation state is that of citizens (*muwathin*) who possess rights and responsibilities equal to those of the nation's other citizens. They do not belong to any of the categories of infidel (*kafir*) which exist within classical Islamic law, i.e., *mu'âhad* (infidels who are subjects of a non-Muslim ruler, who has signed a currently-valid peace treaty with Muslims); *must'aman* (infidels visiting or living in an Islamic state, for purposes of trade, diplomacy, etc., whose safety is guaranteed by a Muslim ruler); *dzimmi* (infidels who have submitted to Islamic rule, dwell within the borders of an Islamic state, pay an annual head tax and are governed by specific, highly restrictive elements of Islamic law); and *harbi* (infidels engaged in war with Muslims, who may be killed on sight)."
3. "Government laws and policies that emerge as a result of modern political processes are an integral part of the constitutional consensus reached by the nation's citizens. If these laws and policies do not conflict with Islamic values, then they are binding (*mulzim syar'i*) and Muslims have a religious obligation to faithfully obey them. On the other hand, if [certain] laws and policies contravene Islamic values, the Muslim community must employ constitutional measures to bring them into alignment [with Islamic values]. The existence of such laws and regulations may not be employed as a justification for defying a legitimate government."
4. "The struggle for world peace is an integral part of the Nahdlatul Ulama's religious orientation and mission. This, in turn, means that whenever and wherever conflicts occur—both those that involve Muslim groups battling each other, and those in which Muslims are fighting non-Muslims—it is a religious duty, incumbent upon other Muslims, to foster conflict resolution, justice and peace, rather than take sides and join in the violence in order to defend or support one of the warring parties."

The second ruling, cited above, elicited considerable discussion and debate in Indonesian society, both pro and contra. Moderate Muslims and religious minorities welcomed the ruling, which theologically prohibits use of the term *kafir* (infidel) to describe one's fellow citizens dwelling within a modern nation state. This has profound implications regarding the rights, responsibilities and status of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and for norms that govern social interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the Islamic world and the West.

In a major news story titled "Indonesia's Largest Islamic Group Seeks End to 'Infidel Usage,'" Bloomberg wire service reported that Nahdlatul Ulama affirmed "non-Muslims… have equal standing in state affairs," and are "citizens with the same rights and obligations as Muslim Indonesians." These rulings by the Nahdlatul Ulama constitute new *ijtihad* (interpretations of Islamic law), intended to displace obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that underlie and animate Islamist extremism and terror. As KH. Abdul Moqsith Ghazali told journalists at the 2019 Munas: "Use of the word *kafir* (infidel) to refer to non-Muslims, harbours a key element [of *fiqh*] employed to theologically justify violence."

Not surprisingly, Muslim extremists and their allies were quick to note the strategic political and theological implications of these rulings, and to criticize leaders of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, by name, for abrogating the obsolete *fiqh* justifications employed by Muslim supremacists to discriminate against, and attack, non-Muslims worldwide. The Nahdlatul Ulama ruling is popular, however, among Indonesia's silent Muslim majority, who have historically

refrained from use of the term *kafir* due to powerful socio-cultural forces—including the traditions of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam) and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity Amid Diversity)—that inculcate respect for one's fellow human beings and the understanding and practice of Islam as *rahmah* (universal love and compassion).

Weaponization of the term *kafir* played a prominent role in Indonesia's 2014 Presidential election—when Muslim Brotherhood activists employed the term to vilify the eventual winner, Joko Widodo—and also helped precipitate the political downfall, and imprisonment, of Jakarta's popular Chinese Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama ("Ahok").

The historic *Findings of Bahtsul Masa'il Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation, Citizenship, State Law and Peace* at the 2019 Munas—and a previous 2017 Munas ruling that Muslims are permitted to choose non-Muslim political leaders—may be viewed as the formalization and public assertion of traditional *Islam Nusantara* values in response to what Indonesians widely regard as the importation of extremist ideologies from the Middle East.

Complex Political and Religious Dynamics in Egypt: an Ancient, Proud and Pivotal Nation That Aspires to Lead the Muslim World

Since the advent of Islamism as a modern socio-political movement during the twentieth century, Egyptian (primarily Muslim Brotherhood) religious scholars, activists and jihadis have provided much of the intellectual and practical leadership responsible for the spread of Sunni ultraconservatism worldwide, financed by Gulf (primarily Wahhabi) petrodollars. With the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity* by Pope Francis and Shaykh al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi, the prospect emerges that Egypt may contribute significantly to the resolution of a global crisis triggered, in large part, by its own citizens.

The origins of this *Document* may be traced to President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi's call for a "religious revolution," delivered in a 2015 speech before the assembled scholars of al-Azhar. Referencing problematic tenets within Islamic orthodoxy, President al-Sisi stated:

> "We must take a long pause to examine the situation in which we find ourselves. It's mindboggling that religious concepts we sanctify should compel this entire [Islamic] nation to be a source of anxiety, danger, slaughter and destruction for the whole world. It's inconceivable that these religious concepts—I do not say religion itself—I say concepts and texts that have been sanctified over hundreds of years, so that escaping them becomes extremely difficult. These ideas promote enmity towards the entire world, the *entire* world!!! I mean, 1.6 billion [Muslims] are going to butcher the entire global population of non-Muslims, just so they [Muslims] can live!? *Impossible*!!!
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> "I'm saying this here, in al-Azhar, in front of the men and scholars of religion, *for by God I will bear witness against you on the day of judgement in front of God Most High about what I'm saying now*. You, when you're inside of [this obsolete way of thinking about infidels], it's impossible for you to feel [how problematic this is]. You must leave [this way of thinking] behind, view it [from afar] and adopt truly enlightened thought. We need to deal with [these problematic religious concepts] resolutely, and I repeat, we need a religious revolution! Grand Shaykh, you are responsible in front of God. The entire world is waiting to hear from you and from the scholars of al-Azhar, because this [Islamic] nation is being torn apart."

In the aftermath of President al-Sisi's historic speech, policy experts noted the lack of any discernible action on the part of al-Azhar to initiate a process of reform, which some knowledgeable observers attributed to the presence of significant numbers of Islamists—including Muslim Brotherhood members, Wahhabis and other Sunni extremists—within this

revered center of Islamic learning. Others pointed to the highly conservative nature of the institution itself. Regardless, so deafening was the silence of al-Azhar on the topic of religious reform, other than to denounce it, that a consensus emerged in expert circles that nothing would come of al-Sisi's speech.

As recently as November 2018, news reports suggested that al-Azhar's inaction had caused immense strain in the relationship between the Egyptian President and Grand Shaykh Ahmed al-Tayyeb. The *Document on Human Fraternity* thus constitutes an unexpected development that illuminates the complex, shadowy maneuvering and negotiations that occur between state and religious institutions in the Middle East. Significantly, it appears that the *Document on Human Fraternity* was drafted not by *ulama* (religious scholars) from al-Azhar, but by a committee of Egyptian public intellectuals summoned to act in response to President al-Sisi's call for religious reform. This committee was chaired by a judge, Mohamed Abdel Salam, who in September of 2013—i.e., immediately following the overthrow of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi—was appointed to serve as a close advisor to the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar by the government of Egypt's Interim President, Adly Mansour, who himself was appointed by then-Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

As stated in the 2019 Munas document, *The Recontextualization of Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Transformation of the Prevailing "Muslim Mindset"*:

> "[T]he *Document on Human Fraternity* signed in Abu Dhabi represents an historic milestone in efforts to safeguard the world and preserve humanity from the threat of a universal inter-religious conflict. The views expressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity*—concerning the elimination of religious enmity; the right to full citizenship and equality before the law, regardless of one's religious or other "primordial" identity; and the vision of [Muslims and non-Muslims] joining hands to strive for peace, establish justice and defend the weak—are profound insights, which must become a fundamental guide and way of life for religious communities throughout the world. . .
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> "The next big challenge will be the effort required to transform the actual mindset of [countless] religious adherents [whether Muslim or otherwise], whose outlook is, in reality, still colored by problematic views. Concrete steps to transform this socio-cultural and religious reality [in which many religious adherents view others with enmity] requires a global consolidation [of like-minded individuals, institutions and governments] by inviting—as the *Document on Human Fraternity* explicitly states—people of good will of every faith and nation to join in this effort. A truly reliable and effective strategy is also required.

The *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* offers a five-fold strategy to accomplish this objective, the first element of which is to identify and contain the threat. This, in turn, requires explicitly acknowledging and addressing—as President al-Sisi urged in his January 2015 speech—"religious concepts and texts that have been sanctified over hundreds of years" which have impelled "this entire [Islamic] nation to become a source of anxiety, danger, slaughter and destruction for the whole world." Perhaps not surprisingly—given the inter-faith character of the *Document on Human Fraternity* and the complex nature of the political and religious dynamics involved—the *Document* does not explicitly identify, nor directly address, those obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy used to justify Islamist supremacism, hatred and violence.

Profound differences in the historical and socio-cultural trajectory of Islam in the Middle East and Indonesia may explain why the spiritual wing of the Nahdlatul Ulama—backed by its 5-

million-member young adults movement, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, and its militia—have taken the lead in explicitly acknowledging and addressing these problematic tenets.

Al-Ahram (The Pyramids)
(est. 1875), one of the oldest and most widely-read newspapers in the Arab world

"Even though there is a distance of thousands of kilometers between Indonesia and Egypt... they have a long history of addressing shared concerns, something that will become the main focus for developing relations between the two countries in diverse fields during the next phase of world history...

"The NU seeks to maintain the tolerant face of Islam within Indonesia. Most Indonesians regard this 'smiling face of Islam' as integral to their national character and a treasured inheritance from previous generations. As such, they refuse to allow the essential values that underlie their national character to be destroyed by Islamist extremism... [T]he Nahdlatul Ulama has consistently nurtured the values of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam) for over a century, and is now poised to export its collective wisdom and experience throughout the world, for the benefit of humanity."

~ Muhammad Abul Fadl, Deputy Editor, *Al-Ahram*

State and Religion in the Islamic World

The processes that ultimately led to the separation of state and religion in the West were complex, tortuous and often bloody. Over a period of centuries, a wide array of religious, political, military, philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural forces maneuvered in a brutal competition for power in Europe, their struggle often accompanied by persecution of those who held contending views and/or "identities." The Roman Catholic Church, for example, did not theologically reconcile itself to the separation of state and religion until the 1965 publication of *Dignitatis humanae*, the Second Vatican Council's declaration of religious freedom.

In the opinion of senior Nahdlatul Ulama theologians—whose ancestors have continuously struggled with these issues since the arrival of political Islam on the island of Java in the 15th century—it is unrealistic to imagine that the threat posed by obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy will miraculously vanish as the result of abstract theological discourse, divorced from the exercise of political power. As stated in the *Nusantara Manifesto*:

> "Preserving Indonesia's unique civilizational heritage—which gave birth to NKRI [the Republic of Indonesia] as a multi-religious and pluralistic nation state—requires the successful implementation of a global strategy to develop a new Islamic orthodoxy that reflects the actual circumstances of the modern world in which Muslims must live and practice their faith.
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> "This global effort, already launched by key elements of the Nahdlatul Ulama—including its 5-million-strong young adults organization, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor—is not just an inevitable corollary of efforts to defeat Islamist subversion of Indonesia. It is vital to the well-being and preservation of virtually every other nation in the world, whose laws are derived from modern political processes and whose people and governments do not wish to be subsumed in a universal Islamic caliphate or exhausted by the struggle to prevent its establishment.
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> "The recontextualization and reform of Islamic orthodoxy is thus crucial to the welfare of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, for it constitutes the one indispensable prerequisite of any rational and humane solution to the multi-dimensional crisis that has plagued the Muslim world for over a century and not only shows no sign of abating—despite an

> ever-growing toll of human lives and misery—but rather, increasingly threatens to spill over and engulf humanity as a whole" (Nusantara Manifesto, points 38 – 40).

In order for the *Document on Human Fraternity* to become widely adopted throughout the Islamic world, and the basis of actionable policies—which institutionalize its call for religious freedom and equal citizenship rights for Muslims and non-Muslims alike—these policies must be widely viewed, by Muslims, as consistent with, and supported by, orthodox Islamic teachings. Implementation of the *Document* thus necessitates the recontextualization (i.e., reform) of obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that are inconsistent with its message.

The *Document on Human Fraternity* did not emerge as a result of pure religious discourse. Rather, the fact that it was drafted by a committee of Egyptian public intellectuals mobilized by their government, and its public launch amid great pomp and ceremony, reveal the highly complex political dynamics that continue to shape religious developments in the Middle East. Fortunately, the states in question have determined that their national interests are predicated upon advancing the arguments contained in the *Document*. The interests of humanity as a whole depend on translating these arguments into practical policies, deliberately and consistently implemented over time.

Conclusion

Adoption of the *Document on Human Fraternity*, by al-Azhar and the Vatican, provides significant theological cover to Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, Bayt ar-Rahmah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, as they seek to recontextualize (i.e., reform) obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy.

Conversely, *ijtihad* performed by Nahdlatul Ulama scholars between 1984 and 2019—and indeed, throughout the 500 year history of *Islam Nusantara*—has established a robust conceptual framework and a practical strategy to realize the aspirations expressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity*.

These developments in Indonesia, Europe and the Middle East reflect the possible emergence of a global movement to reform problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy. As Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the NU Supreme Council, said in an August 2017 interview with the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: "Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a crystal clear relationship between fundamentalism, terror and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot attain final victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam... A problem that is not acknowledged cannot be solved."

As reported by the *Public Radio International* (*PRI*) network: "When someone calls you a *kafir*, that means you're considered someone who is godless," said Alex Arifianto, an Indonesian political scientist with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. "Or you're someone whose religion is considered inferior to the Islamic belief," he said. "That's why this is so significant. The largest Muslim organization in the world is saying, 'Look, we have to treat non-Muslims as equals.'"