BUILDING INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY
INDONESIAN EXPERIENCE

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I.   Introduction

Indonesia is the biggest Muslim country, characterized by diversity in many areas. There are 17,504 islands, 1.340 ethnicities, 742 languages, and six recognized religions. They are Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. It is natural that in such a diverse country like Indonesia, unity is not something to be taken for granted. It needs high degree of tolerance which is indeed very costly. If Indonesia nowadays is considered one of the peaceful countries, despite the fact that the country had experienced some separatist movements in the past and some religious disturbances in some areas. The separatist movements had generally been motivated by perceived political and economic inequality in 1960s, and religious disturbances by social factors in the last few decades. There are also radical movements operating in Indonesia that were mostly under the influence of international networks. These last movements are indeed very small in number of followers and incidents, but became known because of their activities of suicide bombings that brought about the feeling of mass fear.

While radicalism is a global phenomenon, no matter what religion the radicals have been affiliated and no matter what nation they have been associated, that must be fought against collectively by all walks of life. The relative success of Indonesia in preventing the blossoming of radicalism is due to a collective effort in promoting tolerant and peaceful culture. This is not to say that we are justified to boast of the country, but at least we can learn something from a country with multi facet diversity driving toward national harmony.

II.   Five Areas

There are many factors that contributed to interreligious harmony in particular and national integration in general. The first is the language. Bahasa Indonesia in proclaimed as the only national official language, which every national must learn in educational system. It is the language in which official documents are written and in which intercultural and interethnic communities communicate. The second is the basis of the state. After long series of debates from 1930s to 1040s, it is finally agreed upon by the founding fathers that Pancasila (the Five Principles) is the basis of the state rather than Islam as the religion of the almost 90% of the total population. The Five Principles are, loosely translated, Belief in One God, Just and Civilized Humanity, Indonesian Unity, Democracy, and Social Justice. By the Pancasila there will be no legitimate discrimination against followers of any religion. The third is the law, such as that of religious blasphemy. Although this law remains controversial as to if it is instrumental in preventing religious conflict or instead can be misused for criminalizing any critics. Besides the law of blasphemy, the law of the foundation of religious houses (such as mosque or church) is also instrumental. This law is jointly issued by Minister o Religious Affairs and Minister of Interior, regulating that the foundation of any religious house must be permitted only when it meets certain conditions, such

as the number of the followers residing in the area where the building is to be erected. The fourth is institution nurturing peace culture. Government sponsored institution such as Forum Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama (Interreligious Harmony Forum) is established at very province, district and subdistrict. Within both Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Interior a body concerned with religious harmony is created in all their bureaucratic structure from national to subdistrict levels. This body is designed to support the activities of the Forum.

The fifth is faith-based NGO (Non-Government Organization). It is difficult to count how many NGOs working for developing interreligious harmony because there are so many. Some of them constitute part of international network, working in alliance of international agencies, or sheer community based operation. In this regard, we can also include in this category religious-social-mass organizations, such as Muhammadiyah (1912-present), al-Irsyad (1914-present), Persatuan Islam (1023-present), Mathlaul Anwar (1916-preent), Nahdlatul Ulama (1926-present), and al-Washliyyah (1930-present),. All these nationwide Islamic organization setup a special body for promoting interreligious relation and fighting against extremism and radicalism. A commitment for interreligious harmony and for preventing extremism and radicalism off course comes not only from the Muslims but also from the other five recognized religions, namely Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

III. Concept and Experiences

However, the idea of encouraging community participation to address the challenges of extremism and radicalism has importantly emerged since the last decade. It is an urgent response to the powerful state-centric and security-based approach that seems ineffective to reduce a growing dynamic of extremism and radicalism across the world. The theories and practices of community-based peacebuilding efforts alternatively emphasize the role of community in participatory approaches. It seems to be more effective in addressing violent extremism

  1. *Conceptual Debate*

It is better to be critical and careful when we talk about extremism, for this concept is not understood equally in various community backgrounds. One group can be labeled extremism by others, but not by their group. Let us takes Hamas in Palestine as an example. We can tell them extremism, but Palestinian would not say that.

There is no doubt that violent extremism concept is closely connected with all militant Islamic groups, such as ISIS, Al-Qaida, Boko Haram, Taliban, and so on. Those groups trigger the notion of violent extremism, and it spreads globally after 11 September as a country policy under Bush administration. Actually, before that, many groups already existed, like Mindanao Muslim. I am quite critical of it because everybody is being pressured right now to say something about PVE.

  2. *Experiences*

Interreligious dialogue and cooperation had officially been promoted in Indonesia by Suharto, the second Indonesian president in 1967 through the program called 'Musyawarah Antar Agama' (Interreligious Dialogue). This dialogue was politically carried out to get a consensus for the sake of national stability. This program looked very societal, but in many cases, an interreligious dialogue was promoted just as a means of supporting the agenda of the regime. In this process,

interreligious dialogue functioned as a top-down political initiative, where religions are operated mostly to support the ruling power's agenda.

The awareness of a paradigm shift in the governmental approach to interreligious dialogue occurred around 1980 with a movement sponsored by Paramadina Foundation, Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and the National Council of Churches, and, also with the attempts of many other non-governmental organizations, such as Interfidei (Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia) or Madia (Masyarakat Dialog Antar Agama: Society for Interreligious Dialogue). These civic organizations changed not just the direction of dialogue into a bottom-up approach, but also emphasize societal problems like poverty, inadequate education, injustice, corrupt government, polluted environment, and so on. This level of dialogue starts with the exchange of everyday life.

The process of establishing an interreligious dialog for peacebuilding in Indonesia took place after 1990. The dialogue was highly required as a strategy for building peace under the agitated conditions of interreligious conflicts in some regions of Indonesia, such as Maluku and Poso. This conflict history calls for extreme care in creating any method and strategy to encourage community engagement from a different faith to get together in each step of prevailing peace.

3. Industrialization of the Concept

Since the last two decades, Preventing Violent Extremism has become very popular among many international and national agencies such as the UN, UNDP, USAID, CIDA, and others. These institutions have been treating the PVE idiom as a new industrial product of peacebuilding efforts. It was industry because everybody or every global institution is talking about violent extremism as a priority of their peacebuilding efforts in many conflict areas around the world, even if the issues are not directly related with some particular regions.

Historically, the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) emerged in the mid of '80s and increased to be a global phenomenon after the tragedy of September 11 in New York City. CVE began as a movement after its huge promotion, driven by the Bush administration in early 2000. Entering 2010, CVE is no longer considered to address the problem of extremism and terrorism adequately. It was the time when Europe comes with the term Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) that offered different strategy by providing more space for community engagement. With the support of various INGOs and NGOs, these efforts have been enhanced globally.

4. Weaknesses of the Approach

When people are talking about extremism today (either CVE or PVE), they generally refer to Islam because the genesis of these terms is rooted in response to Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, ISIS and many other militant Islamic groups who legitimated the use of violence to achieve their goal. It is possible that the use of these terms will reinforce prejudices on Islam if we are not careful. We will face resistance from Muslim groups who are often perceived as radical, extremist or even terrorist groups by mass media. It will reduce the quality of mutual trust between groups in our assisted community. Often, we are also suspected of being an intelligence device to gather information on the ground regarding radical groups and used it to help intelligence strategies of donor countries. The Islamisation of PVE is also gain more massive support when media are unable to distinguish between the great teaching of Islam in supporting the just peace, and those

who corrupted the genuine of Islam through the glorification of the violence for the sake of their political or economic driven ambition.

Sometimes, people feel that PVE approach is indirectly instrumentalized religious teaching, as well as religious leaders. A Muslim Imam, for instance, is visited and invited to support PVE program. When he agrees, they ask him to issue a fatwa against a particular group to label them as an extremist group. He is instrumentalized, it means they need him as an instrument, but they don't want to be involved with him.

Many strategies of the PVE keep a distance from dealing with religion or, paradoxically, they allow secular people who have no capacity enough to manage religious issues. How can they deal with violent religious extremism by using secular approaches? The secular approach will not work effectively without a faith-based approach. With the absence of faith-based intervention, secular approaches will lose their main thrust, namely Community Participation.

Another dilemma regarding PVE approach is a dominant role of the outsiders in policy development, although they provide more opportunity for community engagement. Unluckily, the part of outsiders tends to be framed by intelligence and powerful security approach. It is the reason why such an approach is not too favored by the community, even by those who are not extremists. Community displeasure increases because PVE approach is based on fear and not on hope. That is why its strategy is more dominantly oriented towards security and defense approach. It doesn't mean that we don't need security approach. At a certain level security approaches are essential, but merely prioritizing that approach is not useful to overcome violent extremism.

5. Community-based Approach

A community-based approach is a different method of peacebuilding management. If the security approach is characterized by fear paradigm and self-defending character, the Community Based Peace Building approaches rest on empathy, trust, love, and hope. In a fear-based approach, duration of programs are often short-term, transplanted from the outside, while the role of outsiders' becomes important, intelligence roles dominate the framing of the strategy, and the capacity is weak to relate to the religion and particular culture of the local community. In a community-based approach, total community participation is important. The scale of the program is long term, where the community is involved in formulating problem-solving strategies based on their local capacity. Social capital and local wisdom, including the role of religion, gained an important position in the strategies development. Community-based peacebuilding strategies have always sought to mobilize communities to restore religion from its manipulation to provoke conflict and violence into their role in provoking peace. It is an art of community-based peace management. An art of managing religious identity as a tool to fight against violent provocations. For that reason, we must engage in working with the community and the religious community

6. Common Ground and Connecting Issues

Principally, the community-based peacebuilding approach is carried out based on the recognition and utilization of the "common ground" or "connecting issue" among different groups of people. It can be related to the equivalent culture among community groups. Indonesian culture for instance, as part of mainly Asian tradition, richly embodies many forms of local wisdom. Many

structures of our culture are believed to be a melting pot embracing all factions of our community. Thus, community-based interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding process should not be driven separately from a dialogue between religions and our cultural value. This values system has reinforced the tendency to identify one's social bond according to cultural compartments, which tied the Indonesian community in harmony for centuries. This social bond, at least, points out the importance of local wisdom that serves as the signifier of the collective identity of Indonesia society.

IV.   Final Remarks: Promoting Wasatiyya Islam

Concerning an effort to develop a community-driven model on peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue, two significant conferences, one of interreligious and intrareligious harmony and the other on Wasatiyya Islam, were conducted in Indonesia by the office of the Envoy of the President of RI for Interreligious and Intercivilizational Dialogue and Cooperation in 2017 and 2018 respectively. The first conference has produced A Declaration of Interreligious Leaders on National Unity, Pancasila, Interreligious and Intrareligious Relation, the Foundation of Religious Houses, Election and Democracy, and Recommendation. This conference can be seen as a prelude that paved the way for the following conference on Wasatiyya. This second conference mentioned in its final decision that the paradigm of Wasatiyyat Islam must be mainstreamed to build the Ummatan Wasatan, a society that is just, prosperous, peaceful, inclusive, harmonious, based on the Islamic tenets and morality. As noble teaching of Islam, Wasatiyyat is positioned in the middle and straight path emphasizing justice, balance, tolerance, consultation, reform, noble initiative, and statehood and citizenship. The Wasatiyya Islam must be given important place in academic discourse due its central position to counter extremism (*al-ghuluww or tatarruf*). It also needs to be developed in academic nature from theological, historical and sociological perspectives. Discussing the Wasatiyya should not be merely rhetoric. It must be scientifically supported. The Netherlands-Indonesia Consortium may carry the task of researching and promoting the Wasatiyya paradigm in academic community.