

## **Plenary Session I**

### **Religion and Social Problems**

#### **Remarks by Hon. Mr. Prof. Dr. Nasaruddin Umar, Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia**

The Plenary Session I was preceded by remarks by the Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In his remarks, he outlined that religion is embedded in the life of Indonesian.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia will continue to take active role in promoting interfaith dialogues both within Indonesia as well as in the world's arena such as with Southeast Asian, Southwest Pacific and European countries. This is an avenue where the Indonesian Government could show case its experiences and also collect valuable input to manage its cultural and religious diversity. The dialogues allow empowerment of various groups, network and cooperation domestically and internationally to be established. Since 1970s more than four hundred Forum of Inter-religious Harmony (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragam – FKUB) have been established throughout Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs will continue to support and welcome cooperation with parliamentarians to take active role in interfaith dialogue. As Indonesia embraces its diversity and democracy it continues to remain majority-Muslim country (more than 80% of total population, more Muslims live in Indonesia than the entire Middle East countries) and not an Islamic state (it is rather a democratic state where every religious believer enjoys equal rights to perform his or her religious convictions). Islam itself opens widely for diversity and democracy, and thus Islam opens for interfaith dialogue as illustrated in various Al-Quran verses. Despite religiously motivated tensions as illustrated by the media in recent years, Indonesia is optimistic it has once again regain stability in both politics and economy, and Indonesia will continue its commitment to establish fruitful cooperation in multi-dimensional community for advancing the future of Indonesia and the future of the world.

In closing, he highlighted that interfaith dialogue shall not confined into conference room but reflected in the practices at grass root level.

#### **Summary of Keynote Speech by Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra**

The growing number of multi dimensional tensions around the globe highlighted the ever-increasing need for improving mutual understanding and reconciliation among peoples and cultures in various areas in the world. Such tension as inter and intra-religious conflicts can become really intense and in many cases the root causes have little to do with religion such as economic disparity, educational level, political power, demography, ethnicity, cultural background, nationality and history. This definitely call for better recognition and management of religious pluralism among the followers of religions promises to advance the principle of inclusiveness, which would enhance accommodation, not conflict, amongst competing claims to religious truth in religiously and culturally heterogeneous societies. Such an inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, should lead to a sense of multiple and unique possibilities for enriching the human quest for

spiritual and moral wellbeing. Islam has long recognized socio-cultural and religious pluralism in a mixture of contexts. Islam is the single largest religion in Indonesia, Indonesia is not an Islamic state as politically and ideologically, it is based on Pancasila (The Five Principles) which is a compromise between secular nationalists who advocated a secular state and Muslim leaders who demanded an Islamic state. It is therefore reasonable to expect that Islam and Muslims play a key role in the enhancement of a democratic and multi-cultural Indonesia. Indonesian Islam is a Wasatiyyah Islam, which is essentially a tolerant, moderate, and “middle way” (ummah wasat) Islam given the history of its peaceful early spread and had been integrated into diverse ethnic, cultural and social realities of Indonesia. To conclude, the parliament and parliamentarians have the positional power to represent and facilitate the voices of the people in intra and inter religious.

## **Summary of Presentations**

### **1. Hon. Mrs. Pikulkeaw Krairiksh (MP from Thailand)**

In his speech, Hon. Mrs Krairiksh acknowledge that rooted between the lines of any dialogue regarding cultural values is a need for mutual understanding and respect in order to achieve a positive and constructive result for all parties involved. Parliaments and parliamentarians, who represent the ideological values of people in different areas, can play influential roles and confront difficult challenges. They can bring positive outcome based on democracy and ensuring the provision of human rights among all people.

In Thailand, differences is not only tolerated, but also integrated into the nation. Like their neighbors, the country’s population is formed by people with many differing mixtures of cultures and beliefs. Thailand strives to appreciate and value such diversity.

The Thai Parliament has the Standing Committees on Religions which has the purposes to maintain and support the preservation of arts and traditions, as well as regional folk wisdoms. This serves as the significant venue to promote Interfaith and Intercultural cooperation in Thailand.

### **2. Hon. Mr. Jamel Tourir (MP from Tunisia)**

The history of Tunisia following independence in 1956 saw a secular country that lead to various tensions. The early leader did not give room for freedom of speech that lead to increased tensions. The following leaders implemented similar policy and maintain that religious affair was completely separated from state affair. This was lead to an uprising that seek freedom to speak and freedom to implement religious values in the government and everyday life. However this does not automatically resolve differences among Tunisians. More distinctive Islamic uprising followed that lead to an agreement to review comprehensively how religious, human, cultural and other values can be integrated to form strong platform for advancement. New constitution is now being developed by integrating and harmonizing religious values, political values and other values that can be the new reference for Tunisians to develop and advance as a nation and as a country

**3. Hon. Mr. Alan Griffin (MP from Australia)**

In his speech, Hon. Mr. Griffin highlighted that religion underpin values of peace. Thus negative values such as intolerance, ignorance and justification of radical actions must not be in existence. Thus, parliament and government holds significant role in society as guardian of values, managing and administrating as well as celebrating diversity in order to address the challenges in modern society.

In order to secure right to participate fully in civil society, parliament has the power to enact law, fund programs and react to statement made in occurrence of an event.

Nowadays, Australia saw growing number of churches, mosque, synagogue and other place of worships. Since 2011 the fastest growing religion in Australia are Hindu and Islam. Australian parliament has promoted tolerance through dialogue, initiative and funding community programs, as well as celebrating harmony day.

Various councils have been established to help Australians improve their understanding between different faiths through dialogue and chair is rotated to give fair representation. 15 faith organizations are currently present including Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Sheikhs. Australia has various initiatives to developing inter-faith interchange. Australia and Indonesia initiated inter-faith dialogue between various religious groups. Other countries such as New Zealand became sponsor in this event. Respective government supports including scholarships and exchanges have allowed different members of various religious groups to participate in these positive engagements.

**Question and Answers**

1. During the question and answer session, Member of Parliaments was raising some interesting points. They acknowledge that misunderstanding still took place mostly due to ignorance and lack of understanding on the real value of other religion.
2. The Member of Parliaments also shared some experiences from their country. In Indonesia, the freedom of religion is protected by Constitution. In order to secure that protection and to address the growing horizontal conflict due to different interpretation of religious teaching, the Indonesian Parliament recently passed Law No. 7/2012 on Social Conflict. This law serves as the juridical answer to conflict as well as a comprehensive solution to prevention of conflict and post conflict recovery. Further, Indonesian philosophy of Unity in Diversity serves as tool to maintain harmony despite of cultural and ethnic diversity.
3. In addition, Indonesia awares that fundamentalist group exist in almost every society and continue to pursue their own perspective and objective. In order to maintain the peace and harmony as well as integrity of its nation, a country need politicians or statesmen who could protect the interest of its country more than the interest of its heritage, religion and group. It means a statesman who could promote universal value of peace and harmony in every aspect of society.

4. Uganda has its fair share in tensions due to religious belief. Islam was the first religion to come to Uganda through trade followed by Anglican and Catholic. Tensions have arisen between Muslim and Christians, Protestants and Catholics. Recent development in education, health and trade eased the tension. However, during the dictatorship period, various political parties were established through immature means and it is common for Political party to be linked to religion. This has led to untold suffering of Ugandans. Nowadays, Ugandan parliament has formed interreligious Council, which marked the end of clashes between different faiths, thus lead to the existence of mature interfaith dialogue in Uganda.
5. The Member of Parliaments and the invitees also highlighted some universal values common to different religions. Thus, religion should be developed for the prosperity and development of nation. It should not be creator of problem but part of solution. In order to disseminate those universal values, there should be effort to enhance religious literacy. Rather than clashes with each other, different religions shall unite to find common enemy such as destruction of nature and finding constructive solution to preserve the nature.
6. In relation to Islam, some Member of Parliaments reflected on Verses on Quran that insist on dialogue between religions with the objective to introduce Islam as peaceful religion. Islam is not religion of tyranny and violence. Islam is a religion that promotes coexistence, peace and taking care of each other as stipulated in the Islamic principles.
7. In addition to the country experience, Member of Parliaments paid attention toward oppression of Muslim minority in non Muslim country and vice versa. Recent development in Palestine was also receiving high attention from the Member of Parliaments. However, the Member of Parliaments aware that they shall not be hasty in judging that a horizontal conflict is an inter-religious conflict simply due to differences in religion among conflicting parties.
8. Furthermore, Member of Parliaments extended their expectation that this Meeting could reach feasible solution and recommendation to the religion based conflict. In order to gain commitment from the attendees, those solutions shall take into account the situation in developed as well as underdeveloped country.