



Policy Brief

Interfaith-Based Student Community: A Strategic Religious Peacemaking and Deradicalization for Indonesian Youth

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1. Introduction and Background

Indonesia is a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation that since its beginning has been based on *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which recognized unity in diversity and respect of each people group equally.

Nevertheless, this state foundation and commitment has been challenged from time to time. In socio-religious life, the key challenges are in Muslim-Christian relations as well as in the struggle of the Islamic state. In the past decade, the rise of religious extremism has widely influenced and recruited young people, including university students, to be on board.

It is important to address this issue seriously and urgently because it is like virus that thrives, significantly influencing many spheres of life. Some terrorist attacks recently were done by young people in their twenties and violence acts towards other religious groups were committed by some radical religious groups; even in the recent general election, religious sentiment was very strongly used to win the votes, including the hope for *khilafah* if one candidate won the election. It is a serious threat for the nation unity and relations among religions in Indonesia.

These phenomena in principle show that religious exclusivism leads to social/ political exclusivism. The belief that one's religion is the one and only truth has brought them to exclude other faith groups socially and politically. It is like fertile soil for the sowing of radical ideology seeds. The key to solving this problem is when religious exclusivism can be compatible with social/ political pluralism, which accepts and respects all different people groups equally. It means that their social exclusivism should be transformed to be social pluralism, though does not change their religious exclusivism. Radical ideology could not grow in social pluralism soil.

2. Main Findings

Three forming factors of religious and social exclusivism

From the research I conducted in 2016, I found at least three main factors that influence the respondents to be both religious exclusivists and social exclusivists in various degrees: 1) the teaching of parents/ family; 2) they grew up in the religious homogenous environment, society and schools; and 3) identity/ ideology of the student group that they joined.

Inter-Religious-Based Student Movement

Out of many mono-religious-based student movements in Indonesia, the emergence of an inter-religious-based student community has become one of significant alternatives in transforming those religious exclusivists to be more social pluralists. Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community Indonesia (YIPCI) purposely gets involved in religious peacemaking particularly between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia.

Three factor transformation to social pluralism

YIPC in some degree has been effectively transforming students from social exclusivism to social pluralism, while they could remain as religious exclusivists. There are at least main factors that support this transformation to take place: 1) interfaith community; 2) safe place for religious exclusivist; 3) transforming activities.

Interfaith community

The best setting to create a peaceful relation and thus transform social exclusivism to be social pluralism is an interfaith/ heterogeneous religious community. Through this kind of community, they could interact with and learn directly from diversity. They could clarify all misunderstandings and prejudices directly from the reliable resources.

Safe place for religious exclusivists

For sure, the community has to be a safe place for them to be in. The most important thing is safety for their faith. They do not feel threatened that they will lose their exclusive faith and change to be pluralists. Therefore, it is important that this community respect and keep their religious exclusivism.

Transforming activities

There are at least three main activities that are run in YIPCI: 1) peace education based on each religious teaching, 2) interfaith dialogue for peacebuilding, and 3) reconciliation between groups. Through those activities, they experience a change of mind and heart towards those who are strangers before they join YIPCI.

3. Recommendations

To have a larger and faster impact in countering religious intolerance and conflicts, this grass-roots movement should be supported by policy makers in both government and educational institutions.

1) Educational Institution

The formal educational institution (university level) is one key in supporting and thriving this movement. According to the United Nations, one of the four pillars of education is “Learning to Live Together in Peace and Harmony.” Universities should take this pillar more seriously regarding the growing of radicalism among students on campus. An interfaith-based community like YIPCI is the best model to answer the need.

2) Government

As many religious radical movements and terrorist groups recruit young people, this kind of community can be one solution to counter it. The National Body Terrorism Counter (BNPT) should consider supporting and working alongside this community, but not subordinate it under the BNPT. To form this kind of community in every university and city all over Indonesia requires more funds and resources, which is very hard to achieve by students themselves. With the support from government, it is very possible.