At present Europe seems to be dominated by a climate of fear, mistrust, mutual suspicion, and misunderstanding which has given rise to populist parties promoting an “us vs them” mentality; thereby, scapegoating religious and ethnic minorities for the woes of the continent. Indonesia, on the other hand, despite being one of the most diverse countries in the world with over 240 ethnic groups, more than 300 languages and six official religions, has managed the complex relationship between religion, state, and society in a tolerant and harmonious way. This has been possible through special emphasis on keeping dialogue between religious communities open: every one of the 34 provinces is host to a Religious Harmony Forum. Inter-religious dialogue is also undertaken by universities, youth organisations and NGOs. Indonesia, as a leader in inter-faith dialogue, also has a strong mandate to promote it abroad. It holds many bilateral inter-faith dialogues— including with Singapore, Myanmar, Fiji, and Australia in its immediate neighbourhood – as well as regionally and multilaterally (through the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations, for example).

In short, Indonesia is gracefully endowed with a very rich spiritual-religious capital and it is hoped that it can assist and offer some valuable lessons to the EU in tackling extremism, radicalisation, and other related challenges. The seminar threw light on the Indonesian experience of pluralism and discussed the challenges facing the country with regards to the relationship between the state, religion and society. The panel of the seminar was an interesting mix of highly acclaimed individuals from diverse backgrounds— government representatives to religious scholars and civil society actors— each of whom added new and interesting perspectives to the discussion.
Welcome Note by the Chair

Mr Alberto Turkstra, Programme Coordinator, European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS)

Mr Alberto Turkstra welcomed the esteemed speakers and the audience by laying emphasis on the motto of Indonesia: Unity in Diversity. He expressed great admiration for the Indonesian model that provides for freedom of religion and has a history of being the most tolerant Muslim-majority country in the world with well-balanced harmony among numerous religious and ethnic groups. He further underlined the crucial role of local, national and international interfaith dialogues in overcoming differences and fostering religious harmony. He briefly outlined the agenda for the session, which was to learn from the Indonesian experience of pluralism and discuss the challenges facing the country with regards to the relationship between the state, religion and society.

Introductory Remarks

H.E. Mr Yuri Thamrin, Ambassador of Indonesia to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the European Union

Mr Yuri inaugurated the conference with a dynamic and optimistic speech that stressed on the striking similarities between Indonesia and the EU, and the concrete steps that both of them could take to promote religious tolerance and harmony across the two regions. As the ambassador of Indonesia, he appreciated the role of such forums for giving him a chance to represent Indonesian interests and concerns, and help the Western world understand the country's perspective through direct interaction. Mr Thamrin insisted that as two large, diverse and democratic entities, Indonesia and Europe must engage in sharing information and experiences to learn from one another and lead the way in promoting pluralism and harmony across the world. He then moved on to talk about the strengths of Indonesia as the largest country in Southeast Asia, on the path to perfecting its democracy. "Indonesia is like a soccer game. Of course, one or two players get yellow cards but overall we play well. We work well as a country. Our Islam is inclusive," he said. He further went on to state that contrary to the title of the seminar, Indonesia did not claim itself to be a ‘model’ of tolerance, pluralism and harmony, as it was not perfect. However, it would be happy to be considered a source of learning and inspiration for others, and at the same time, it also sought to learn from others’ experiences. Elaborating on the Indonesian Islam, he said that it was inherently inclusive of women and minority rights. At the same time, he also accepted that there were many causes of concern, which had especially come to light during the recent elections in Jakarta, where issues of religion led to violent outcomes. He saw the incident as a wakeup call for Indonesia to preserve its secular social fabric. He also observed that not just Indonesia, but the whole world was facing similar challenges, albeit emerging from different problems like Islamophobia in the West, that he strongly condemned. In fighting this social evil, he suggested a three-pronged approach. First, he stressed on the need to integrate European Muslims into the mainstream, and urged them to represent their interests in a constitutional and peaceful manner. Second, he avowed the positive role that countries like Indonesia could play in providing interfaith dialogue models to promote the practice of moderate Islam through delegations, university courses and collaborations with the civil society. Third, he promulgated the role of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in communicating between the government and the Islamic communities. He also put forth five prospective areas of cooperation between the two regions: to engage the media in a positive manner;
to endorse interfaith programmes for religious leaders and scholars; to install a culture of
tolerance; to prevent the misuse of media in spreading hatred and intolerance; and to use
social media to strengthen democracy. All these actions, according to him, must be geared
to achieve five basic goals in EU-Indonesia cooperation. First and foremost, to share
information on recent developments in Indonesia with respect to promoting tolerance and
harmony with the European partners. The second goal was to further discuss the progress
made and the challenges ahead in fostering harmony. Consequently, assessing the work
done was the next important goal. The fourth step was to share the Indonesian experiences
with the rest of the world, and the final objective was to assess the overall effectiveness of
the approaches in counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism efforts.

Panel Discussion

Prof. Dr Dede Rosyada, Rector of the State Islamic University of Syarif
Hidayatullah, Jakarta

Prof. Dr Dede Rosyada’s speech focused on the different ways in which the core ideal of
Indonesian society, ‘unity in diversity’ could reach its optimum potential. He stressed that
even though Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, it
also has a huge diversity in terms of other religious followers— Christians, Buddhists,
Hindus etc. According to him, this religious diversity could further be protected in Indonesia
through four key constitutional mechanisms. The first and most central legal document
according to him was the ‘Legislation number 39 of 1999 concerning human rights’ that
protects the human rights of all people in Indonesia, including their freedom of religion or
belief. The second legislation, ‘Law on Court of Human Rights (No. 26/2000)’ helps in the
preservation of the aforementioned law, by making the violation of human rights
justiciable. Further, the National Commission on Human Rights of Indonesia overlooks the
protection and promotion of human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief.
Finally, and most crucially, he underlined the role of the ‘Presidential Decree on the
Prevention of Blasphemy and Abuse of Religions (No. 1/PNPS/1965)’ in providing a robust
framework for prohibiting the deliberate attempts to spread or express feelings of hostility,
hatred, or contempt against any of the recognised religions, and thus promoting tolerance
amongst all religious followers. Prof. Dr Dede, however, did urge for the revision of the old
law so that it could address modern dilemmas. He also underscored the need for preserving
unity in diversity for the economic upliftment of the country. In his speech, he raised a key
point that while many measures have been taken to maintain tolerance, this was not
enough. Indonesia must aim to promote not just tolerance, but also pluralism and
coeexistence. Additionally, he suggested the expansion of the duty to promote tolerance
and pluralism from the government to religious leaders, in that while the government’s
influence was limited to the legal spheres and mechanisms, religious leaders had the
capacity and social presence to influence their followers at a personal and community level.

Prof. Dr FX Armada Riyanto, Catholic Scholar and Author

Prof. Dr Armada added a personal touch to the conference by recounting his experiences
as a professor in not just large metropolitan cities of Indonesia, but also in its rural
countryside. Having taught theology to generations of Indonesians, Prof. Dr Armada tried
to enrich the understanding of ‘living together’ through practical experiences of everyday
life. Instead of focusing on the political and national issues of intolerance, he elaborated
on how ‘living together’ was an intrinsic value of Indonesia. These ideals of coexistence, according to him, could be seen in all aspects of everyday life. For instance, he illustrated that even though he was a professor of philosophy in Christian priestly formation, he was often invited to deliver lectures in Muslim Universities, and had even taught catholic priesthood to a number of non-Catholic students, including Muslims. By keeping his seminary open to people from all faiths, he saw an opportunity of interfaith dialogue, where others could learn about Christian beliefs and practices, and in turn, Christians could learn from other religions as well. He articulated on the various benefits of interfaith dialogue, which were not only political, but also social and economic. Preserving this inter-religious understanding was his main aim in order to maintain the precious practice of living together. This would enable people to appreciate one another, accept people the way they were and live peacefully in everyday life. He reiterated the main objective of the conference, which was not only to share Indonesian experiences, but also to learn from the rich history of the European community. Further, he insisted that Indonesia was not yet a perfect model of tolerance, pluralism and harmony. However, in his words, “we (Indonesians) are a good student. We are willing to learn and pursue the success of tolerance and living together. We are on this good track.”

*Dr H. Abdul Mu’ti, Secretary Generaly, Central Board of Muhammadiyah*

“We live far away from each other, but we are close despite cultural and religious differences. But being different doesn’t mean we are separated or disintegrated... We can be different, but it doesn’t mean we have to be indifferent.” With these lines, Dr H. Abdul Mu’ti opened his speech. He highlighted the universality of norms, and went on to elaborate on the social fabric of Indonesia. According to him, diversity was the social asset and capital of Indonesia, which could make it a stronger and more prosperous nation. Quoting the national motto of Indonesia, ‘Bhinneka Tunggal Ika’ which stands for ‘Unity in Diversity,’ he said that in Indonesia, ‘unity is diversity,’ which denoted the idea that regardless of individual differences, everyone identified with an overarching Indonesian identity and nobody needed to change their religious affiliations to be called Indonesian. He reiterated that there was equal respect for every racial, cultural, ethnic and religious identity in Indonesia. Further contrary to popular opinion, he persuaded the audience that Indonesia’s Islam was not only compatible with a robust democracy, but also the very essence of it. He called the country an open neighbourhood, where people lived together side by side regardless of religious and ethnic differences. “Acceptance of difference is in the DNA of Indonesia,” he exclaimed. He said that syncretism in religion, which was widespread in Indonesia was a strong indicator of tolerance and openness. At the same time, he acknowledged that democracy in the country was not yet perfect; in the post-authoritarian era, there existed a challenge to expand the currently existing formal and procedural democracy to the political character of the country, and embed it in the entire system. In this process, he emphasised the crucial and responsible role that the Muslims of Indonesia had to play, to ensure peaceful coexistence and protect all world and indigenous religions of the country.

*Rev. Gomar Gultom, Secretary, Indonesian Church Union*

The core focus of Rev. Gomar’s speech was on de-communalising the understanding of the Indonesian state and citizenship. He said that despite having a strong majority of Muslims,
Indonesia was not a Muslim state. It recognises and respects various other religions. The base of politics and protection in the Indonesian state, according to him was not religious identity, but citizenship. He also stressed on the fact that extremism and inter-religious violence in Indonesia must be analysed not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of the worrying rise of religious fundamentalism and populism across the world. He articulated that a major challenge that Indonesia was facing was the influence of external extremist factors. This was particularly dangerous for Indonesia, since the country was still in a phase of democracy building. Considering the widespread poverty, it was easy for external and internal factions to instrumentalise religion as a dividing issue for political and economic gains. While this was part of the reality, Rev. Gomar also insisted that it was not the character of Indonesia, which in its essence was based on tolerance and harmony. He emphasised the need for Indonesian Muslims to play a positive role in building peaceful coexistence, and contribute to the betterment of the world civilisation.

Q&A Session

**Question 1**
How does the change of regime in Saudi Arabia affect Indonesia?

**Answer**
Both Rev. Gomar and Dr H. Abdul agreed that a transition towards modernity was slowly unfolding in Saudi Arabia, and that was a positive trend for the whole world, including Indonesia.

**Question 2**
While some religious communities may be living harmoniously, there are still serious problems, such as the attacks on the Ahmadiyyas, Shias and other minority groups, and the government has been accused of not doing enough. What is the government doing to improve the situation of communal violence in Indonesia? Are there specific legislations or other measures that have been taken?

**Answer**
Dr H. Abdul replied that such incidents of violence were a remote occurring rather than a trend in Indonesia; the society was largely accommodative and open and majority of people coexist peacefully. He substantiated further on this point by recounting historical incidents where Mohammadiya Muslims had helped Shia refugees to rehabilitate. Dr Dede added that empirically there has been an improvement in cases of religious conflict. He also suggested the update of the Blasphemy Law, and cooperation between the EU and Indonesia to deal with such problems. Dr FX Armada reiterated that while they accepted that human rights violations were a serious problem, Indonesia had been trying their best to move forward and foster unity.

**Question 3**
What is the source of Islamist extremism in Indonesia?

**Answer**
All speakers articulated that the source of religious extremist in Indonesia was due to a combination of internal and external factors. Rev Gomar gave the example of the Islamic
organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia that had been banned by the Indonesian government in order to protect pluralist principles of Pancasila of the Indonesian state.

**Question 4**
How does Indonesia as a whole deal with incidents like the violence in Aceh and the imposition of Sharia Law?

**Answer**
Dr H. Abdul responded to this question by saying that the violence in Aceh was the negative side of democracy, i.e. populism. He believed that the violence, such as the case of Aceh, was a result of electoral politics and number games.

**Closing Remarks**
*Dr Ferimeldi, Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia*

In his closing statement, Dr Ferimeldi assured the people of Indonesia that the government was with them when there were problems of intolerance. He acknowledged that religious violence was quite frequent, but also stated that the government was working hard to maintain harmony. He recounted the impressive model of interfaith dialogue that takes place in every district of Indonesia, and invited officials working in the European Parliament to come to Indonesia and understand the situation though first-hand experience. He laid emphasis on the need for cooperation and mutual understanding as the path for fostering tolerance, pluralism and harmony.

*Report prepared by Saniya Singh*