STATE POLICIES ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA*

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Abstract

This article discusses how Indonesian state manages its religious diversity. The state policies on religious diversity cannot be understood without analyzing the history of how the founding fathers decided to choose Indonesia as neither secular nor Islamic country, but somewhere between the two. The author discusses three topics, namely the recognized religions, Muslim fear of Christianization, and dialogue and inter-religious harmony. Based on the Decree No.1/1965, Confucianism was one of six religions recognized by the state. However, in the Soeharto era, around 1979, this religion was dropped from the list, and only after his fall Confucianism has been rehabilitated, and even the Chinese New Year has been included as one of the national holidays in Indonesia. In terms of Muslim-Christian relations, there were tensions since 1960s, particularly dealt with the issue of the high number of Muslims who converted to Christianity. It was in this situation that in 1967 a newly built Methodist Church in Meulaboh, Aceh, was closed by Muslims, arguing that the Church was a concrete example of the aggressiveness of Christian missions because it was built in a Muslim majority area. Since the Meulaboh case, the Muslims consistently insisted the government to accommodate their four demands: (1) restriction on establishing new places of worship; (2) restriction on

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religious propagation, and control of foreign aid for religious institutions; (4) Islamic religion classes should be given to Muslim students studying in Christian schools; (5) inter-religious marriage should not be allowed. Apart from these contested issues, the government and religious leaders have been trying to avoid conflict and to establish cooperation and peace among religious groups in the country through inter-religious dialogues, either organized by the government or sponsored by the leaders of religious groups themselves. The author argues that specific socio-political contexts should be taken into consideration to understand state policies making concerning religious diversity. Hence, all debates and compromises achieved afterwards usually do not go beyond the neither secular nor Islamic compromise.

Keywords: state policy, religious diversity, religious conflict, pluralism.

A. Introduction

Indonesia "is not just locally, accidentally and temporarily pluralist. It is, to commit a philosophical solecism and a political truth, pervasively, essentially, and permanently so," said the American Indonesianist, Clifford Geertz.[1] Anyone who knows Indonesia would probably agree with Geertz's remarks. Indonesia is a multi-ethnic society with more than 1,000 ethnic/sub-ethnic groups living in various separated islands. The difference among the ethnic groups is mostly cultural, but it can sometimes be seen in physical appearances too. This country is also politically quite diverse, and it is well indicated by the present multiparty system.

Indonesia is religiously plural as well. It is true that Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. The government statistics of 2000 indicates that 88.22% of the Indonesians are Muslim. However, there are different types Muslim organizations in Indonesia (reformist, traditionalist, moderate, radical etc.), and there are also nominal Muslims who do not regularly practice Islam. Moreover, Christians are the largest religious minority in the country, comprising 8.22% of the total population followed by Hindus (1.81%) and

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[1] Clifford Geertz, "The Near East in the Far East: On Islam in Indonesia" (Occasional Paper of the School of Social Science, 2001), p. 11.

Buddhists (0.84%). It is very important to note that in certain areas, Christianity is the religion of majority or a large minority, namely in East Nusatenggara (87.67%), Papua (75.51%), North Sulawesi, excluding Gorontalo, (69.27%), Maluku, excluding North Maluku (50.19 %), North Sumatra (31.40%) and West Kalimantan (34.01%). It is also well known that Hinduism is the religion of majority in Bali, comprising 87.44% of its population.[2]

Faced with the problem of diversity, the founding fathers of the Indonesian state were urged to answer this very important question: What is the thing that can unite the diversity? In response to this question, history tells us that the founding fathers were divided into two groups: one opted for secular nationalism and another for Islam. After a series of debates and negotiations, they eventually made a compromise that the Indonesian state should be neither secular nor Islamic, but somewhere between the two!

The unclear position is indicated by the first principle of the state ideology, Pancasila, namely '*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*'. The meaning of the sentence is not clear but it somehow reflects the compromise. The Islamic oriented groups usually takes the phrase "*Yang Maha Esa*", literally means "the One", to argue that it refers to the Muslim belief in monotheism (*tawhîd*), while the secular oriented groups often emphasize the word "*Ketuhanan*" which means "Godhead" as contrasted to the word "Tuhan" (God) to argue that it refers to all religions and beliefs, not exclusively to Islam.

The compromise is also found in Article 29 of 1945 Constitution concerning religion. Section 1 and 2 of the Article is the following: (1) *The state is based on* Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa; (2) *The state guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace his/her religion and to observe the rituals according to his/her religion and belief.* One can argue for religious freedom by referring to the section 2 of the Article. However, for those who want to argue for the state intervention in religious matters, they can also refer to the section 1. It is important to note that the attempts to

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    [2] See Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), pp. 104; 115-16.

amend the Article have been unsuccessful.[3]

In January 1946, just several months after the proclamation of Indonesian Independence, the Indonesian Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir, decided to establish the Department of Religious Affairs.[4] This Department apparently embodies the compromise that Indonesian state is neither secular nor Islamic. The existence of the Department clearly indicates that the state intervenes in religious (but not exclusively Islamic) matters. It is true that the Department mostly serves the Muslim interests, but there are also a few positions for other religions, especially the so called "recognized religions". In the early years of Soeharto's New Order, there were voices demanding the abolition of the Department, but the President finally decided to keep it. Now, the Department still exists and probably would not be abolished in the (near) future.

The state policies on religious diversity in Indonesia cannot be understood without considering the facts above. Specific socio-political contexts certainly play a part in the making of state policies, but all debates and compromises achieved afterwards usually do not go beyond *the* neither secular nor Islamic compromise. It is true that in certain cases, the state tended to be more secular, while in other cases it tended to be more Islamic, but it never became *totally* Islamic or secular oriented.

B. The Recognized Religions

As discussed above, the *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* does not exclusively refer to Islam, but it somehow indicates that the Indonesian state should be religious. Does it mean that all citizens should believe in a religion? Should the state determine certain religions as recognized religions? During the two decades after the independence, it seems that there were no positive answers to these questions. It was partly

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[3] See "Perubahan Keempat UUD 1945 Disahkan", *Kompas*, 11 Agustus 2002.

[4] On the Department of Religious Affairs, see C.A.O van Nieuwenhuijze, *Aspects of Islam in Post-Colonial Indonesia* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1958), pp. 236-43; Deliar Noer, *The Administration of Islam in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1978), p. 12 ff; and B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), pp. 108-9.

because after the revolutionary war (1945-1949), and then the elections of 1955, the political forces still struggled for their respective ideological orientations. From 1959 to 1965, the Indonesian first President, Soekarno, introduced "Guided Democracy" with a "synthetic" ideology combining the three competing ideologies called "Nasakom", an acronym of *Nasionalis, Agama, Komunis* (Nationalism, Islam and Communism).[5] In this period, we find that the Department of Religious Affairs was not abolished, but at the same time, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) became increasingly strong.

In early 1960s, however, the political contest between the PKI and its enemies, especially the army and the Islamic groups became more critical. Partly as a response to PKI's agitation against Islam, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Saifuddin Zuhri, successfully demanded President Soekarno to issue the Decree No.1/1965 on "the Prevention of Misuse and/or Abuse of Religion". The Decree states, among other things, that "the acceptance of the first principle (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*) cannot be separated from religion, because it is one of the main pillars of human life and Indonesian nation, and it is also the backbone of the state life and the necessary element of the nation building."[6] Then, in the Elucidation of Article 1 of the Decree, we find the following sentences:

> Religions embraced by Indonesian citizens = Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. This can be proved by the historical development of religions in Indonesia. Because these six religions are embraced by almost all Indonesian citizens, apart from the guarantee mentioned in the Article 29 section 2 of the Constitution, they also receive aid and protection as dictated by this article.

> It does not mean that other religions, for instance Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, Taoism, are banned in Indonesia. They get full guarantee given by the Article 29 section 2 of the Constitution, so they

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[5] Soekarno already proposed this idea in his article published in 1926, and it is translated into English in 1970. See Soekarno *Nationalism, Islam and Communism* Trans. Karel H. Warouw dan Peter D. Weldon (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, 1970).

[6] Weinata Sairin, *Himpunan Peraturan di Bidang Keagamaan* (Jakarta: BPK, 1994), p. 265.

shall be allowed to exist as long as they do not contradict this regulation or other regulations.

For the spiritual bodies/groups (*badan/aliran kebatinan*), the government tries to lead them to a healthy vision and *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* direction.[7]

The Elucidation of the Decree quoted above indicates that there are six religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism) followed by Indonesians, and those religions would receive both protection and aid from the state. In other words, they are "the recognized religions". The Decree also states that other religions are also allowed to exist and shall get protection (but apparently not aid), from the state, unless they break the law. The Decree, however, does not approve spiritual bodies/groups as distinctive religions, and therefore, the state shall try to guide them to "a healthy vision" and "*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*" direction (whatever these terms mean). The spiritual bodies/groups here probably refer to Javanese Mystical groups, tribal religions or other religious groups considered heterodox by the Islamic mainstream.

After the abortive coup of 1965 followed by the massacre of the communists and suspects, the time had come for the army to establish the New Order regime. This regime identified communism, or more precisely the PKI, as the common enemy of the state. The regime argued that communist ideology is equal to atheism and anti-religion, and therefore, it is opposed to the first principle of Pancasila, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*. Consequently, everybody had to affiliate herself with one of the recognized religions or otherwise she could be charged with being a communist. This policy certainly strengthened the position of the recognized religions.

During the New Order period, however, the position of the recognized religions was not unchallenged. The challenge primarily came from the Javanese mystical groups. President Soeharto had sympathetic relations with them, and he apparently realized their political significance to counterbalance the Islamic groups. Since 1950s the Javanese mystical groups had actually demanded the government

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[7] Sairin, *Himpunan*, pp. 266-7. My translation.

to include them as one of the recognized religions, but the attempts never succeeded. In fact, in 1978 the government party, Golkar, proposed the same idea to the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), but it also failed, primarily because of the strong opposition from the Islamic groups.

The followers of the Javanese mysticism, therefore, have been dictated to affiliate formally with one of the recognized religions. The same policy affects the followers of local/tribal religions like the Karo people who believe in the so called *Perbagu* religion, and the Ngaju Dayak who believe in *Kaharingan* religion. These native religions have been simply categorized as Hindu variants by the government. Presently, there are voices demanding state recognition of the tribal religions, but so far there is no sign that the government shall take a positive response.

Like the Javanese Mysticism and local religions, the recent controversy on "new religions" or "sects" is also a challenge to the state policy on recognized religions.[8] Does the state have the authority to judge one's beliefs? Should the state follow the dominant opinion among religious leaders, to judge the validity of certain beliefs and practices of the new sects? Should the state guide the followers of the new sects to embrace one of the recognized religions, or even to the religious teachings followed by the majority of a recognized religion?

It is also noteworthy that during the Soeharto period, around 1979, Confucianism was dropped from the list of the recognized religions. The government assimilation policy for the Indonesian Chinese was apparently the reason behind the dropping. After the fall of Soeharto, however, the position of Confucianism as a recognized religion has been rehabilitated. The Chinese New Year (called "Imlek" in Indonesia), has been included as one of the national holidays.

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[8] New religious groups like al-Qiyādah, Salāmullāh, Jemaah Qur'an Suci etc. have recently attracted public attention in Indonesia. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) issued fatwas that the groups are heretical, and the government authorities have sentenced their leaders. On these new religious groups, see *Tempo* (11 November 2007). For a study of similar groups during the New Order period, see Martin van Bruinessen, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia: Latar Belakang Sosial Budaya" *Ulumul Qur'an* Vol. 3 No. 1 (1992), pp. 16-27.

C. State Policies and Muslim Fear of Christianization

Muslim-Christian conflicts in Indonesia have become a more serious issue since the New Order period.[9] As noted above, communism identified with atheism and anti-religion, was the very enemy of the New Order regime. Thus, to save oneself from the accusation of being a communist, he or she should affiliate formally with one of the recognized religions. As a result, a high number of conversions to the state recognized religions occurred in the early years of the New Order. The new converts were mostly nominal Muslims called '*abangan*' among the Javanese (the largest ethnic group comprising more than 40% of the total population), and the followers of tribal religions.[10]

Although many people also converted to Islam, the high number of conversion to Christianity made the Muslim leaders worried. One of the reasons was the provocative news in Western media boasting about 'mass conversion' to Christianity and about a huge amount of money sent to Indonesia for missionary activities. Among the Indonesian Christians themselves, there was also optimism that in a short period all Indonesia would be followers of Jesus. Not least significant, some missionaries, particularly those of the evangelical background, preached the Bible through door-to-door visits. For many Muslims, this was too aggressive.

The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Islamic groups were politically frustrated. The ruling army, in alliance with the secular oriented Muslims and the Christians, were opposed to the attempts of the Islamic groups to include explicitly the state responsibility to apply the shari'a in the Constitution. In addition, although the reformist Muslim group was initially an important ally for the army during the crushing of the PKI and the Soekarno regime, the army finally did not

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[9] For a detailed account, see Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/ISIM, 2006), Chapter 1.

[10] For a comparative analysis of conversion of two ethnic groups in this period, see Mujiburrahman, "Religious Conversion in Indonesia: the Karo Batak and the Tengger Javanese" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 12 (January, 2001), pp. 23-38.

allow the rehabilitation of their political party, Masyumi, which was banned by Soekarno in 1960.

It was in the above socio-political context that in 1967 a newly built Methodist Church in Meulaboh, Aceh, was closed by Muslims. The Muslims argued that the Church was a concrete example of the aggressiveness of Christian missions because it was built in a Muslim majority area. As a reaction to this case, the Protestant and Catholic parties in the Parliament, proposed Questions (*interpelasi*) to the government regarding the issue of religious freedom. In return, the Islamic parties proposed other Questions to the government regarding control of foreign aid for religious institutions. They also demanded the government restrict religious propagation only to those outside the recognized religions. The government's responses to the Questions were generally ambiguous, and at the same time it insisted that the debate on the issues should be stopped.

Since the Meulaboh case, the Muslims consistently insisted the government to accommodate their four demands: (1) restriction on establishing new places of worship; (2) restriction on religious propagation, and control of foreign aid for religious institutions; (4) Islamic religion classes should be given to Muslim students studying in Christian schools; (5) inter-religious marriage should not be allowed.

1. The Restriction on Building New Places of Worship[11]

The first Muslim demand accommodated by the government was the restriction on establishing new places of worship. In 1969, the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Religious Affairs issued a joint decree in which it was stated, among other things, that to build a new place of worship one should get an approval of the people living in the area, including the local religious leaders. Ever since, it has been very difficult for Christians to erect a church in Muslim majority areas as for Muslims to build a mosque in non-Muslim majority areas.

During the New Order period, there were cases in which Muslims attacked several churches on the ground that they were built without

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[11] For a detailed account of issues discussed in section 1 and section 2 below, see Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened*, pp. 72-91.

following the regulation. Similar cases reoccurred after the fall of the New Order. In October 2004, a group of Muslims barricaded a Catholic school in Cileduk, Jakarta, because it was used illegally for religious services, and for the same reason, 23 churches have been closed by Muslims in West Java in September 2005. On the other hand, voices condemning these actions and arguing for religious freedom and tolerance were also heard among the Christians and some Muslims.

The incident in 2004 and 2005 above eventually pushed the government to change the 1969 Decree, and after some negotiations, the government finally issued the Decree No. 8 and 9/2006.[12] However, this new Decree apparently does not go very far from the earlier one. To get the permission to build a new place of worship, one has to get approval from at least 60 people living close to the area. In addition, one has to prove that there are 90 people who shall use that place. This regulation clearly prefers the majority to the minority. It is also more applicable in densely populated cities than in cities and villages with low population.

On the other hand, it is important to note that according to a Christian Minister, Daniel Sopamena, there are a few positive things in the new Decree. First, it dictates that one of the authorized institutions to give a recommendation for building a new place of worship is the Inter-religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) in which all recognized religions are represented. Second, there is a time limit (namely 90 days) for the government to respond to the application. Sopamena said that in the past, he used to submit an application, and there was no response from the government up to 11 years! He hopes that this new regulation will prevent this kind of treatment to happen. Third, the new Decree dictates that in case a group of people do not have a place of worship, they can apply for a temporary permission to use an ordinary building. This alternative was not found in the previous Decree.[13]

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[12] The full text of the Decree can be found in www.mirifica.net

[13] Interview with Daniel Sopamena, Makassar, 20 June 2007.

2. The Restriction on Religious Propagation and Control of Foreign Aid

Regarding the control of religious propagation, the government initially tried to accommodate the Muslim demand in an Inter-religious Consultation of 1967 (organized by the government) but it was unsuccessful particularly because of the Christian opposition to this idea. It was only after a decade later, namely in 1978, that the government issued a decree restricting religious propagation only to those outside the recognized religions. By the same year, the government also issued a decree on the government control of foreign aid for religious institutions. This accommodation was attempts of the government at political reconciliation with the Islamic groups who had been the staunchest oppositional voice.

On the other hand, the Christians consistently asserted that the decrees were against religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution, and therefore, they should be withdrawn. The government never withdrew the decrees but the protest of the Christians still had some effects on practice. The government loosely implemented the decrees, and this made some Muslim leaders disappointed. The government ambiguity was because its interest lied neither in defending religious freedom nor in curbing Christian missions but in maintaining political stability and power. It is also noteworthy that so far this policy has not been changed yet, even though it is already three decades old (1978-2008).

3. Compulsory Religion Classes[14]

Up to 1965, religion classes at schools and universities were optional in Indonesia. However, in 1967, in line with the increasing significance of religion in national politics, especially to oppose communism as the state common enemy, religion classes have been compulsory in Indonesia. The religion classes taught at schools and universities are of those recognized religions. This is in accordance with the government policy that one has to affiliate with one of the recognized religions.

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[14] For a detailed account, see Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened*, Chapter 5.

In terms of Muslim-Christian relations, there has been a problem regarding the issue of religion classes. Muslim parents preferred to send their children to study at Christian private schools because the latter could provide a high quality of learning and training. As in many other countries, the Christian schools in Indonesia have been developed since the colonial period when the Christian missionaries started their mission in the Archipelago. These schools did not only produce the early prominent Christian leaders of the new Republic of Indonesia, but also helped eradicate illiteracy among the natives throughout the country.

For many of the Muslims concerned with religious education, the enrolment of many Muslim students in the Christian schools has been alarming because the students only received a Christian religion class. The prominent Muslim leaders said that a Muslim child who studied at a Christian school would face at least two dangers: the child might be converted to Christianity or become a skeptical and uncommitted Muslim. To face this challenge, some Muslim leaders tried to do at least three things: first, they tried to convince the Muslim communities that to study in a Christian school was harmful to the Islamic commitment of children; second, the Muslims tried to establish and develop better Islamic private schools to compete with the Christian schools; third, they demanded a state regulation obliging every private school to provide a religion class according to the religion of the students.

The last attempt was not easy because while the first and second aims were only Muslim internal affairs, the third aim had to face opposition from the Christians and others who shared or sympathized with the Christian objection. Since late 1960s, some important Muslim leaders already demanded that religion classes should be taught according to the religion of the students and the teacher should be of the same religious background. This idea, however, was only partially accommodated about two decades later, namely in the Education Law of 1989. Nevertheless, because of the strong protest of the Christian leaders, this regulation was finally applied only to state schools not private schools. Because Christian schools are private, the regulation was not applied to them. It is understandable, therefore, that some

Muslim leaders were unhappy with the government policy.

After the fall of the New Order, this issue became a hot controversy again during the making of the new Education Law of 2003. A lot of articles published in various newspapers and magazines opposing or supporting the idea of religion classes should be taught by a teacher to students of the same religious background. In addition to the Christians, among the opponents, there were also Muslims arguing that the state should not deny the rights of a private school, let's say a Christian school, to teach only Christianity to its students.[15] Apart from the opposition, the idea was finally accommodated in the new Law (Article 12, section 1), and we are still observing how it is to be applied.

4. *Religious and Inter-religious Marriage*[16]

In early 1970s, the government proposed a marriage bill to the parliament. The bill soon triggered strong opposition from the Islamic groups. First of all, the Department of Religious Affairs was not involved in drafting the bill. Second, the bill tended to treat marriage as a secular rather than a religious issue. Third, there are some articles of the bill that contradict Islamic family law. Fourth, Islamic forces were in a political frustration because the government party, Golkar, dominated the parliament.

After a series of Muslim demonstrations and protests, the government, via the Armed Forces (ABRI), successfully made some compromises with the Muslim leaders. Perhaps, the most important compromise was the definition of the legal validity of marriage. The bill merely required that marriage should be registered to the government, and this was considered too secular by the Muslims.

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[15] See for instance the statement of the executive chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Hasyim Muzadi in *Suara Pembaruan* (17 March 2003). See also the articles written by younger Muslim intellectuals such as Nur Khalik Ridwan, "Pendidikan Agama, Hak Asasi dan Ideologi" *Suara Pembaruan* (8 May 2003); Rumadi, "Pendidikan, Agama dan Kontroversi RUU Sisdiknas" *Kompas* (29 March 2003); Zuly Qodir, "Lagi, RUU Sisdiknas" *Kompas* (6 June 2003); Ahmad Fuad Fanani, "RUU Sisdiknas: Ada Hegemoni Negara di Situ?" *Kompas* (3 May 2003). It is not surprising that these articles were published in *Suara Pembaruan* and *Kompas*, commonly associated with Protestants and Catholics respectively.

[16] For a detailed account, see Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened*, Chapter 4.

Therefore, besides the registration, the Muslims demanded that "Marriage is valid if it is carried out according to the laws of respective religions and beliefs", and this definition was ratified by the Parliament. What are the respective religions and beliefs? They are certainly the recognized religions! Therefore, marriages outside the recognized religions cannot be legalized.

Another problem is inter-religious marriage. A few religious groups allowed inter-religious marriages, while many of them do not allow or at least do not support that kind of marriage. If a recognized religion does not allow inter-religious marriage, how then can that marriage be legalized? The problem becomes more complex because the clause of the bill allowing inter-religious marriage was finally dropped. A prominent Muslim leader, M. Rasjidi, wrote at that time that the clause was an undercover Christianization effort. He believed that the Christians used inter-marriage to convert young Muslims. A rumor circulated among Muslims that the bill was drafted by the *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS), the New Order think tank established by some prominent Catholic activists and intellectuals in cooperation with Soeharto's two important generals. Whatever the political context was, the Marriage Law of 1974 does not have a clear position on inter-religious marriages. Consequently, inter-religious marriages are generally difficult, although not impossible, to get legal approval in Indonesia.

One of the possible ways to help legalize inter-religious marriage within the present Marriage Law is to assert that it is religiously acceptable. In the year 2003, the Paramadia Foundation in Jakarta (founded by the prominent Indonesian Muslim intellectual, Nurcholish Madjid), organized a public discussion on inter-religious marriage. The two main speakers in the discussion, Zainun Kamal and Musdah Mulia, proposed the idea that inter-religious marriage can be accepted if one develops a new interpretation of Islamic sources in question.[17] The prominent activist of Paramadina, Budhy Munawar Rachman also explained to the audience that Paramadina already helped several

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[17] See Zainun Kamal, "Kawin Antar Umat Beragama" and Musdah Mulia, "Islam dan Pernikahan Antar Agama" in *Penafsiran Islam atas Pernikahan Antar Agama* (Jakarta: Seri KKA Paramadina ke-200, 17 October 2003).

people to carry out inter-religious marriages. As can be expected, the discussion was full of debates between the proponents and the opponents. When the idea reached a wider public, the resistance to it was even harder. Thus, it seems to me that it would be better (and perhaps more acceptable) to legalize inter-religious marriages based on civil rights rather than religion.

D. Dialogue and Inter-religious Harmony[18]

Apart from the contested issues above, the government and religious leaders have been trying to avoid conflict and to establish cooperation and peace among religious groups in the country. There have been inter-religious dialogues organized by the government or sponsored by the leaders of religious groups themselves. It is also not uncommon that inter-religious conflicts in society helped push both the government and religious leaders to hold a dialogue.

1. The Government initiatives

As mentioned above, in response to the increasing Muslim discourses and actions against the Christians, in November 1967 the government organized the "Inter-religious Consultation" (*Musyawarah Antar Agama*). Although the Consultation finally came to a deadlock, it was actually the first inter-religious dialogue organized by the government. After the 1971 elections when the New Order regime became more established, the government paid more serious attention to the dialogue program.

A. Mukti Ali, the Minister of Religious Affairs, was the man who started the inter-religious dialogue project in 1972. Inter-religious dialogue, he said, could be an effective means to increase participation of religious groups in government development programs and to prevent them from inter-religious conflicts. Mukti Ali's project, therefore, was strongly related to what he frequently referred to as "the harmony of religious life" (*kerukunan hidup beragama*), that is, peaceful co-existence of religious groups. He suggests that dialogue should be based on the agreement to disagree.

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[18] For a detailed discussion, see Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened,* Chapter 6.

Mukti Ali then appointed Djohan Effendi to be the head of the project. According to the latter, from 1972 to 1977, there were 23 dialogues of religious leaders held in 21 cities all over the country. The participants included government officials, leaders of the recognized religions and even of Javanese mysticism and local beliefs. Although the dialogue was still far from Mukti Ali's ideal of agreement to disagree, it was quite different from the debate in the Inter-religious Consultation of 1967.

The government project on inter-religious harmony has continued to develop since Mukti Ali's period up to now. The project has been mostly carried out by the Office of Research and Development of the Department of Religious Affairs. Sometimes, certain lecturers of State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) are also involved in the project. The project consists of various activities such as dialogue, research training, workshops, publications, preparing a draft of a bill on religious issues, etc.

Some religious leaders, however, felt unhappy with the government initiatives. They saw that the dialogue organized by the government was much more like a formal meeting among religious leaders rather than having a true dialogue. For the critics, the aim of the dialogue should not be only the 'inter-religious harmony' but 'inter-religious understanding and cooperation'. Moreover, some important religious intellectuals argued that religious groups should not only become supporters but also critics of the government development projects. Influenced by liberation theology of Latin America, in the late 1970s, a few Catholic and Protestant intellectuals suggested that the government development programs helped widen the gap between the rich elites and the poor masses. Therefore, instead of talking about 'development' or 'modernization', these critical intellectuals were interested in developing a discourse on 'social justice'. Some Muslim intellectuals also tried to find an Islamic version of theology of liberation. In the early 1980s, some Indonesian Muslim intellectuals found that the ideas of the leftist Muslim thinkers like 'Ali Syari'ati from Iran and Hassan Hanafi from Egypt were parallel with the Christian theology of liberation.

2. Privates Initiatives

Up to the late 1970s, most of the inter-religious dialogues in Indonesia were organized by the government. It was only in early 1980s that a serious non-government effort of developing inter-religious dialogue apparently started in Indonesia. This effort came from the Protestant intellectuals of the Indonesian Church Council (DGI) who organized the inter-religious meeting called 'Seminar of Religions'. Started in 1981, this seminar provided the opportunity for religious leaders to talk more openly and freely about social, political and cultural issues from religious perspectives.

By the late 1980s, Soeharto shifted his political alliance from secular Muslims and Christians to the Islamic groups, particularly the Muslim reformists. This was particularly because Soeharto had conflict with some influential army generals. In 1990s, Soeharto became closer to the Islamic groups. He supported the establishment of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) and several members of the ICMI became his cabinet ministers. The religious minorities were understandably worried about this political development. It was in this context that in 1992, the prominent Protestant intellectual, Th. Sumartana, with support from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other intellectuals, establish the Institute for Interfaith Dialogue (Interfidei) in Indonesia, based in Yogyakarta. The major discourse of the Institute was how religious traditions could contribute to the development of democracy and religious pluralism in general.

In 1995, another private institution specifically concerned with dialogue was established in Jakarta called 'Majelis Dialog Antar-Agama' (MADIA). This institution was initially supported by Protestant, Catholic and Muslim activists and then followed by others of different religious backgrounds. In the beginning, MADIA often organized discussions among its members on theological issues, but later it was also engaged in socio-political issues. One interesting thing in MADIA's activity was that they usually closed their meetings with prayers, offered alternately according to the respective religions of the participants. The MADIA activists became much more responsive to socio-political issues by the late 1990s when incidents involving religious symbols

happened in the country.

During the late 1990s, several riots occurred in different places of the country in which a lot of churches were burned by the rioters. Some studies indicate that the riots were not spontaneous local Muslim actions but operated by outsiders, and rumour said that certain generals might be involved in providing logistical support to the rioters. In any case, these riots helped increase the concern of many intellectuals with the importance of dialogue. In Situbondo, where one of the riots occurred, [19] Muslim and Christian leaders, thanks to a dialogue organized by them, could successfully prevent further violence in their society. On the other hand, the government spent a lot of money in organising national and international inter-religious dialogue in order to repair the bad image of the government abroad. There were at least two international inter-religious conferences generously financed by the Government in 1997, one was held in the luxurious Horison Hotel, Jakarta, with the participation of the Hartford Seminary and Temple University; and another was held in Leiden, the Netherlands.

3. Dialogue in the Post-Soeharto Period

After the fall of Soeharto regime, we bitterly witnessed the bloody conflicts coloured by Islamic and Christian sentiments in Ambon and Poso. Both the government and private institutions were busy with organizing dialogues for people in the area of conflicts. It was in this period—perhaps because of the flood of foreign money—that a number of NGOs for dialogue were established. It was also in this period that Interfidei developed its network outside Java through the so-called 'Forum Dialog' (Forlog). Perhaps, some of the dialogues contributed to establishing peace in the regions but it seems that dialogue in the sense of 'talking about religion and peace' was not enough. Some studies of the conflicts suggested that the socio-political and economic context in the region in question was the most important issue to take into account.

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[19] For the Situbondo case, see Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 190-3.

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 marked the rise of democracy in Indonesian politics. In this political context, dialogue seems to find its momentum, because one might say that dialogue is the most important part of democracy. In a multi-ethnic and multi religious society like Indonesia, dialogue is no doubt a necessity. On the other hand, within the present free public sphere, many of the ideologically oriented Muslim groups previously suppressed by the New Order regime now re-emerge. There are also a few militant and radical Muslim groups who are not tolerant to non-Muslims and even to Muslims of another group. The emergence of these groups is a serious challenge to the proponents of dialogue.

Faced with these challenges, the proponents of dialogue continue their efforts to develop mutual understanding and cooperation among activists of different religious background. An example of the efforts is the program organized by the traditionalist Muslim NGO, the Wahid Institute, called 'Islam and Pluralism'. The program is attended by Christian Ministers and teachers of the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI). It is noteworthy that most of the GKI members and ministers are Chinese. The program invites Muslim leaders and intellectuals to present a paper on some important religio-political issues. By the end of the program, the participants are given the opportunity to stay and observe the life in an Islamic boarding school.

From the government side, in 2003, the Office of Research and Development of the Department of Religious Affairs organized a series of discussions on a draft of a bill concerning inter-religious harmony. Leaders of the recognized religions were invited to talk. The draft of the bill, however, eventually triggered strong opposition from Christians and progressive Muslims, partly because it simply reintroduces the decrees issued during the New Order period.[20] Perhaps, because of the opposition, the bill is not submitted to the Parliament (yet).

Probably the latest important government policy on inter-religious harmony is to establish "Inter-religious Harmony Forum" (FKUB) at the district and provincial levels. This is dictated by the

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[20] See the articles in *Basis* No. 1-2 (January-February, 2004), and in *Syir'ah* No.26 (January 2004).

Joint Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs and Religious Affairs No. No. 8 and 9/2006. According to the Decree, the FKUB members is appointed by people (read: representatives of recognized religions) and facilitated by the government. The main duty of the FKUB is to cooperate with the government in developing inter-religious harmony and mutual understanding in society. It also has the authority to give recommendation to the government regarding religious issues, including the permission to build a new place of worship (as mentioned above). In several places, the FKUB has been established, and we will wait and see whether it can function effectively in society.

E. Conclusion

The state policies on religious diversity in Indonesia are strongly related to the nature of the state which is defined as neither secular nor Islamic. This unclear position has provided a grey area in which conflicts and compromises have been made. This is why the state policies are usually found somewhere between total religious freedom and state intervention. The total (and perhaps the true) religious freedom, at least in theory, can be more easily achieved if the state is secular. On the other hand, a religious, or more precisely a theocratic state, tends to break religious freedom of the people.

For the sake of religious freedom, should Indonesia become a secular state? For some people, a positive answer to this question is the only solution to the problems of religious freedom in Indonesia. In my view, however, politically speaking, to make Indonesia a secular state is unrealistic. The long history of Indonesia shows us that the neither secular nor Islamic compromise is still significance in maintaining the unity and integrity of the country. This does not mean, however, that we are in a deadlock. The political democracy developing in this Reformation Era has provided the opportunities for us to discuss the problems openly, and hopefully we would eventually find the solutions. Inter-religious problems cannot certainly be solved by state centered policies without support and control from religious groups themselves. In this case, we don't have to start from zero because since the New Order, there have been non-government initiatives to build mutual understanding and cooperation among religious groups.

As indicated above, apart from its weaknesses, the Joint Decree of 2006 has some positive points compared to the previous one. I believe that other crucial issues can also be solved as long as we are ready to open ourselves for dialogue. In this context, with regard to the issue of the recognized religions, can the state give both protection and aid to the recognized religions, and at the same time only provide protection for those beliefs outside the recognized religions? As hinted earlier, the Presidential Decree of 1965 apparently indicates that this was the (right) policy, but in practice we know that beliefs outside the recognized religions are often not protected by the state. Likewise, if inter-religious marriage is difficult to accept religiously, can the state legalize this marriage only based on civil rights? Because Indonesia is neither Islamic nor secular, it seems to me that this solution is possible.

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