

## PURSUING POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AMONG RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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### Abstract

Religious community should be understood as a sign God of power on human beings. diversity has become the fact that could not be denied. Because of every human being has the distinction of education, environmental, socio-cultural, ethnic, language and different experience in his live. These differences should be viewed from ontology of theological. Religions like a candle in the night, every human being would feel worried if there are no candles behind. All of the candles will provide illumination to mankind in the dark of his life in this world. Every religion must have universal values that should be plucked from the religious community. Messages from all prophetic (holy men) should be guidance of human beings to achieve happiness dan blackness. This article, will be describe of universal values in religious community.

**Keywords:** *Religious Diversity, Voice of Prophetic, Universal Values*

### Abstrak

Komunitas agama harus dipahami sebagai tanda kekuasaan Tuhan atas umat manusia. Keragaman merupakan sebuah kenyataan yang tidak dapat disangkal, karena setiap manusia memiliki perbedaan dalam hal pendidikan, lingkungan, sosial-budaya, etnis, bahasa, dan pengalaman hidup yang berbeda-beda. Perbedaan-perbedaan ini seharusnya dipandang dari sudut pandang ontologis-teologis. Agama-agama diibaratkan seperti lilin di malam hari; setiap manusia akan merasa cemas jika tidak ada lilin yang menyala di sekelilingnya. Semua lilin tersebut akan memberikan cahaya bagi umat manusia di tengah kegelapan hidupnya di dunia ini. Setiap agama pasti memiliki nilai-nilai universal yang dapat dipetik dari kehidupan komunitas beragama. Pesan-pesan dari para nabi (orang-orang suci) seharusnya menjadi petunjuk bagi umat manusia untuk mencapai kebahagiaan dan terhindar dari kegelapan. Artikel ini akan menguraikan nilai-nilai universal yang terdapat dalam komunitas beragama.

**Kata Kunci:** *Keberagaman Agama, Suara Kenabian, dan Nilai-Nilai Universal*

## INTRODUCTION

Constitutionally, Pancasila recognizes the importance of religion in life.<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in the first principle of Pancasila, namely 'Belief in the One and Only God.' It means that the Indonesian people are free to embrace their own religion and beliefs according to their personal convictions. Society is free to practice religion based on faith in what is deemed true and convincing.

Religion, as understood by many, serves as a guide for the salvation of human life. Therefore, throughout history, the instinct for religiosity has always remained present. Islam, as a religion that calls for total submission to the Divine, deeply yearns for peace. This is why, when Muslims meet one another, the greeting 'Assalamu Alaikum'—which means 'peace be upon you'—symbolizes that aspiration. It signifies that the peace desired by this religion is not only for oneself, but also for others. Accordingly, it is no surprise that one of the characteristics of a true Muslim is as stated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): '*Man salima al-muslimuna min lisanihi wa yadihi*,' meaning, 'A (true) Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe.'<sup>2</sup>

It seems that Islam is not the only religion that longs for peace for every human being; other religions undoubtedly share the same aspiration. A priori, no religion is born into this world with the aim of fostering chaos. Therefore, it is essential for all religious communities to seek and establish common ground in order to create goodness for all. This common ground is not merely about embracing and embodying the universal values of goodness present in each religion, but also about rejecting and resisting all forms of evil that, a priori, are universally condemned by all religious traditions. Thus, when the teachings of a religion are manifested in a system of behavior, that system should ultimately lead to the betterment of all humanity. This, indeed, becomes the shared identity of all religions: "Religion is, and must always be, for the good of humanity."

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<sup>1</sup>The importance of religion in national and civic life lies in the fact that religion serves as the soul of human beings in their social existence. This is evident in the understanding that a human being is not merely a physical body, but also possesses a sacred and noble soul within.

<sup>2</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Qur'anic Insights: A Thematic Interpretation of Various Issues Facing the Muslim Community* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), p. 378.

The problem is that, in religious life, the normative values that religion calls to be embodied are often hindered by the rigid interpretations of its own followers. The shared point of unity—namely, the call to perform righteous deeds together and to stand against evil—is sometimes misconstrued as a dilution or compromise of one's faith. Yet this domain has been clearly delineated by religion itself: "*Lakum dinukum waliya din*"—"To you your religion (i.e., your faith), and to me mine." Therefore, there is no valid reason to make a person's faith the sole measure of fraternity or estrangement. It is unjustifiable to draw a divisive line between 'us' and 'them' in society based on religious disagreement. When such attitudes prevail, the peace longed for by every religion is disrupted. Worse, hostility toward others merely because of religious difference becomes a spark that ignites conflict and social unrest.

It has been stated that the function of religion is to serve as a guide; in this sense, it is a blessing and a vital resource for human beings as they navigate the journey of life. However, when religion is understood superficially, it can ironically become a source of catastrophe. In recent times, we have witnessed numerous individuals who, claiming the absolute truth of their narrow interpretations, have not hesitated to take lives—including their own—through acts of suicide bombing, dragging innocent souls along with them, all in the name of *jihad fi sabilillah* (struggle in the path of God). For those well-grounded in religious knowledge (*rasikhuna fi al-'ilm*), such expressions of religiosity evoke not only astonishment but also horror. It is truly unsettling how a silent text can so powerfully shape the actions of its readers. Is there something wrong here? Undoubtedly, the answer is yes.

This is precisely where a comprehensive internalization of religious values becomes essential. With sincere and profound religious understanding, it will naturally give rise to noble religious attitudes and behavior. If we truly reflect on the mission of every religion, we will find that religion profoundly desires the well-being and salvation of all humanity. From this, we can see that religion consistently stands on the side of humanity. As a logical consequence of this alignment, human beings are called to exhibit good social conduct—or at the very least, to refrain from causing harm to others.

This paper seeks to explore the idea of the prophetic voice in the pursuit of common ground among religions, particularly as found in each tradition's sacred texts, while also integrating the exemplary legacy embodied by its messenger, namely Jesus the Messiah/Christ (Isa al-Masih)<sup>3</sup> and Muhammad, to further clarify and affirm the importance of mutual respect and unity in rejecting evil and embracing universal goodness.

## METHODOLOGY

This study, entitled "*Pursuing Points of Convergence Among Religious Communities*", utilizes a qualitative-descriptive research design that combines hermeneutic analysis of religious texts with field-based ethnographic observation. The objective is to identify shared moral and ethical values across major religious traditions—Islam, Christianity, Judaism—that may serve as common ground for interfaith understanding and cooperation.

The scope and object of this research include both the scriptural and doctrinal teachings of the selected religions and the practices of interfaith actors such as religious leaders, faith-based NGOs, and interreligious forums. The study particularly investigates how religious communities interpret core values like compassion, justice, peace, and human dignity as part of their theological and moral frameworks.

The main materials consist of sacred texts (e.g., the Qur'an, Bible, and Torah), classical commentaries, and contemporary theological writings. In addition, field data are gathered through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Instruments used in this study include semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, audio recording devices, and qualitative coding software such as NVivo for managing thematic data.<sup>4</sup>

Data collection techniques consist of textual analysis of interfaith documents, religious declarations, and comparative theological works and Focus Group Discussions

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<sup>3</sup>Nurcholish Madjid, *Doctrine and Civilization — A Critical Study on Issues of Faith, Humanity, and Modernity* (Jakarta:Paramadina,1992), p. xciv.

<sup>4</sup>John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), p. 173–175.

(FGDs) with community members involved in interfaith activities.<sup>5</sup> Data analysis will follow the Miles and Huberman model which includes three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.<sup>6</sup> Thematic coding will be used to identify patterns of shared values. The textual data will be interpreted using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, which allows layered interpretation of meaning across symbolic and moral discourse.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the insights of Farid Esack will be employed to critically examine how religious texts can support interreligious solidarity against injustice.<sup>8</sup>

This integrated methodology is expected to yield a comprehensive understanding of the normative, scriptural, and practical aspects of convergence among religious communities, offering strategic recommendations for enhancing interfaith engagement in diverse societies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Reflecting on the Ten Commandments

It has been firmly stated that, a priori, no religion on the face of the earth leads its followers into the abyss of destruction—whether in an empirical-worldly sense or in a metaphysical-eschatological dimension. This is because, when a religion enters the course of history, its central mission is none other than salvation. Without this core message, a religion would lose its followers, wither away, and ultimately be abandoned. Thus, throughout the history of human civilization, within every religious community, there has always emerged someone sent by the Transcendent Being (read: God) to guide humanity and proclaim prophetic messages—messages which, in their essence, are strikingly similar across traditions: the call to salvation.

In the teachings of the Torah, we are certainly familiar with the Ten Commandments, which were received by the Prophet Moses from God on Mount Sinai

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<sup>5</sup>Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2018), p. 568–573.

<sup>6</sup>Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2020), p. 12–14.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 45–60.

<sup>8</sup>Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p. 3–7.

(Exodus 20:1–17). The following is a summary of the contents of these ten commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods except the one true God; 2) You shall not make for yourself an image to worship; 3) You shall not use the name of the lord your God in a careless manner; 4) Remember the seventh day of the week, and keep it holy; 5) Honor your father and your mother; 6) You shall not kill; 7) You shall not commit adultery; 8) You shall not steal; 9) You shall not tell a lie about your neighbor; and 10) You shall not covet anything that belong to your neighbor.<sup>9</sup>

From these ten commandments, we can observe and understand that the teachings contained in the first through fourth commandments clearly fall within the domain of individual religious faith. In this area, each religion's truth claim cannot be invalidated. In Qur'anic terms, this is often expressed as *lakum dinukum waliya din* — "To you your religion (read: your faith), and to me mine." When one attempts to impose their religious convictions onto the faith of others, such efforts inevitably lead to conflicting truth claims, which in turn give rise to mutual defensiveness, division, and even hostility or harm. Therefore, in addressing this matter, it would be wise to set boundaries. And if interfaith dialogue does take place, it should be pursued merely as a means of mutual understanding—not as an attempt to impose one's beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the earlier commandments, the fifth to the tenth are notably flexible. These commandments closely relate to universal human values. Thus, there is no valid reason for anyone—religious or not—to reject them. This is because such values align with the very nature of humanity. Even without religious teachings, people inherently recognize the virtue of honoring one's parents, refraining from murder, adultery, and theft, speaking truthfully, and not envying what belongs to one's neighbor. Any action that violates these natural principles is universally regarded as a form of wrongdoing.

In fact, this is the very aspect we often overlook when engaging in interfaith dialogue. When we encounter the beliefs of others, what tends to surface is merely a battle of truth claims—us versus them, ours versus theirs. This strong attachment to one-

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<sup>9</sup>Badru D., Katerengga and David W. Shenk, *A Muslim and Christian in Dialogue*, (Scottsdale :Herald Press, 1997), p. 192.

<sup>10</sup>An endeavor to foster understanding rather than imposition in interfaith dialogue.

sided convictions often leads us to impose our beliefs on others. Yet, the true aim of interfaith conversations—as the writer wishes to emphasize once again—should be merely to introduce, not to impose. The success of a religion does not lie in the number of its adherents, but in the level of awareness among its followers to live out the values of their faith, especially its moral teachings.

Quite often, the fault lies with the propagators of the religion themselves, who equate the mission of salvation with the recruitment of as many followers as possible. In reality, attempting to convert individuals who already adhere to a faith—especially through manipulative or dishonest means—is a grave mistake and cannot be justified. Religious efforts that focus solely on increasing membership while neglecting the humanistic values taught by the religion itself—as reflected in the fifth to tenth of the Ten Commandments—are both naïve and indicative of a poor quality of religiosity among such religious figures.

"Of the Ten Commandments received by Prophet Moses, six represent points of convergence among religions. These six commandments embody a form of salvation that is empirical and exoteric—meaning their benefits can be directly perceived and experienced by religious adherents. The remaining four, on the other hand, represent a transcendental and esoteric form of salvation.<sup>11</sup> Empirical-exoteric salvation is clearly highly functional and transcends religious boundaries. Any religion—be it Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism—would agree on its truth, and may even claim it as originating from their own teachings. In contrast, esoteric salvation lies beyond the conscious grasp of organized religions. It is profoundly transcendental, and can only be approached through theological reflection or faith.

## **B. The Legacy of the Exemplary Lives of Jesus and Muhammad**

From the perspective of the two major world religions—Christianity and Islam—Moses is regarded as the earliest among those in the line of prophets who received divine revelation. Both religions acknowledge that the God of Moses is the same God they

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<sup>11</sup>The terms *esoteric* and *exoteric* are borrowed by the author from Frithjof Schuon, *Seeking Common Ground Among Religions*, translate Safroedin Bahar (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2003), p. 49.

worship. This common ground is particularly interesting, as throughout history—especially in the context of receiving revelations—each subsequent religion has claimed the superiority of its own revelation. Despite both acknowledging the prophethood of Moses (and even Jesus in Islam), the two religions hold differing theological understandings. This is the root of the problem: history has shown how claims of exclusive truth in matters of faith can turn into catastrophes for religious communities. Each side claims to hold the ultimate truth, leading to the perception that differing faiths are enemies. Rarely have religious leaders taken meaningful steps to de-escalate this tension by highlighting, or even emphasizing, shared beliefs. Worse still, religion has often been exploited as a vehicle for political agendas and personal ambitions. A clear example of this is the Crusades, which claimed thousands of lives under the banner of 'holy war' fought in the 'spirit of faith.

Given this reality, should we continue to maintain these divisions, or should we seek alternative solutions to open up broader spaces where each party can breathe freely, even within the same shared environment? In light of the demands of our time, the notion that differing faiths automatically equate to enmity must be put to rest. Why so? Because such an attitude will only continue to disrupt social harmony and may ultimately become a driving force behind the collapse of human civilization.

Faith is a deeply personal matter between an individual and God. Therefore, if someone holds a different belief from ours, it is not our right to force them to convert or to compel them to believe what we believe. For this reason, matters of faith must be fully protected by law, so that no one is coerced into adopting another's religion against their will. However, when it comes to human interactions and social life, this is where normative teachings—those religious teachings related to morality—can be shared collectively, and even enforced upon individuals or groups who stubbornly reject them. Someone who insists that theft or adultery is obligatory must be opposed, and, if they act on such claims, may even deserve to be imprisoned. These moral teachings, derived from various religious traditions, represent the 'Prophetic Voice' and serve as essential points of convergence that must be brought into dialogue and alignment.



In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus teaches: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as your self. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets*”.<sup>12</sup>

The command to love one’s neighbor as oneself is an extraordinary teaching. The example set by Jesus serves as a powerful foundation for building an ‘empathetic’ society—one that shares in the feelings of others. Teachings of this kind have inspired influential works throughout the ages. For instance, Stephen R. Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence*, both emphasize how empathy toward others is a deeply effective way to engage in social life. Naturally, we would not wish to hurt others—whether through words or actions—because we ourselves would not want to be hurt or humiliated in the same way. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic teachings also strongly emphasized this value. The Prophet said: “*Lā yu’minu aḥadukum ḥattā yuḥibba li-akhīhi mā yuḥibbu linafsihī*” — “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” Here, the Prophet Muhammad not only emphasizes the importance of being empathetic, but even goes so far as to categorize those who reject this principle as lacking faith—or in other words, as disbelievers.

In Matthew 5:21–26, Jesus teaches: “I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be (in danger of) judgment.” Undoubtedly, anger can drive a person to act wrongly—even in ways that endanger others. Much like a judge, if he delivers a verdict based on anger or personal biases—such as like or dislike—he may end up making an unjust decision: condemning the innocent and justifying the guilty. The Prophet Muhammad, in the teachings he received from God, stated that God has said in Surah al-Mā’idah [5]: 8, “*la yajrimannakum syana’anu qaumin ala alla ta’dilu*”, “Let not your hatred for a people lead you to act unjustly.” Therefore, any factors that may influence a decision—especially those that can lead to error—ought to be restrained. In other words,

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<sup>12</sup>Badru D. Katerengga and David W. Shenk, *ibid.*, p. 190.

the decision-making process should be postponed until one is in a truly stable state of mind, free from the impulses of negative emotions or desires.

Abu Hayyan, in his book *al-Başā'ir wa al-Zawāhir*, narrates that at one time the Messiah said: *"The world has been spread out before you, and you have been seated upon its back. Yet I myself have neither wife nor child. The earth is my bed, the stone my pillow, and the moon my lamp. None contend with you over the world except Satan and kings. Confront Satan with prayer and patience, and yield the world to the kings—surely, your religion will be preserved for you. The kings have abandoned wisdom so that you may take it; therefore, abandon the world and let them have it."*

This moral teaching was delivered by him amidst a society immersed in worldly grandeur, indulgence, and hypocrisy. Religious leaders were preoccupied with the formalities of rituals, yet their inner lives were barren and spiritually dry. At that time, many had already fallen as victims of material splendor, and there was an urgent need for salvation from the destructive influence and consequences of materialism.

In such a social and psychological condition of the people, he came bringing a moral teaching: *"Woe to those who are full yet fail to realize that they are, in truth, hungry; who are rich but forget that they are in need. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Whoever strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the left as well."*<sup>13</sup>

In line with what Jesus taught, the Prophet Muhammad also strongly condemned those who sleep with full stomachs while their neighbors suffer from hunger. In a hadith, it is stated: *"la yu'minu ahadukum man baata sya'baanan wa jaruhu juuan."* It means: "He is not considered a true believer who sleeps while his stomach is full, yet his neighbor beside him is crying out in hunger."

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<sup>13</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *A Glimmer of Divine Light: Living with the Qur'an*, (Bandung: Al-Mizan, 2000), p. 30.

Once again, we can see here that those who are immoral—in this context, those who lack social concern—are condemned by the Prophet with the label of being without faith. The eschatological warnings implied by the Prophet are not implausible or irrational, for within the Arab mindset—particularly among believers (mu'minīn)—the belief in the existence of Heaven and Hell is as strong as their belief in the inevitability of death, which they experience empirically. The distinction between the believer (mu'min) and the disbeliever (kāfir) in the Prophet's teachings serves as a clear and explicit symbol pointing to the division between these two ultimate outcomes: Paradise and Hell.

There are indeed countless Prophetic Voices which, if truly embraced and applied by humanity, would not only bring peace to the world but also save it from the hands of those who reject these voices—preferring instead their own shallow self-interests.

The problem lies in the barriers of faith that have led religious adherents to become closed off and deeply suspicious of others. As a result, the Prophetic Voices that once rang powerfully in their own times—when Jesus or the Prophet Muhammad were still alive—now seem to have faded, becoming increasingly distant and unheard. People are now preoccupied with the affairs of their own religions, struggling for humanity based on individual interpretations of religious teachings. This, in turn, has led to fragmented and sporadic efforts—efforts that are ultimately ineffective. The legitimacy of such struggles is often only attributed to one's own group, while others who engage in similar efforts for the sake of humanity are viewed with suspicion and doubt.

The concept of *fastabiqul khairat*—competing in doing good—should not be approached in such a narrow way. Healthy competition in doing good is inherently positive, as it involves viewing others with goodwill and respect. When faced with common enemies such as corruption, nepotism, collusion, and all forms of

behavior that harm others, communities (i.e., those who share in the Prophetic Voice) must come together in unity to combat them, setting aside doctrinal differences in matters of faith. In the struggle against injustice, faith should not become an obstacle, for the issue at hand is a matter of humanity. It is precisely in this space that the unified Prophetic Voice—centered on shared moral truths—finds its breath and strength to bring relief and salvation to humankind.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As a closing note to this writing, borrowing from the analysis of Farid Esack regarding religious diversity, he asserts that the variety of paths and religions that exist is a manifestation of God's will, so that humankind may compete with one another in doing good. In this spiritual competition, there are at least four implications that every religious community must recognize: 1) Good deeds that are acknowledged and rewarded are not the monopoly of one particular group among the competitors; 2) The judge (in this case, God) must remain above and beyond the narrow interests of the participants; 3) Each competitor's claim of having a closer relationship with the judge—or being more favored than others—is of no use, and may even be detrimental to themselves; 4) The results of a fair competition cannot be known until the race is truly over.<sup>14</sup>

Today, we often encounter religious leaders who resist proposals to reconcile the normative teachings of different faiths—particularly in matters related to morality. This resistance is somewhat understandable, as it may stem from lingering doubts or mistrust toward others. Why is this the case? Bitter historical experiences can help explain it. One such experience is the persistent competition to recruit followers. In addition, stereotypical views toward the faith of others remain a significant issue. We may still recall the use of terms such as “filth” or “impure” (*najis*) in reference to those of different beliefs,<sup>15</sup> —a term used by Christians to refer to the Muslim community during the time of the Crusades. This impression seems to have continued to reproduce itself in the

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<sup>14</sup>Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism...*, p. 171.

<sup>15</sup>Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of The Prophet*, (Great Britain:Guernsey Press,1991), p. 26.

subconscious of many Western Christian communities. Conversely, within the subconscious of many Muslim communities, similar impressions also continue to take root. The strong influence of a bitter past has shaped the image of each religion in such a way that it encourages isolation, mutual suspicion, and, at times, excessive reactions—leading even to acts of aggression.

To eliminate such impressions, in-depth studies of the religious practices of each community must be continuously conducted. Without this, we risk being overwhelmed by attempts to force the Prophetic Voice upon others. Groups that hold central positions within their religions are expected to remain actively involved, as they are the voices that articulate religious teachings. Therefore, efforts to save humanity must no longer be tainted by dishonorable actions. Matters of faith are individual affairs, and if religious leaders are truly concerned about human salvation—even if their understanding of salvation requires sharing the same faith as the religion's bearers—they should ensure that salvation, in its simplest interpretation, means freedom from anxiety caused by oppression from rulers or tyrannical groups, peace in practicing religion, the removal of fear born from poverty or scarcity, the elimination of immoral practices in society, and other conditions that disrupt human dignity.

It is indeed not easy to voice the points of religious convergence; rejection can be found here and there. Such is the nature of struggle—it will never be free from opposing responses. However, efforts to foster understanding among communities across religions must continue. The mujahideen who yearn for salvation and peace for humanity must not give up. Leadership development must be continuously nurtured, for the project of raising awareness about the importance of living together in peace and practicing the normative teachings of religion—carrying prophetic moral messages—requires a long time. Without patience, the Prophetic Voice will surely be drowned out, and we will remain haunted by fear in the effort to convey these messages. Wallahu a'lam.

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