



ASEAN IIDC Closing Ceremony and Final Communiqué

“Shared civilizational values are a bridge that unites us, offering ASEAN the potential to become a major regional and global power.”

*~ His Excellency H. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas
Minister of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*

“Islam in Indonesia has always been a religious tradition inclined to provide refuge and protection to minority groups. We want that spirit of humility, kindness, and service to others to become the dominant expression of religiosity throughout the world.”

~ Hj. Zannuba Ariffah Chafsoh (Yenny Wahid)

JAKARTA, Indonesia, 7 August 2023 — The seventh and final plenary session of the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference witnessed the adoption of the Summit’s final communiqué, the [ASEAN IIDC Jakarta Declaration](#). The 5-page document articulates a clear strategic vision and program of action to foster the re-emergence of Southeast Asia as a coherent civilizational sphere and powerful, independent pillar of support for a rules-based international order.

Prior to a public reading of the *ASEAN IIDC Jakarta Declaration*, Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman and Center for Shared Civilizational Values co-founder KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf delivered brief closing remarks, edited for publication, in which he said:

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers, and participants.

There is no greater happiness today than seeing that our conference has gone extremely well and been productive. I can see and feel the great spirit with which this ASEAN IIDC has been undertaken, and the desire of all speakers and participants to formulate solutions to the world’s problems and find a way out of the multiple crises that confront us.

There are some who say that this initiative is part of Nahdlatul Ulama’s public diplomacy efforts, and I confess that public diplomacy is an important part of our agenda. We practice the diplomacy of complete honesty: for we can only find solutions to our problems if we have the courage to acknowledge and deal with them frankly.

I want to express my upmost gratitude to all of you, dear speakers and participants, for this is precisely what you have been doing today. What we have accomplished during this conference is of great significance to our struggle, as religious leaders, to create a brighter, more civilized future for all humanity.

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I would like to express my gratitude on behalf of Nahdlatul Ulama to Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, especially H.E. Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, Director General for ASEAN Cooperation. Pak Sidharto has been working closely with the Center for Shared Civilizational Values and Nahdlatul Ulama in preparing this initiative, including its conceptual development.

I would also like to express gratitude to our colleagues from the Center for Shared Civilizational Values: Pak Holland Taylor; Pak Timothy Samuel Shah; Pak Bob Hefner; Pak Thomas Dinham, and our colleague Mary Ann Glendon from Harvard University.

This is not just a conference. It is part of the Movement for Shared Civilizational Values, which invites religious leaders and people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in a common struggle to create a better future for humanity — by fostering the emergence of a global civilization that is more just and harmonious, and founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

We praise God Almighty for His blessing in having made this conference a success, and we pray for further assistance from heaven as our struggle continues.

Let us close this conference with praise to God Almighty.

Thank you very much. *Alhamdulillah!*

After receiving the ASEAN IIDC banner, Venerable Dr. Vanh Keobundit — representing ASEAN 2024 Chair Laos — delivered brief remarks:

Venerable guests, esteemed religious leaders, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

Today is an auspicious day for us. We have gathered here with the task of seeking common ground and fostering harmony across ASEAN. As a member of the Hmong community in the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, I represent a very small organization, but Buddhism is the largest religion in Laos.

It is an honor and a privilege to be able to address you at the closing of the ASEAN IIDC and to receive the flag of this Conference. In the coming year Laos will be the Chair of ASEAN, and we hope that we can pursue this agenda so that the nations of ASEAN may live in tolerance, prosperity, and peace.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the ASEAN IIDC organizing committee and our excellent hosts for receiving us. We hope that we can come together, work, share ideas, and live in harmony. Thank you very much.

Dr. Teresita Cruz del Rosario (Philippines), Senior Research Associate at the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute and author of numerous books on political sociology and public policy, read the [*ASEAN IIDC Jakarta Declaration*](#).

The inaugural ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference concluded with a gala dinner featuring a dance performance based on the *Panji* legend — the story of a Buddhist prince who has been separated from his wife, and his search for her and for spiritual enlightenment. This legend, which originated in Java, is deeply rooted within the cultural traditions of most ASEAN nations, including Muslim-majority Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The ASEAN IIDC also featured an extensive exhibit of illustrated *Panji* manuscripts displayed in the conference venue at Jakarta’s Ritz-Carlton Mega Kuningan hotel. This cultural component of the ASEAN IIDC was organized by Kyai Haji Jadul Maula, Chairman of the Institute of Indonesian Muslim Cultural Artists, or [Lesbumi](#) — an autonomous branch of the world’s largest Muslim organization.

The Honorable H. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, Indonesia’s Minister of Religious Affairs, co-founder of Humanitarian Islam and of the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, addressed the ASEAN IIDC gala dinner via video. His remarks were followed by Hj. Yenny Wahid, daughter of former NU Chairman and Indonesian president H.E. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, and head of Nahdlatul Ulama’s Institute for Innovative Development. Their speeches, edited for publication, may be read below.

Remarks by the Honorable H. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas to the ASEAN IIDC

Honorable delegates and distinguished guests,

After closely following the events of the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference, I am increasingly convinced that religion and culture play a vital role in peacebuilding, a fact demonstrated by the history of Southeast Asia and the growth of its civilization.

Moreover, I am also convinced that the noble values bequeathed to us by our region’s cultures and religions constitute a genuine creative force, capable of nurturing and strengthening Southeast Asia so that it may become an Epicentrum of Harmony. This idea is elegantly captured in the theme of this conference, “ASEAN Shared Civilizational Values: Building an Epicentrum of Harmony to Foster Peace, Security, and Economic Prosperity.”

In order to successfully face the dynamic challenges and uncertainty that characterize the present world situation, I believe that three major topics demand our collective attention.

First: Religion and religious figures’ important role in upholding Unity Amid Diversity

As the leaders of diverse cultural and religious communities, we have a vital role to play in strengthening the unity of Southeast Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can all promote and encourage the return of shared civilizational values to the mainstream. These values — namely democracy, tolerance, harmony, and moderation — have long been embedded in the genetic code of the nations of the region.

Throughout history, a number of high civilizations of global importance have flourished and interacted with each other in Southeast Asia, bequeathing to us values that are deeply embedded within, and influence, the people of our region.

These shared civilizational values are a bridge that unites us, able to facilitate the close cooperation necessary to overcome the collective challenges we face.

Religious and cultural values can even inspire us to transcend historical differences. They constitute a wellspring for continually renewing our commitment to live together in harmony, while encouraging our efforts for political, economic, and socio-cultural transformation.

These values are vital to ASEAN both today and in the future: it is crucial that we instill them in younger generations so that the noble goal of building a harmonious region may become reality.

At present, it is undeniable that ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions and conflicts still exist, both within and between the countries of the region. Religious leaders and organizations can play an important role in helping to resolve these conflicts by working together within a framework of mutual respect for the sovereignty of Southeast Asia's nations and peoples.

Ladies and gentlemen, we may recall that several months ago there were incidents involving the burning of sacred texts. Such incidents should not recur. They need to be prevented, as they cause division and have the potential to incite violence among followers of the world's religions.

Differences cannot be resolved unilaterally at the governmental level, however, which is why mothers and fathers play a crucial role in fostering understanding and spreading tolerance, harmony, and respect among diverse religious adherents.

Second: Making ASEAN an epicenter of peace, tolerance, and harmony

Southeast Asia is home to at least four major world religions, namely Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, as well as numerous indigenous belief systems.

As a diverse, united community, ASEAN has the potential to become a major regional and global power.

Indonesia has had a great deal of experience creating harmony within a shared nation state. Indonesia's basic principle — and national motto — is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which translated into English means "Unity Amid Diversity." We are different, but still one.

Thanks to the wisdom of religious scholars and leaders, our diverse nation was able to remain harmonious and united. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is a source of strength for the Indonesian nation, and the key to our peaceful and settled political order.

This principle is also in line with the theme of Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship: "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth," ensuring that ASEAN is a peaceful and harmonious center of growth amid a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and religions.

Third: The need for sustainable efforts to foster peace in Southeast Asia

Indonesia's valuable experience in fostering harmony within and among diverse communities can be shared to enrich our collective understanding and build resilience throughout Southeast Asia.

For this reason, I hope that the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference will become a valuable and important vehicle to:

1. Share hard-won experiences and best practices for maintaining unity amid diversity;
2. Reinforce the ancient values of tolerance, harmony, moderation, and mutual respect between communities;
3. Internationalize Southeast Asia's shared civilizational values, both within the region and far beyond; and
4. Encourage ASEAN to become an epicenter of growth and reinforce its strategy to foster a "Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy, and Harmonious Society."

These are the main ideas that I can contribute to this noble endeavor, which I am certain will be blessed by God, the Most Compassionate, the Merciful.

Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. [May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you].

Remarks by Hj. Zannuba Ariffah Chafsoh (Yenny Wahid)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

His Excellency, Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staqif.

His Excellency, Kyai Haji Imam Addaruqutni of Muhammadiyah.

All of the religious leaders and distinguished speakers and guests that are here tonight.

On behalf of Nahdlatul Ulama I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all of you. Welcome to the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference 2023.

We are indeed privileged to have you with us.

Gathered here today is a group of inspiring leaders from various religious and spiritual traditions that underpin our rich and diverse Southeast Asian cultures and histories.

Almost every major religious tradition has left its footprints in this region, thereby contributing to its marvelous heritage.

So, in honor of that great history, I would like to quote a leader from one of the great religious traditions in our region, the Dalai Lama.

When asked how he defined Buddhism, the Dalai Lama replied, “My religion is simple. It is love.”

Yet we just heard what our Minister of Religious Affairs said: that religion is often viewed as a source of conflict. Or to quote our Chairman, Mr. Yahya Staqf, religion is often “part of the problem.”

Many view religion as among the forces that lead to hatred, tension, and violence in society. In fact, because of this, one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century penned these lyrics [sings]:

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky*

*Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Ah*

*Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too*

*Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace....*

[Applause].

I'm glad you enjoyed that song, but it should have made us sad. The fact is, John Lennon viewed religion as a vehicle whereby we mobilize to destroy each other, and countries as forces that divide us instead of unite us.

This is something we need to reflect upon. This is something we should all strive to change. I am very glad that you are gathered here today to create momentum for a movement that seeks to create a better world through shared values, shared beliefs, and shared traditions.

Minister Qoumas said that religious leaders hold great power in their hands. After all, they are there from the day that a human being is born until the day that they die. Religious leaders play an important role. They pray for us. They listen to our grief. They are there for us.

This is a source of strength that I think many have forgotten. According to the World Economic Forum, 80 percent of the world's population adhere to religious beliefs. This is a huge number, a decisive majority who should be mobilized to exert a positive influence on society.

In your hands, you have the strength. In your hands, you have great power. You need to ignite and utilize this strength to awaken people and ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems.

I would like to thank all of the participants for attending this Summit, for it demonstrates your commitment to ensure that religion serves as a blessing for all humanity.

I also want to thank our Chairman, Mr. Yahya Staquf, for his relentless obsession with reminding people that religion should always be a source of solutions, rather than problems. He is tireless in his efforts to network likeminded people through dynamic forums such as the ASEAN IIDC.

Islam in Indonesia has always been a religious tradition inclined to provide refuge and protection to minority groups. We want that spirit of humility, kindness, and service to others to become the dominant expression of religiosity throughout the world. Your presence here today and your support of the *ASEAN IIDC Jakarta Declaration* is a concrete step towards realizing that goal.

The *IIDC Jakarta Declaration* seeks to revitalize shared civilizational values that historically united the peoples of South and Southeast Asia, in order to establish ASEAN as an epicentrum of harmony. This will help foster peace, security, and economic prosperity worldwide.

How will we succeed in this endeavor?

For me, the answer lies in what the Dalai Lama said about love. Let all of us here spread love and compassion to others, so that when people try to imagine a peaceful society, they will know that religion must be part of that picture.

So, thank you very much, and I hope that my singing did not destroy your appetite. Enjoy your dinner!

Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. [May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you].