



ASEAN IIDC Session 2: Character Education

**Indonesia's Minister of Education commends students
for their contribution to ASEAN:**

“Your outstanding proposal has helped shape key elements of the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference and its long-term agenda”

“We urge government leaders to strengthen character education within the national curricula of ASEAN Member States, so that youth may successfully adapt to the modern world, while simultaneously developing a way of life that imparts the inner resources, character, and resilience required to overcome the negative influences of modernity and globalization.”

***~ Students of State Middle School 1
Magelang, Central Java***

JAKARTA, Indonesia, 5 September 2023 — The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has endorsed a call by Indonesian middle school students to “strengthen character education within the national curricula of ASEAN Member States, so that youth may successfully adapt to the modern world, while simultaneously developing a way of life that imparts the inner resources, character, and resilience required to overcome the negative influences of modernity and globalization.”

The Chairman’s Statement of the 43rd ASEAN Summit, which was unanimously adopted by all 10 ASEAN heads of state and government, who convened in Jakarta, Indonesia from 5 – 7 September 2023, “reaffirmed the importance of fostering the values of an inclusive, sustainable, resilient, dynamic, and harmonious ASEAN Community through facilitating a greater understanding of shared civilisational values derived from the ASEAN region’s culture and religions.”

The Statement, issued by His Excellency Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia, also “commended the convening of the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference [ASEAN IIDC] 2023 with the theme ‘ASEAN Shared Civilizational Values: Building an Epicentrum of Harmony to Foster Peace, Security, and Economic Prosperity,’ in Jakarta on 7 August 2023, and recognised the values of its outcomes.”

These developments represent a significant acceleration of Nahdlatul Ulama and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values’ effort to “reawaken the ancient spiritual, cultural, and socio-political heritage of the Indianized cultural sphere, or ‘Indosphere’ — a civilizational zone that pioneered, long before the West, key concepts and practices of religious pluralism and tolerance” (“[The Ashoka Approach](#)”).

Immediately following [ASEAN IIDC’s opening plenary session](#) on 7 August 2023, a group of Indonesian students presented a proposal that ASEAN Member States revive character

education in order to address “the negative side effects of globalization and modernity, often spread via the internet and social media, which are undermining traditional cultures and values throughout ASEAN.”

As their proposal states, “Youth are particularly vulnerable to detrimental aspects of this process, which threatens the mental and physical health of ASEAN youth, and thereby diminishes their potential to shape the future of ASEAN in a positive direction.”

The students’ proposal emerged from a 2023 ASEAN-wide competition organized by Singapore’s Ministry of Education, the Science Center Singapore, and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Secretariat (SEAMEO Secretariat).

State Middle School 1 in Magelang, Central Java (“*Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri 1 Magelang*,” or SMP 1 Magelang) was among ten elite middle schools selected by Indonesia’s Ministry of Education to compete in the 2023 SEAMEO-Singapore Students’ Challenge. Five top students from SMP 1 Magelang were selected to represent the school in the SEAMEO competition. Reflecting Indonesia’s rich cultural and religious diversity, two of the students were Muslim, two Roman Catholic, and a fifth Protestant.

Tracing its heritage to a school for native Javanese established in 1912, SMP 1 Magelang has played a notable role in the history of Indonesia, including its independence movement. In October of 1945, Japanese soldiers — assisting the return of Dutch and British colonialists to Indonesia — massacred five students on the grounds of the school. Situated less than four kilometers from Indonesia’s Military Academy, SMP 1 Magelang has long educated children of the nation’s governing elites.

The students’ proposal stated:

“Strengthening Educational Curricula through Character Education, to Counter the Negative Effects of Globalization and Modernity Among ASEAN Youth”

ASEAN youth are exposed daily to a vast array of negative influences associated with globalization and modernity, driven by the massive rise of internet penetration; pervasive social media; the lack of quality character education; and the breakdown of traditional cultural and religious values.

Youth are particularly vulnerable to detrimental aspects of these phenomena, which threaten the mental and physical health of ASEAN youth, and diminish their potential to shape the future of ASEAN in a positive direction.

Members of the team from SMP Negeri 1 Magelang are deeply concerned by this problem and its implications for the future well-being of society. For contemporary youth are often attracted by the glamorous aspects of modernity, including the culture of instant gratification, and become addicted to the internet without realizing its dangers. These dangers include socio-cultural dislocation; alienation from family and society; the risk of criminality and drug use; diminished educational attainment and/or failure; and the rise of psychological disturbances among youth.

The team from SMP Negeri 1 Magelang takes this opportunity to propose that adults in ASEAN and throughout the world — including those with positions in government and civil society organizations, who share our concern and have the means to help safeguard the younger generation from dangers posed by globalization and modernity — unite and help youth become strong and resilient.

SMP Negeri 1 Magelang has developed a unique curriculum called ASABUNGA, an acronym that stands for *Agamais* (values shared by all religions); *SAINS* (science); *BUDaya* (culture); and *linkuNGAn* (social and physical environment).

The ASABUNGA curriculum represents an effort to address the challenges, and opportunities, posed by globalization and modernity. It contains elements closely related to what is known, in Indonesia, as “*budi pekerti*,” or character education.

Budi pekerti refers to the overall awareness, actions and behavior of an individual. The term “*budi*” means “consciousness,” “reason,” “mind,” or “mental character.” The term “*pekerti*” refers to one’s behavior, deeds, temperament, and objective moral character. Hence, the term “*budi pekerti*” refers to a state of mental and moral character that manifests in the form of behavior that is beneficial to oneself and others, performed by one who is fully aware of the consequences of his or her actions.

Effective character education provides a holistic approach to addressing a myriad of social problems. This is because mature, responsible individuals generally contribute to the well-being of society, rather than detract from it. Proper character education inspires students and shapes their practical behaviour in various areas of life, i.e., individual, family, community, nation and the world at large, including our natural environment.

Reflecting upon their own experience — and aware of the need for sustainable development, resilient communities and the preservation of our planet, so that humanity may continue to thrive — the team of SMP Negeri 1 has resolved to offer a “big idea” to ASEAN and the world. This entails inviting major stakeholders to cooperate in identifying appropriate “big picture” solutions to the challenges posed by globalization and modernity, which solutions may be readily applied by the nations of ASEAN to create an “epicentrum of harmony and growth” that will serve as a model for the entire world.

The near-term solution we propose is to include this “big idea” in the upcoming “ASEAN Conference on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue,” which Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) will host in cooperation with the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nahdlatul Ulama, which has served the nation of Indonesia for over a century, has long implemented *budi pekerti* in its educational system. Last year, NU established the G20 Religion Forum (R20) in conjunction with Indonesia’s Presidency of the G20.

Desired long-term outcomes include strengthening the educational systems of ASEAN Member States, by incorporating and/or improving character education as a core element of their respective educational curricula.

Recognizing the essential role that moral education, the development of noble character, and the practice of virtue have played, for millennia, in fostering shared civilizational values

throughout Southeast Asia, Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf brought the Magelang students' "big idea" to the attention of Indonesia's Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, H.E. Nadiem Anwar Makarim. As a result, Mr. Makarim joined Mr. Staquf in publicly recognizing SMP 1 Magelang and its students' proposal.

Key recommendations from the Magelang students' proposal were also incorporated into the *ASEAN IIDC Jakarta Declaration*, which states:

Deeply conscious of these circumstances and trends, we — religious and cultural leaders from every ASEAN Member State, as well as from ASEAN Plus and other nations — do hereby....

- ix. Affirm the vital importance of women and their role within society, including but not limited to the inculcation of noble values within each successive generation of youth;
- x. Recognize that effective character education provides a holistic approach to addressing numerous social problems, because mature, responsible individuals contribute to the well-being of society;
- xi. Urge government leaders to strengthen character education within the national curricula of ASEAN Member States, so that youth may successfully adapt to the modern world, while simultaneously developing a way of life that imparts the inner resources, character, and resilience required to overcome the negative influences of modernity and globalization, including socio-cultural dislocation; alienation from family and society at large; criminality and drug use; educational failure; violent extremism; and the rise of psychological illness among youth;

Following the [ASEAN IIDC opening ceremony](#), the five student authors of SMP 1 Magelang's proposal summarized the essence of their "big idea" to assembled politicians, delegates, academics, diplomats, and journalists from across ASEAN and beyond, providing the backdrop for a keynote address by H.E. Nadiem Anwar Makarim, excerpts of which may be read below.

It is a great honor for me to be able to stand here today and talk about interreligious and intercultural tolerance and collaboration. It is wonderful to see so many leaders in Indonesia and ASEAN get together to raise this topic, as this has become one of the foremost priorities of President Joko Widodo's cabinet. And I represent — as Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology — the next generation of Indonesians and the programs that we will enact to secure a tolerant, multi-cultural, and multi-religious community in Indonesia's future.

First, I must say that the challenge is overwhelming, with 17,000 islands, so many different ethnicities, and so many different religions. It is a true challenge to talk about multiculturalism, interreligious tolerance, and harmony. But Indonesia has taken some unprecedented steps to achieving this.

I'm not sure many of you know, but we are one of the first, if not *the* first, country whose national assessment is not just plugged in to the international standard of literacy and numeracy. Every year, our national assessment of every single school —

a census — has within it surveys on risks. One is about sexual violence, a second is about bullying and the third is about tolerance and intolerance.

So right now, every single school in Indonesia, every year gets surveyed on intercultural and interreligious tolerance. And that data is presented to every single teacher and principal and local government in Indonesia. They know exactly where they are versus their region and for the first time in Indonesian history, principals are finally faced with responsibility for improving their scores on religious and intercultural tolerance.

This is an unprecedented initiative. For the first time, the government of Indonesia is telling every single principal and teacher that [tolerance] is being measured in your school. This is a huge step forward that I think will change forever the paradigm of what it means to be a school and what are the responsibilities of every principal....

For more than seven decades, Indonesia has embodied an unwavering commitment to building a strong, harmonious community for all its citizens. Through our chairmanship of ASEAN and our brand-new approach to improving our students' civic responsibility, Indonesia is ready to elevate ASEAN as the epicenter of global growth in the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (“Oneness Amid Diversity”). Thank you very much.

[View H.E. Nadiem Anwar Makarim's speech](#)

On 5 – 7 September 2023, the Heads of State/Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia, for the 43rd ASEAN Summit under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Indonesia, with the theme “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth.”

In the [Chairman's Statement of the 43rd ASEAN Summit](#), ASEAN Heads of State/Government acknowledged the value of the SMP 1 Magelang students' proposal regarding character education and other ASEAN IIDC outcomes, by jointly declaring:

122. We reaffirmed the importance of fostering the values of an inclusive, sustainable, resilient, dynamic, and harmonious ASEAN Community through facilitating a greater understanding of shared civilisational values derived from the ASEAN region's culture and religions, and commended the convening of the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference 2023 with the theme ‘ASEAN Shared Civilizational Values: Building an Epicentrum of Harmony to Foster Peace, Security, and Economic Prosperity,’ in Jakarta on 7 August 2023, and recognised the values of its outcomes.