

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY

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Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank the organizer of this conference for inviting me to talk about the role of faith in the global society. The world we live in today has shown an unprecedented speed of change in almost all spheres of life and all corners of the globe. Globalisation, which has created globalised world and the global society, is indeed a manifestation of God's law of nature, that is that time dimension always brings continuity and change. Globalisation has brought changes in both positive and negative senses. On one hand, it has brought progress and development to human life, but, on the other hand, it has created civilisational deficit.

The most threatening challenge to human civilisation is currently the appearance of accumulative global damage. This includes the many faces of the absence of peace, such as poverty, illiteracy, injustice, ecological collapse, and moral illiteracy, etc. At the same time, human race is facing a great danger stemming from world crisis, i.e., crisis of energy, crisis of food, and crisis of environment. These crisis are resulted from the world system, which has more anthropocentric orientation, rather than theocentric one. Consequently, human civilization is far of being just, prosperous, and peaceful both morally and worldly.

It is indeed disheartening to see that conflicts and the use of violence remain a defining characteristic of today's world. When we look at the world today, the

absence of peace continues to be a key feature of most countries in underdeveloped and developing world. It is in this vastly populated part of the world where all kind of conflicts could be found. Internal conflicts --either in form of communal violence, conflicts for self-determination, genocides, or separatist conflict-- are mostly fought within under developed and developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There were 118 major armed conflicts in 80 different locations between the end of the Cold War and 2010. The majority of these were civil wars. In 2010 alone, 19 major armed conflicts occurred in 80 locations throughout the world.

War, which we thought to be obsolete, continues to serve as an instrument by which nations resolve their differences. Thus, we should do our best to renounce the use of force and war as a means of conflict-resolution. Through war, human kind would not accomplish anything but misery. The use of force will never resolve differences, and the use of violence will only breed more violence. However, we should also note that the use of violence as an instrument either to resolve problem or to achieve political objectives has not been monopoly of underdeveloped and developing countries. We continue to witness the display of military prowess as an instrument of problem-solving by major powers.

The other feature of the global society remains in its very nature of being multicultural. The global society embedding diversity of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, and language is now inevitably pushed to maintain multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has now become a world ideology, any country or religious community must engage in. Multiculturalism is closely related reciprocally to the emergence of borderless global society. This, in turn, has paved the way for not only liberalisation of trade and economy that created free trade areas, but also liberalisation of religion and culture that created free areas of religion and culture. Together with the imposition of the principles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, implementation of multiculturalism has imposed the exercising of freedom of religion and freedom expression.

The interrelation and interaction between people of different faiths and nationalities in this interconnected world has encouraged cultural and civilisational convergences, which may lead to unity in diversity of the global society. Yet, on the other hand, that

social interrelation and interaction has also created tensions and conflicts where the problem of identity and integration is not well solved.

What is the position and the role of religion in that backdrop? Whether religion becomes a problem solver, or a part of the problem, or even a problem maker?

Significance of Religion

Religion has been heavily criticized on many fronts in recent years. Some secularists would say that religion tends to bring about or legitimize authoritarian regimes, considering it as a dangerous political tool for social control. In many parts of the world, they speak against any notion of bringing religion into politics as if religion has only harmful impacts on diversity, democracy and human rights. Some scientists would say that religion is an impediment of the progress of science, assuming it as largely incompatible with science. Many atheists would even highlight the perceived conflicts between religious beliefs and scientific findings and regard religion as a construct intended to give solace and a sense of relationship with larger forces – which science has revealed today. In some developed countries, they openly criticize what they regard as the irrational nature of religions and consequently the irrational nature of holding on to these belief systems. They compare religion to mental illness and delusional behavior. Moreover, some feminists would regard religion as responsible for many forms of the oppression of women and domestic violence. Still, some people from various backgrounds would be of the opinion that religion is the root cause of many tensions, conflicts and violent actions taking place all over the world. The list of criticism of religion can still continue, however. Despite these harsh criticisms, religion continues to play its significant role in society and even grow in an unprecedented rate in many places. Religion remains central both in private life and public sphere. It is also uneasy to separate religion from politics, economy, education and other fields – no matter it is really needed or not.

There are a number of reasons why religion continues to attract people. First of all, it has something to do with nature of human being. In Islam, religion is a *fitra* or a natural disposition (in a more universal sense). As human consists of physical and spiritual elements, they continue to feel attached to a certain faith tradition from which they may fulfill their needs (either named mental, psychological, moral or

spiritual). Some scientists argue for a God spot or a God module existing in every human being.

On the other hand, materialism has failed to offer happiness to man and even lead them to spiritual-emptiness and meaningless life. In a materialism-influenced world setting, some societies have to always struggle with their economic crises while others are unable to find happiness and meaningful life in their luxuries. The pursuit of wealth does not lead to happiness, and might yet make people unhappy, even when they are successful according to materialistic parameters. Faith traditions, on the other hand, offer people a more lasting sense of hope as well as a more balanced, meaningful life. People turn to faith as they are more certain with its importance to their life.

In addition, there have been more and more findings – by scientists or others – on the advantages or functionality of religious beliefs and religious practices (such as praying, fasting, almsgiving, night waking for remembrance of God) for physical health, greater intellectuality, positive mentality and social solidarity. In relation to health for instance, there have been many studies during the last few decades which find an established link between spirituality, religion and physical well-being. Religious beliefs and practices are believed to have a positive impact on individual's recovery from acute illness and surgery, and help prevent a number of diseases. Moreover, some scientists continue to draw inspiration from religious texts and reveal the compatibility of science and religious teachings.

At socio-political level, there have been more and more examples of how religion is used to raise awareness to fight against authoritarianism, dictatorship, injustice and oppression – in any form. There have been many efforts – by religious scholars/leaders and others including feminists – to provide liberation interpretation of religion. While liberation theology has traditionally associated with Christianity in Latin American context, there are liberation theologies in every major religion and in various places. These liberation approaches to religion have led to vigorous activism on behalf of the oppressed – the poor, the disadvantaged, the marginalized – which much involves the study of sacred texts and spiritual practice.

Also, it has been increasingly acknowledged that in many conflicts associated with religion, external factors (such as political and economic interests) play a much more

decisive role rather than religion itself. Due its effective power, religion is often exploited to incite or preserve conflicts for hidden political and economic agenda. Moreover, people tends to focus on conflicts “between religions”, while there have been many conflicts, killings, massacres “within the same faith” throughout history. In most major religions, many more people are killed by co-religionists than are killed by people from different religions. Most conflicts are in fact about land, power and resources. In most cases, religion can bolster, but does not originate the conflict. In addition, one should also remember that there have been also many examples of how religion is used to transform conflicts and even address terrorism. Religion itself can help any attempt to forge peace.

Furthermore, there have been efforts to enhance peace among the followers of different religions through interfaith programs and activities. There have been even interfaith dialogues and cooperation intended to address social problems, such as poverty, human rights abuse, corruption and environmental degradation. Interfaith partnership for the common good has been on the rise in the last decade, involving more and more religious leaders and activists.

Last but not least, religion has also been increasingly involved to help ensure the success of humanitarian and development projects at various levels – from local to international – and in various issues – from dealing with diseases, disasters and environmental damages to dealing with terrorism and post-war recovery. Religion can serve as a source of powerful legitimation required for any humanitarian and development program to work effectively. By involving religious texts, leaders, institutions and organizations, many humanitarian and development programs have achieved greater success. With interfaith communication and cooperation flourishing rapidly, we can be more certain of the potential success of every program involving people who take religion seriously.

On the one hand, this shows the extent to which religion is deeply entrenched in societies, and the potentials religion has to help resolve human contemporary problems. On the other hand, this inspires us the way by which we can live out the meaning of religion as a blessing, a mercy (*rahma*) for all people, and the role we can better give to religion in our contemporary life.

In this contemporary era, we can see how people found religion as a meaningful teaching and values that is facilitative in succeeding development agenda. Experience in many Asian and African countries where religion is still strongly institutionalized within societies, achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is strongly supported by faith organizations. Regardless their differences in some aspects of rituals, religions have common mission to create prosperity, security and peace. This universal mission of religions brought people from different faith across the globe to build up a constructive partnership for different field of development and humanitarian actions.

With these all reasons, one can remain optimistic about the role faith can play in our increasingly globalized world. It is up to us whether to choose to present religion as a source of strength for a more meaningful life by which we can truly carry it out, or to choose to abandon its potentials to affect positive changes or exploit it for our selfish interests by which we already destroy it..

Religion and Multiculturalism

We are now living in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. No single society that is monolithic. All great cultural and religious traditions have to deal with plurality and diversity of cultures and religions. These pluralities are both given and generation. As mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an, God created mankind into tribes and races with different skin colors and languages. Plurality of religions is also a part of God's Will. Indeed, plurality is observable signs or evidence of God Almighty for intellectuals, knowledgeable persons.

Cultural and religious plurality becomes more complex in line with development and interactions between people from different faiths and cultures. Plurality is resulted from creativity and adaptation of people to cope with realities, changes and challenges. A plausible consequence of these creativity and adaptation is the birth of ideologies across human history. Now, variety of multiculturalism, pluralism and other ideologies have become major studies of modern social sciences especially sociology and anthropology.

Islam has a positive view of plurality. Islam outlines three basic principles of plurality. Firstly, Muslim has to accept plurality and all consequences as part of

social, cultural and religious realities. Secondly, Muslim has to response these realities in positive ways. Thirdly, plurality has to lead to harmony and better life and harmony.

The positive of Islam on plurality might be called as Islamic Pluralism which consists of three basic teachings. The first teaching is to respect differences. It is obligatory for every Muslim to respect human life and dignity. No infant can choose their parents, race, sex, color of skin, eyes and hair. When they were born, children could not choose their culture, country, environment, and, even religion. In later development, human are given freedom and rights to choose their religion, nationality and culture. These choices are private. Therefore, everyone is responsible to their own choices. In this regards, Islam teaches its adherents to always address others with a full respect and dignity as human being. This is the very basic teaching of Islam on tolerance and Human Rights principles.

The second teaching is to race or compete in goodness. The teaching of Islam on competition is based on four principles. The first, Muslim has to be confident with their faith and identity. Being a Muslim is a private choice that distinguishes someone from others. Being a Muslim could mean being an exclusive man. The second, Muslim has to be consistent with and committed to do goodness beneficial for themselves and others. It is not a true Muslim that has plenty of food and let their neighbor in hunger. Real Muslims are those presence create peace for their immediate environment. The third, Muslim has to perform goodness in a perfect performance according to the guidance of God (*ihsan*). For Islam, what is more important is not the quantity or amount of deeds but the quality or perfection of deeds. The fourth is to be always innovative and creative. In an open competition only the most creative, innovative and productive could leading and survive. In line with teaching, relationships of Muslim with others are not based on hatred and rivalry but love, respect and fair competition.

The third teaching of Islam on positive plurality is unity and inclusion of society. This teaching is based on two concepts namely *tawhid* and *umma*. The very basic principle of Islam as a monotheist religion is *tawhid*. Literally, *tawhid* means unity. Muslim testifies to worship Allah, the Only God. *Tawhid* brings implication that any

existences other than God are creatures (*makhluk*). Further, *tawhid* brings implication on unity of creation, unity of mankind and unity of the purpose of life. The consequences of *tawhid* are equality, sovereignty and solidarity among people. With the concept of *umma* Islam teaches the inclusion of a society. Mankind is one single community which comes from the same origin and same parents. They are all created from mud and children of Adam and Eve. The concept of *umma* implies unity, commonality, shared rights and responsibility. People are bound with their society and consensus between people. In line with the concept of *umma*, Muslim has to follow rule of religion and social norms and is prohibited to be indifference. On the ground, the concept of *umma* highlights the principle of unity, integration, inclusion and cooperation.

In line with this principle, Islam views religious and cultural plurality not simple as a co-existence. It entails a world view and code of conducts on how to see plurality and to deal with accordingly. Historically, there are two examples of *umma* on the ground. The first example is Medina Community or State. This State is based on the Medina Charter (*mitsaq al madinah*) as a consensus among people. There are three characteristic of Medina Charter. The first, Medina Charter is not based a particular religion (Islam) but universal teaching and values of existing religions especially Christianity and Judaism. Second, every single community, ethnic and religion is entitled as *umma*. Therefore none of them are excluded or alienated. The third, the Charter did not abandon the existence and identity of religions, ethnics and tribes but they are highly respected and well-protected. As could be seen from history, under Medina Chapter every religion, tribe and ethnic lived in conformity, harmony and unity.

The second example is that of *Pancasila* in Indonesia. By population, Indonesia is a Muslim majority country. More than 85 percents of its citizen are Muslims. Despite, Indonesia is neither a theocratic nor an Islam State. The *Pancasila* as the State Ideology is dig from universal teaching and values embraces by Indonesian. Because the teaching and values are inclusive, *Pancasila* is accepted by all ethnics and religious groups in Indonesia. Under the *Pancasila*, despite their religious and cultural differences, Indonesian could live peacefully, side by side in harmony.

Religion and Peace making

Differences, be it in religious, ethnic, cultural and even civilizational terms, would continue to be a fact of life. But, these differences should by no means become a reason why we cannot live in harmony and peace. In fact, Islam reminds us that God made us into different nations and ethnicities so that we might come to enhance mutual understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation (The Quran, 49: 13). Therefore perpetuating those differences in order to foment conflict is certainly against God's Law of Nature.

Our main task is therefore to ensure that religion continues to serve as the basis of peace. We continue to work to ensure that religion will not be used, misused, and abused to justify act of violence in any forms. The Holy Qur'an strongly reminds us that whosoever killed a person without justified reason is that if he has killed all mankind and humanity.

When conflicts do occur, it is our task also to ensure that those conflicts are resolved peacefully, not through the use of violence. Here, we believe in the power of dialogue, and that interfaith dialogue could take the form of mediation between conflicting parties. It is true that sometimes conflicts have no religious motive, as religion is only used as a mean of justification, yet religious approach in conflict resolution is often fruitful.

It is my belief that more of these dialogues are needed. More exchanges of views and discussions among civilizations should be encouraged. Therefore, we should continue to make the dialogue among civilizations useful both at the elite and grass roots level. We should ensure that various activities to bridge the gap among civilizations would contribute to the enhancement of mutual understanding and respect in a concrete way.

Mediation through interfaith dialogues would not be meaningful unless parties to such dialogues are able to articulate their point of views in a frank and candid manner. Dialogues would quickly turn into a political theater if we cannot be honest with each other. Fruitful dialogues could only be achieved in an environment that promotes candidness and honesty within a spirit of togetherness and brotherhood.

Faith-based organizations, like Muhammadiyah, whenever possible, can and should play a role in mediation effort to resolve conflict. We have played, and will continue to play, that role at community level. We have also played that role in order to bridge differences among communities at national level.

The challenge we are now facing is how to continue emphasizing the value of mediation through interfaith dialogues and cooperation as an instrument to bridge civilizational divides and conflicts at global level. Various initiatives in this area remind us that religion and religious leaders do have a positive role to play in international relations. Religion does serve as a source of values and norms that could provide guidance for a healthy inter-state relations based on mutual understanding, mutual respects, and equality. Those dialogues also serve as a venue for religious leaders to articulate their aspiration for a peaceful and just world. At grass-root level, inter-faith dialogues and cooperation can provide the basis for peace among people of different faiths. Dialogues could remove mutual suspicions, which often result from ignorance, lack of knowledge about each other, and the absence of mutual respect.

Challenges to Shared Security

The notion of “shared security” implies that security is a collective public good. The Kyoto Declaration highlights “the collective responsibility of all people to meet our common need for security.” The notion of “shared security” emphasises that the security of the people, of human being, should be at the centre of attention. Similar to the notion of human security, “shared security” also requires a comprehensive understanding of security in terms of the matrix of human rights and needs. More importantly, “shared security” requires the involvement of all stake-holders to defend and advance human dignity. In this regard, religious traditions clearly provide the foundation for such undertaking.

However, the challenges to promoting such noble understanding of security remain formidable. First, the notion of security remains dominated by traditional discourse of peace and war, in which military security continues to overshadow the more human dimension of security. The prevailing habits among governments to

emphasises the primacy of national security continues to render other security concerns more relevance to the people. Within the tradition of national security, state security becomes the locus of attention and priority. In fact, state security does not guarantee that the security of the people who live within a state are also ensured.

Second, due to the primacy of national security discourse, states –especially major powers-- are locked in the habit of exercising power politics. Domination by one state over others, and the quest to reach the top position in the hierarchy of power, become the norms rather than exception. Consequently, security becomes a zero-sum-game: security of one state or community can only be achieved at the expense of others' security. Security, then, becomes an exclusive property of the powerful and not to be shared. Indeed, as noted in the Kyoto Declaration, national security “often promotes violence and foments insecurity.”

Third, “shared security” can be achieved only if we agree on the importance of understanding security as an attempt to “acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them.” Shared security cannot be achieved unless we understand each other's (in) security concerns. Most dialogues among civilizations, or between different faiths, often ignore or avoid the importance of this point. Focusing such dialogues on issues of commonalities is certainly useful to promote greater mutual understanding. However, it does not provide a complete understanding on the sources of tension between communities or between civilizations. It is equally importance to understand each other's insecurity. This should be an agenda in inter-faith dialogues, both at local, national, and global levels.

The Role of Religious Leaders in Interfaith Dialogues

What can religious leaders do in order to promote and realise the notion of “shared security”? Do religious leaders have a role to play in addressing both human security problems and the problem of global tension caused by power politics and the quest for power supremacy? Can religious leaders become the effective voice of peace in the current turbulent world characterised by violence and selfish quest for exclusive security? These questions have been raised again and again in the post-September 11 world.

The answer to those questions is of course “yes”. Religious leaders can derive from their moral authority to work together in promoting shared security. Religious

leaders can be at the forefront in confronting violence. Religious leaders can play important role in promoting mutual understanding among civilizations and among people of different faiths. Religious leaders have taken very active role in promoting inter-faith dialogues as a means to advocate peace. Indeed, the proliferation of both state-driven and society-driven inter-faith dialogues at regional and global level over the last six years signifies the growing involvement and participation of religious leaders and communities to avert the nightmare scenario of Huntingtonian “clash of civilizations.”

However, one should not overlook the limits within which such role can be exercised by the religious leaders. Problems remain abundant with regard to the ongoing inter-faith dialogues and dialogue of civilisations, and need to be improved by looking at three important contexts.

First, the key obstacle in using inter-faith dialogues as an instrument to address the problem between the Muslim world and the West is the gap between the ideal world of religious actors on the one hand, and the cruel world of political players. Inter-faith dialogues have often been constrained by the gap between society and the state. When religious actors work hard to create a better world based on mutual understanding and mutual respect among different faiths, the results of the works by political actors tend to undermine it, intentionally or not. When religious actors advocate the method of peace, political actors continue to value the utility of force and even war. When religious actors emphasise national and global spirituality, political actors exaggerate the importance of national and global security.

Second, the conversation between Islam and the West tends to be one-sided. It is important to acknowledge that the attention and the focus more on how to understand Islam. Implicit in this reality is the assumption that Islam needs to be understood because the problem is to be found within this community of ummah. Bernard Lewis, for example, has asked: what’s wrong with Islam? Others have questioned whether Islam will ever accept the reality of the West and therefore co-exist with it in a peaceful and productive way. Worse, there have also been questions raised in the West on how to deal with the so-called “Islamic threat.” Constructed in this way, it would be difficult for any dialogue to produce fruitful results. The Muslim

community is then cornered to a defensive position, trying hard to explain that their religion is indeed a religion of peace and poses no threat to any other religion.

Third, the transformation of world major powers into national security states since September 11, and its corollary War on Terror, has exacerbated the problem of inter-civilisation relations. The use of force as an instrument of conflict resolution and the primacy of prejudices in dealing with the Muslim world have created an impression that the West is using the War on Terror as a disguise for an anti-Islam attitude. The combination between unfair treatment of Muslims and the Muslim world by the West and the disillusionment of Muslims in many Arab/Muslim despotic states has served as a recipe for civilisational calamity. When the perceived arrogance of the West meets with the predicament of Muslim world, the future of harmonious relations between Islam and the West has been put in jeopardy. In other words, the war on terror has posed a serious barrier to a genuine dialogue among civilisations and undermined the relationship between Islam and the West.

Indeed, within such three contexts, there is a need to reform our mindset and our way of thinking. Here, a paradigmatic shift has begun to emerge. Instead of looking at the problem through the framework of “clash of civilisation,” the framework of “Alliance of Civilisation” needs to be supported and advanced. Within this paradigm, a way of thinking that juxtaposes Islam and the West becomes an irrelevant exercise. Islam and the West should not be seen as a binary opposition. Islam and the West should be seen as the pillars of a common global civilisation. Islam and the West should be treated as two forces that compliment each other in ensuring and preserving the future of mankind.

Islam and the West should be seen as partners in a common struggle to preserve the sanctity of religion as a source of values for mankind. Islam and the West should work together to prevent the use of religion as a political tool in the quest for supremacy among nations. In fact, the quest for supremacy among nations should be removed from any nation’s agenda. If we can achieve this, then the notion of “shared security” will not be an empty dream.

Given such situation in our world today, the key question is this: “how can religion and religious leaders contribute to the creation of a world without violence?” Is there

a role that we can play so that the relevance of the use violence as an instrument of problem-solving would diminish, if not become obsolete?

I do believe that the answer to these questions lie in the continuing efforts by those us who believe in the imperative of a world without violence to continue seeking a genuine dialogues among religions and civilizations. We should continue pursue our common dream of a new world civilization based on social justice, equality, harmony, and prosperity.

In this regard, religions clearly speak the language of peace. We should never surrender even though the challenges to our efforts to spread the message of peace are increasingly becoming more and more difficult. Indeed, proliferation of dialogues among civilizations seems o have not completely removed the danger. The flurry of inter-faith dialogues, both state-driven and society-driven, seems to have generated little success in removing the prejudices, misconceptions, and misunderstanding among people of different religious, especially between Islam and the Christian West. Mutual suspicion continues to characterize the ongoing relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

This reality clearly points to the imperative of not only doing more, but also doing it right. So much has been done to address the problem. But, progresses have not been entirely satisfactory. However, it would be misleading also to claim that the ongoing initiatives on inter-faith dialogues or dialogues among civilizations are no more than pointless exercises. These dialogues to create a greater space for mutual learning process. They expand the boundary of mutual understanding among people from different religious and civilizational background. They create the imperative of enhanced interaction among people from different faith. Dialogues have also opened up more opportunities for clodser cooperations and communities to address problems of humanity and for the betterment of the society.

Various initiatives in this area have also reminded us that religion and religious leader to have a positive role to play in international relations. Religion does serve as a source of values and norms that could provide guidance for a healthy inter-state relation based of mutual understanding, mutual respect, and equality. Those dialogues also serve as venue for religious leader for articulate their aspiration for a peaceful and just world. At grass-root level, inter-faith dialogues can provide the

basis for peace among communities of different religions. Dialogues could remove mutual suspicions which often result from ignorance, lack of knowledge about each others, and the absence of mutual respect.

However, problems remain abundant with regard to the ongoing inter-faith dialogues and dialogue of civilizations. The key of obstacle in using inter-faith dialogues as an instrument to address the problem between the Muslim world and the West is the gap between the ideal world of religious actors on the one hand, and the cruel world of political players. Inter-faith dialogues have often been constrained by the gap between society on the state. When religious actors work hard to create a better world based on mutual understanding and mutual respect among different faiths, the result of the works by political actors advocate the method of peace, political actors continue to value the utility of force and even war. When religious actors emphasise national and global spirituality, political actors exaggerate the importance of national and global security.

Common Word for Common Enemies

What can be done in the future? We have to admit that the world is facing more serious and complex challenges. Not every community, religion and state leaders are happy and supportive to multiculturalism and pluralism. Some of them even stated that multiculturalism and pluralism have been fail. In my view, there is no reason to discard multiculturalism and pluralism. Under above mentioned concepts multiculturalism and pluralism are necessary foundation to find a common ground for our life and our common world. Multiculturalism and pluralism are likely to fail if some of us still think that one particular religion, culture and ethnic is better and superior over other. It has been fail to create a peaceful world if multiculturalism is directed to unilateral world. Multiculturalism can only be successful if is subjected to respect difference and protect identity of all people.

Second, having this view, then people of faith should find ways to build harmony and prosperity. This is possible through a more productive and constructive dialogue to see differences and commonalities of religions. Theologically, there are points when people from different faiths stand in an exclusive state, but there are also points

where they share common teaching. Towards differences we have to be tolerant, but to the point of agreement we could develop cooperation.

So far, there are numerous interfaith dialogues as well as Muslim-Christian dialogues. There have been declaration produces from these dialogues. Off course, dialogue is not everything. It is not a panacea that could heal any diseases. Dialogue is just one struggle to find a common ground and shared responsibility. Despites some over-stated criticism on inter-faith, we need to extend dialogue which involves more people from the ground, the grass-root and ordinary people.

But, more importantly, we need to explore ways to move beyond political and theological dialogues. We need to develop cooperation as part of well-grounded dialog. It is cooperation that reflects and represents our common concern to heal the world. Together now, we face a serious climate change and environmental damages. We witness people who suffer of poverty, energy crisis, water crisis, hunger and other human calamities. It is our humanity duty to find ways for a more positive and constructive cooperation on the ground.

There are lesson learned from Indonesia. In the last five years, we face series of natural disasters and thousands people lost their live. Based on humanity reasons, people from different faith helped us for relief and reconstruction. As the experience of Muhammadiyah, based on our common ground and shared responsibility. Muhammadiyah could develop partnership and cooperation with international and national religious organization. A few years ago, we set up Indonesian Humanitarian Forum consists of humanitarian organization from different faiths. It is also our Indonesian experience where leaders from different faith made a joint action for anti-corruption, promoting democracy and good-governance.

In October 2007, 138 Muslim leaders wrote an open letter *A Common World* which outlines the fact that Muslims and Christians around the world are bound by the twin “golden” commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving the neighbor. These principles of the Love of God and the neighbour emphasised in the open letter are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and

Christianity. I fully endorsed the document as an additional signatory because I believe that we indeed inherit a common world.

Therefore, I am not going to argue that we need to create common grounds for co-existence. In fact, I would like to re-emphasise the fact that such common grounds for Islam and Christian to live together in peace have long existed. Indeed, the importance of love occupies a central place in both the Quran and the Bible. As such, both the Quran and the Bible have long emphasised the very existence of common ground between Muslims and Christians..

The Way Forward

In order to address the problem mentioned above, there are four steps that we need to take:

First, there is a need to reform our mindset and our way of thinking. Here, a paradigmatic shift is necessary. Instead of looking at the problem through the framework of “clash of civilizations,” within this paradigm, a way of thinking that juxtaposes Islam and the West becomes irrelevant exercise. Islam and the West should not be seen as a binary opposition.

Islam and the West should be seen as the pillars of a common global civilization. Islam and the West should be treated as two forces that complement each other in ensuring and preserving the future of mankind. Islam and the West should be seen as partners in a common struggle to preserve the sanctity of religion as a source of values for mankind. Islam and the West should work together to prevent the use of religion as a political tool in the quest for supremacy among nations. In fact, the quest for supremacy among nations should be removed from any nation’s agenda.

Second, in order for any mutual understanding to prevail, it is necessary to conduct dialogues in a context of equality. Dialogues should proceed from the presence of mutual eagerness to learn and understand about each other. Society-driven dialogues, especially among religious leaders themselves, have to a certain extent managed to conduct inter-faith dialogues on this basis. However, there is still the question of authenticity with regards to the state-driven dialogues. Are politicians genuinely trying to reach a mutual understanding and mutual respect among different civilizations? When the gap between declaratory intention and the actual

policies remains wide, the utility of inter-faith dialogues would gradually be questioned. If this happens, then it would be difficult to sustain the progress that has been achieved so far through various initiatives of inter-faith dialogues.

Third, the problem in the relationship between the muslim world and the West could be resolved if there is a parallel effort by both religious and political leader. Religious leaders should provide an atmosphere of spirituality for better mutual understanding and mutual respect, while political leaders should work eliminate global injustices. Religious leaders should advocate a genuine adherence to religious principles and norms, while political leaders should avoid the practice of double standards in pursuing their politics. There should be no gap between words and deeds. Indeed, the root causes of the tension between the muslim world and the West can be among others found within the persistent global injustice. We should work together to eliminate this global injustice, which serves as a structural cause to the global tension. The West is in a better position to address this problem.

Finally, the elimination of global injustice alone cannot guarantee the birth of a world free from any tension and conflict between the Muslim world and the West. The Muslim world has its own predicament also. Many Muslim, in the fact the majority of Muslim, continue to live within the control of despotic regimes and authoritarian states. This characteristic of most the Muslim world needs to be addressed by both Muslim population and Muslim rulers. Respect for human rights, and a democratic political order, is the path that all of us should take. Freedom is an essence of Islamic teaching. Islam teaches and preaches that human beings should be liberated from exploitation by other human beings. The of a political order that ensures and respect human dignity should be made a priority by Muslim rulers. Genuine tolerance, and a sense of self-confidence among the population, can only prevail in a truly democratic order.

Indeed, a better world requires changes both in the West and in the Muslim world. These changes do not have to be come in a separate process. Both the Muslim world and the West should, and can, work together in addressing and removing the impediments to progress within both civilizations. It only requires an open mind and a genuine effort. The problem is, open mind and genuine effort is still hard to come by. However, we are all forbidden from losing hope. It is this hope that will ensure

the utility of every single step that we are all taking in order to bridge the West and the Muslim world. It is order to bridge th West and the Muslim world. It is through preservation of hope that life continues to be meaningful.