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Indonesian religious leaders call for harmony

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MALANG, Indonesia -- A few days before Indonesia celebrated its Independence Day, six religious leaders in East Java province's Malang city signed a communiqué calling on the nation to promote tolerance and harmony.

The leaders represent Indonesia's six officially recognized religions: Buddhism, Catholicicm, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Protestantism.

They signed their Joint Communiqué of Religious Leaders on Aug. 14, just ahead of Indonesia's Independence Day on Aug. 17. It states that they "reject all kinds of violence done in the name of religion" and they "ask all the nation's entities to uphold the principles of peace and togetherness."

The signatories are: Chamzawi, adviser to the Malang branch of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Islamic organization; Father Ignatius Adam Suncoko, head of Malang diocese's Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; Reverend Gunawan Yuli Agung Suprabowo, a Protestant lecturer at Balai Wiyata Institute of Theology in Malang; Ida Bagus Bajra, head of the Malang branch of the Indonesian Council of Hinduism (Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia); Malang Hariono, secretary of the Malang branch's Trusteeship Council of Indonesian Buddhists (Walubi); and Bunsu Anton Triyono, a Confucian.

Their communiqué declares: "Indonesia is a nation developed within religious and cultural diversity. Therefore, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia must be maintained as a communal living space by giving priority to tolerance and harmony."

The leaders called on "all religious leaders to be consistent with their role in promoting humanity and morality and to defend those who are weak."

Largely Muslim Indonesia has endured bitter communal conflicts in the past.

About 150 university students and activists from various local NGOs witnessed the signing ceremony. The Center for Cultural Development Study run by Averroes, a local NGO involved in social issues, initiated the ceremony.

The center's director, Riansyah, told UCA News he organized the event because religious leaders are committed to addressing problems that confront the nation, including violence, corruption and poverty. "In this pluralistic nation, we have to resolve these problems together," he stressed.

Chamzawi, one of the signatories who spoke with UCA News about the ceremony, said Indonesia's Independence Day should be an occasion for people to reflect on the state of their country, and the signing ceremony was meant to promote harmony among all religious believers in the pluralistic nation.

"There are differences indeed," he said, "but there is one thing in common: we all are human beings who have goodwill. We do not need to question this."

The Muslim leader suggested that all religious leaders keep urging their followers to promote harmony and develop brotherhood among religions.

Father Suncoko agreed. He told UCA News that the communiqué signing reflects the commitment of the religious leaders to national life, and such commitment must be reiterated every time Independence Day is observed.

Indonesia gained its independence 63 years ago, the diocesan priest noted, but its people still face problems such as corruption and poverty, and "we must resolve them together." Diversity in the nation must be respected, he added, and all believers should promote tolerance and harmony in daily life.

Hariono shares that view. He said Indonesia's ideal of pluralism has existed ever since the nation's struggle for independence, and it must be upheld.

According to Bajra, the country's greatest concern is corruption and it must be stopped. A joint effort by the different groups in Indonesian society is needed to eliminate corruption and poverty in the nation, he said.

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