

“NU and Contemporary Indonesian Islam”

Open Forum with

Dr. Hasyim Muzadi
President, Nahdlatul Ulama

February 8, 2008

Indonesian Islam is, in essence, moderate, and NU is actively taking steps to confront the virulent strains of Islam now being seen in the country, according to Dr. Hasyim Muzadi, President of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization.

Muzadi described how Indonesian Islam, combined with Indonesian culture, rejects violence. He pinpointed the entrance of violent and radical elements to 1998 and the fall of the Suharto regime. Describing the Constitution under Suharto as a bulwark against radical global influences, Muzadi blamed the weakening of the Constitution during the Reformasi period for the entrance of global and Middle Eastern radical influences into Indonesia. Muzadi

described Indonesia as a victim of terrorism, especially since 9/11.

During this period, there have been increasing calls for Indonesia to become an Islamic state, but Muzadi emphasized that NU and Muhammadiyah want Indonesia to be an Islamic society, not an Islamic state.

In response, NU has undertaken several steps to combat religious violence. Firstly, NU itself has consolidated internally to ward off outside influences; it has invited other Islamic organizations to join NU in combating violence; NU has worked with organizations of other religions to combat radicalism in all religions; NU offices have made themselves into centers of religious discussion and interaction; it has sponsored international efforts in terrorist

“origin” countries, including sponsoring an international organization of clerics; and NU has cooperated with Indonesian police and intelligence organizations.

Muzadi went on to describe how NU is actively trying to correct “wayward” groups, and to bring them back into the fold of mainstream Islam. NU also presses the government to ensure that any terrorists get due process, as a security crackdown will only engender “revenge” and a lack of useful intelligence on their activities.

Partially as a result of this activity, Indonesia has not experienced a terrorist attack in over a year. Muzadi said that in the future, Indonesia can overcome the problem of terror by gradually taking away the “space” within society for terrorists to operate.

In response to a question regarding radical elements in the 2009 elections, Muzadi said that radical groups and individuals would likely not be able to enter the party process, and thus the elections.

Muzadi also said that he expects support for the PKS will continue to decline in the 2009 election, and that he has seen many young

former PKS supporters returning to NU and Muhammadiyah.

Muzadi agreed with a questioner that there is foreign money flowing to radical groups in Indonesia, but that liberal groups are also receiving added funds. In fact, there has been growth in liberal groups precisely because of the growth of radical groups in Indonesia. He made clear that NU does not receive any foreign funds because it would undermine its neutrality. NU is more content, he said, to build its own network of enterprises in such sectors as agriculture and mining.

In response to a question about sharia law in Indonesia, Muzadi emphasized that all Muslims have a duty to abide by sharia edicts. The question really is whether it needs to be done at the individual level or in a state context. Muzadi said that he believed that sharia was appropriate for civil society, but not for the state, especially since this would shut out groups from other religions. He went on to say that he does not believe that 70% of Indonesians are in favor of sharia, as some polls claim, and in any case, the state should not be enforcing Islamic law.

Talking about the Indonesian election system, Muzadi expressed his opinion that there is a real

burden on political parties with the number of national-level elections that are held. He said that every five years, six national-level elections are held, creating an

expensive burden for political parties. He thought a return to the old system with only direct elections for President and the Parliament was appropriate.