

Fostering Tolerant Religious Education to Prevent Violent Extremism in Indonesia – CONVEY Indonesia

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CONVEY Indonesia aims to build peace in Indonesia and to prevent violent extremism and radicalism through a series of research-survey, policy advocacy, and public interaction based on the potential of religious education. CONVEY Indonesia project covers on the issues of tolerance, diversity and non-violence among youth.

Revitalizing the Function of Mosques as Center of Religious Literacy in the millennial era

CSRC UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

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Executive Summary

The strengthening of communication and information through digital platform resulted in how massive religious *dakwah* becomes and how fast it is shared using various available social media channels. *Jamaah* in the millennial era are finding it easier to access religious lectures on Youtube or Facebook, Digital preachers have sprung up and reached thousands and even millions of visitors. Inevitably, digital media today has become an important source of religious literacy for Muslims and has started replacing the role of mosques and traditional Islamic institutions.

It is imposible and unnecessary to stem the flow of religious *dakwah* in the digital media. The mosque is demanded to keep up with digital *dakwah* through revitalization of its function as the center of Muslims' in the millennial era. Considering that there are limitations in digital *dakwah*, one of them being that it only touches the surface of religious teachings. Apart from that, most of the information in the digital world is less accountable from the perspective of Islamic teaching. Most of the information is also used for radicalism, intolerance and fanaticism. Reinforcing the mosque's function as the center for religious literacy can help Muslims, especially millennial adolescents, to be more critical in selecting content that is being served in the digital world.

Furthermore, they are expected to be able to produce and spread more constructive religious literacy for the development of peaceful, tolerant, and respectful social life in Indonesia.

In order to achieve the mentioned objectives above, synergy is needed between

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Local Government (District/City), Higher Education, Indonesian Mosque Council, and *mubaligh* associations, in supporting the efforts of revitalizing the mosque's functions as center for religious literacy through the following policies:

- formulating general and specific instructions for organizing religious literacy activities in the mosque.
- building the capacity of the mosque's takmir in improving the quality of organizing religious literacy in mosques, including the provision of facilities, infrastructure and ,supporters, especially the mosque library.
- enhancing the capacity of preachers, and *mubaligh* of religious literacy in the mosque
- enhancing takmir capacity of the mosque to revitalize the activities of the mosque's youth in helping the prosperity of religious literacy in the mosque.

Background

The government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs has given considerable attention towards mosques at all levels. It is proven by the issuance of a decree of Director General of Islamic Community Guidance No DJ.II / 802 of 2014 concerning Standards Mosque Management Guidance. Besides focusing on management aspects (*idarah*) and facilities and infrastructure (*ri'ayah*), the Ministry of Religion policies are also paying attention to standards mosque prosperity (*imarah*), both in terms of implementation of worship (prayer), and education and also social. By making the mosque as a mean of religious education, the

government considers the function of the mosque as a religious literacy institution. To what extent the development of religious literacy practices in an important point to be highlighted in this *policy brief*.

The study conducted by CSRC UIN Jakarta in collaboration with CONVEY and PPIM UIN Jakarta in 7 Cities/Districts (2018) found that religious literacy of mosque's Takmir, Imam and Khatib are still classified low. Religious literacy referred to here is an understanding of Islam on its application aspects in a social-historic context change; about how the Qur'an and the hadith is interpreted, discussed, and applied by Muslims in different time and place.

In regard to the ability of reading and understanding verses of the Al-Qur'an and the Prophet's Hadith as an ideal doctrine (basic religious literacy), *khatib*, takmir and imam of the mosque in general has met the standards, especially, those who have finished their education from Islamic tertiary institutions and / or Islamic boarding schools. They generally have mastery of basic literacy and are considered as capable. However, only a small number is considered capable in advanced literacy, which includes the ability to understand various Islamic discourses, especially in the fields of Fiqh, Kalam, and Sufism. Religious literacy referred to by al-Syami (2018) as *Fiqh al-Tadayyun*, if well-developed, can function as a doorstep to religious attitudes and understandings that are absolutist, namely a religious attitude that emphasizes only on itself interpretation as the most correct.

Absolutism in religion can lead people to a closed attitude, fanaticism, intolerance and even radicalism. For example, people with absolute tendencies in religion will assume a different political choice as a matter of *aqidah* that is non-negotiable. As a matter of fact, in Sunni's point of view, a political choice is a problem of *ijtihad*, namely the decision taken is based on consideration of the mind which is relative. In addition,

the study also found that millennial youth are not interested in exploring Islam in the mosque. They see religious discourse in the mosque as boring and find that doing so does not lead to the answers they need as teenagers looking for their true identity. On the other side, their fondness for cyberspace or the digital world is increasingly distancing them from religious studies (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) in mosques because the internet provides a variety of literacy that is more attractive to young viewers and is able to answer to their needs. Concerning the pattern of religious literacy delivered on social media or digital, observations have shown that religious narratives that are served on social media, although tend to appear more interesting, are also more instant and do not have an in-depth elaboration. Islamic discourse delivered by preachers with millions of viewers tend to be indoctrinative and lack the ability to present a diversity of discourse about Islam and its relation to social, cultural, economic, political and humanitarian issues.

In other words, due to its instant nature and focus on packaging rather than the contents of its message, religious literacy in social media only functions as something that strengthens Islamic identity among Muslims, rather than becoming a place to understand Islamic tradition and its great civilization. Inviting back young children to *bertafaqquh fi al-din* in the mosque is a strategic step in order to revitalize the function of the mosque as the center of Islamic religious literacy and Islamic culture.

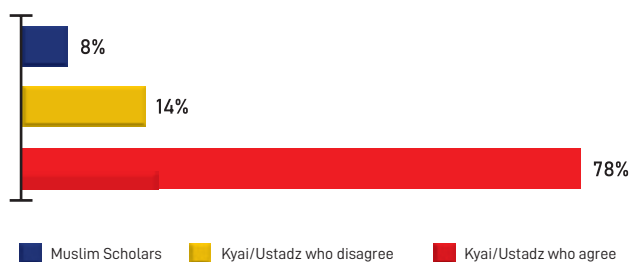
Enhancing Religious Literacy In The Mosque

The study conducted by CSRC UIN Jakarta (al-Makassary and Gaus, 2010; CSRC Team, 2018) found that religious literacy in mosques in various regions in Indonesia, especially those located at the district and city level still carried out conventionally, i.e. through normative religious sermons and lectures

and they tend to be indoctrinative. Not many mosques hold discussions that discuss social, cultural, economic topics and politics from an Islamic perspective. In a big city like Jakarta, only several mosques stated that they have had discussions forum that invited Muslim scholars as guest speaker. Generally, mosques in the capital city hold Fridays sermons and lectures by presenting Kiai or Ustadz with the same perspective or preachers that are not considered heretical by the MUI fatwa. This data shows that the mosque takmir understand the purpose of religious literacy in mosques is to maintain Islamic orthodoxy through indoctrination of religious understanding (al-Makassary, 2010). Below is the data from the mosque survey results in Jakarta (al-Makassary, 2010).

Graph 1.

Religious Figures Invited as *Khatib*



In some small cities, like Garut and Tasikmalaya, religious literacy is deliberately directed solely for delivering Islamic normative teachings to strengthen *aqidah*, worship and morality of the worshipers. It has become a silent agreement among mosque worshipers in both areas that a preacher should not explore social issues and politics in his sermon although for the purpose of evaluating it from an Islamic perspective. It seems that worshipers and takmir have the view that the sermon should be used to increase piety in particular in worshipping Allah, like Salat, Fasting, Zakat, Hajj, and increasing faith (Nabil, 2018). Realizing faith in social relations, between people with different religion, economy, culture and politics is not considered important and suitable for Friday sermon. While almost all takmir, khatib, and imams

believe in Islam as a *Rahmatan Lil-'alamin* religion, most do not realize the importance of making room for pilgrims to explore how this ideal doctrine is applied in modern context and contemporary pluralistic society. There is no room for learning how Muslims were during the era of The Prophet and his best friends and in the golden age of Islamic civilization (Khilafah Abbasiyah dan Fatimiyah) that implemented the ideal doctrine above according to its unique historical social context.

It seems that the mosque's takmir in 7 regency / city that are used for UIN Jakarta CSRC research location (CSRC Team, 2018) (Banda Aceh, Palembang, DKI Jakarta, Garut & Tasikmalaya, Manado, Ambon and Mataram) are worried about Islamic discourse outside the topics of worship, creed and morals. If these topics are raised in religious sermons or lectures, they can lead to a controversial understanding that results in the creation of unrest among pilgrims. In line with that, the takmir in the 7 districts and cities prefer Islamic discourse delivered at the mosque to emphasize more on harmony and unity and to avoid khilafiyah issue contention. They also tend to reject the pulpit to be used for political campaigns, blaspheming against other Muslims, and spreading hate speech.

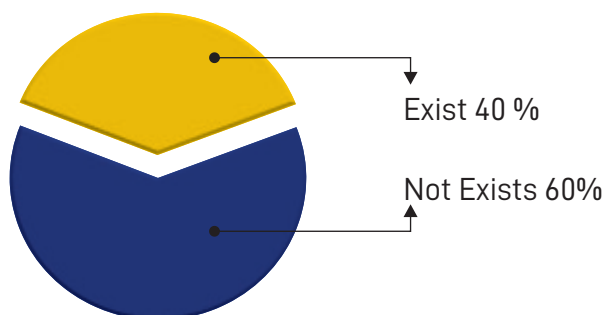
One thing that might not be realized that pilgrims are basically not sterile to various religious views that require discussion and clarification. Nowadays, religious issues related to politics, social and culture can be easily accessed via the internet and social media. Most of the religious narratives on social media, such as posts in WhatsApp groups are not always accountable and most of them do not use scientifically proven methods. Without any effort in holding discussions and exploring issues, we can be sure that pilgrims who have less knowledge about religion will be easily provoked by the messages they read. By avoiding discussions on society, politics, culture, economy and so

on inside the mosque, the takmir has kept the mosque away from its ideal function, which is to provide religious education and enlightenment for all the pilgrims.

The reality today is that people are crammed with massive information from the digital world, some of which being contrary to the Islam *Rahmatan Lil-'alamin*.

The lack of spaces for *tafaqquh fi al-din* in the sense of exploring religious issues in mosque is further compounded by limitations reading source in the mosque. From mosques which was studied in 7 districts and cities, only few mosques have libraries, simply just a small bookcase with very limited books, and which is also rarely used. Survey of mosques in DKI Jakarta (al-Makssary, 2010) found out of 10 only 4 mosques have libraries.

Graph 2 .
Mosque Library in Jakarta



As stated earlier, the Ministry of Religion through the Decision of the Director General of Islamic Society Guidance No DJ.II / 802 of 2014 about the Mosque Management Guidance Standards, has set the mosque to function as religious education facilities. Even inside the standard *imarah* for the great mosques that are located at the district and city level includes some points about religious education in all levels, formal and non-formal. This serves as standardize *imarah* requirement. Takmir also has to provide *khatib* who meets the criteria, decides topics for sermons, and as well as holds various

Islamic study activities in the mosque. However this provision is still too general to be applied well at the level of mosque administrators at the district and city level. The Ministry of Religion needs to formulate more detailed and measurable guidelines

regarding several points related to increasing religious literacy in mosques. Below are some feasible proposals that might be considered:

Some Proposals for the General Director of Islamic Community Guidance of The Ministry of Religion of The Republic of Indonesia

SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS FOR MOSQUES TAKMIR IN ORDER TO IMPROVE RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN THE GREAT MOSQUE

1. Specific instructions for themes and content of regular sermons and recitals
2. Special instructions khatib's criteria and regular lecturer
3. Specific instructions for organizing religious basic literacy in mosques jami' and large mosques, specifically for the level of children, adolescents and adults
4. Specific instructions about teaching staff for basic religious literacy *injami'* mosques (kelurahan) and large mosque (district), both at the level of children, adolescents and adults
5. Special instructions for organizing a Discussion forum (halaqah) of social culture, economy and politics themes in the mosque
6. Specific guide for the criteria of the resource person of Discussion forum (halaqah) on social, cultural, economic and political themes in the mosque
7. Specific description on participant's criteria of Discussion forum (halaqah) on social, cultural, economic and political themes in the mosque

The Ministry of Religion needs to work with the Regional Government (Pemda), Regency and City as well as academics from local tertiary institutions to increase takmir capacity of the great mosque in carrying out religious literacy improvement on each mosque. It includes compiling the syllabus or module for discussion forums or halaqah of the great mosque. In regard to this capacity building, local governments need to establish coordination with the campus library manager at provincial, district or city level for setting up the library's human resources that can be relied on to manage the library of the great mosque in order to maintain qualified religious literacy development activities in the mosque.

In addition, it is also important to strengthen the capacity of *khatib* that serve as sources for religious literacy improvements in the great mosque. The synergy between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Local Governments, Campuses, Indonesian Mosque Councils (DMI) and mubaligh associations is needed to improve religious literacy of *khatib* and *mubaligh* at the district and city level.

Inviting Millennials to Enrich Religious Literacy in the Mosque

UIN Jakarta CSRC research in 7 districts and cities shows the reluctance of millennial adolescents to prosper religious literacy in the mosque. In cities that are included in the research, there are not many mosques organize activities for the youth. Indeed the Decree of the General Director of Islamic Society Guidance No. DJ.II / 802 2014 about the Mosque Management Guidance Standards has included the organization of mosque's youth as one of the management requirements of mosque at all levels, especially in terms of mosque's direction. Nevertheless, as it is found in this study, mosque for millennials, is no more than a place for Friday prayer and for some also for *Fardhu* prayers. For them, religious narratives delivered at the pulpit or sermons

or recitation do not interest them and are not able to answer questions about their interests as millennial generation with their special characteristics. In a study of Muslim millennials, it was found that they were more interested in studying religion through the internet than from teachers of religion. As a matter of fact, religious information on the digital world has replaced the role of the religious teachers in schools (Bamualim et al, 2018). The viral preachers on Youtube and Instagram are loved for their ways of delivering religious messages that are felt to be more contextual and also their interesting and easy to understand rhetoric. Although some people consider digital preaching to be superficial, millennials feel that they are being provided an oasis to quench their thirst of their religion through virtual propaganda. However, on the other side, religious information that is spread on social media cannot be fully accounted for in terms of validity and scientific authority. Without being equipped with critical power and understanding of good and tested religious foundations, millennials can be herded to a radical religious perspective, absolutist, and intolerant. Therefore, a way to equip millennials with the ability to select information they get in the digital world about their religion. The mosque should be able to provide facilities religious studies that function to discuss, confirm and even criticize the religious information of the digital world in a way that emphasizes standards science.

According to Amalee (2019), management model of the traditional mosque did not succeed in inviting young people to actively prosper religious literacy in the mosque. According to him, there has to be some out of the box ways for inviting millennial to prosper the mosque. Some of them are by opening spaces for millennials channeling their interest and creativity (Amalee, 2019). Mosque Takmirs need to understand the characteristics millennials whose lives are attached to cyberspace or

digital communication. Therefore, providing free internet access in the mosque is one way that can be taken in order to attract millennials to spend their “hang out” time at the mosque and socialize with their peers. But, it is not easy to make this happen when mosque administrators are not aware of the importance of using creative ways to invite young people to be active in the mosque. Moreover, usually, mosque takmir is filled by older generations who view the mosque from a traditional point of view, which consider a mosque as a sacred place that must be kept away from profane activities (Lubbi, 2019). Therefore, it's time to think about providing access to young people as part of the mosque management in order to overcome the visible prominent generation gap in mosque management.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Local Government, Campus, and the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI) has to develop a synergy to encourage youth involvement in the management of the mosque. It is necessary to have capacity building activities for mosque caretakers for generating the youth of the mosque, especially in the religious literacy field. Mosques that do not yet have Mosque youth activities can be facilitated to learn from the experiences of mosques that are considered successful in developing literacy activities for the young people. Although in general, mosque youth activities are less interesting, in some mosques of big cities that are well managed, activities for youth look promising. For instance, the youth at Bintaro Jaya Grand Mosque has an organization called REMINSYA (Remaja Masjid Bintaro Jaya). They held creative programs, such as Talk Shows with celebrities, Youth Studies (*Kajian Muda Mudi*), Smart Canteen, and *Gerakan Pemuda Subuh*. Mosque youth which are also famous for being active is RISKA (Sunda Kelapa Mosque Youth / Remaja Masjid Sunda Kelapa). They organize programs such as: SDTNI (Basic Study of Integrated Islamic Values), BMAQ (Guidance to Read Al-Quran Proficiently), Riska Caring (Donation for Poor People or

Affected Natural Disasters), AAR (Riska's foster sister), SDIS (Student's Islamic Basic Studies), Tifhan Pokan (Islamic martial arts), Vocal Class (singing and music), Sister Club (for young women only), and so on. (Alim, 2018).

Policy Recommendations

Based on the description above, the mosque in the millennial era needs to revitalize its function to become the center of religious literacy in the millennial era. In order to achieve this goal, it has to be realized well that the support and synergy of some institutions, from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Local Government) and also Religious Organizations (DMI, Islamic organizations, associations of *mubaligh*) and University.

Below are some policy recommendations that are necessary to be implemented:

1. With reference to the Director's General Decree of Islamic Communities Guidance No DJ.II / 802 of 2014 concerning Mosque Management standards Guidance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs need to formulate general instructions and specifically organizing religious literacy activities in the mosque. To be more participatory, The Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to facilitate the management of the great mosques in regencies and cities that have met the mosque management standards (*idarah, imarah and riayah*) formulating guidelines together.
2. The Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to work together with the local government, and Universities to build the capacity of mosque takmir in improving the quality of organizing religious literacy in the mosque. This includes developing the capacity to manage the mosque library. The pilot great mosque takmir can be involved in this capacity building programs
3. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Local Government, DMI, and Muballigh and Dai Associations need to work together to increase the capacity of the preachers, so

that they can become a reliable source in increasing religious literacy in mosques.

4. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Local Government, The administrator of the pilot mosque, caretaker of Mosque youth pilots need to work together to formulate general instructions and specifically the management of religious literacy by mosque youth.
5. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Local Government need to work together to improve mosque's takmir capacity in revitalizing mosque youth activities to participate in enriching religious literacy in the mosque. Comparative study programs and internships in mosque youth pilot mosque need to be done by involving potential young children from districts and cities.

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