

## **“Asian WYD,” the sultan welcomes young Catholics**

*Indonesia hosts an event with many interreligious meanings: Christians support the government in the struggle against Islamic radicalism*



*The sultan (on the right) playing the othok-othok while inaugurating the “Asian WYD”*

### **PAOLO AFFATATO, VATICAN INSIDER, 3 AUGUST 2017**

Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, governor of Yogyakarta, playing the othok-othok - a Javanese traditional musical instrument - officially opens the event; this poignant picture is embedded with all the meaning of the **Asian Youth Day**, an event organized by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences which, for a week, brings together young Catholics from twenty-two Asian nations on the streets of Yogyakarta, a town on the Indonesian island of Java.

**The Sultan, the civil and religious leader of the Yogyakarta Province, offered his support to the Catholic gathering** by granting the use of a large conference center hosting the various events of the week free of charge: meetings, seminars, catechesis, theater and music performances, prayer and reflection experiences, all of them centered on the subject of multiculturalism and harmony between different cultures and religions.

The focus of what is known as the **“Asian WYD”** - World Youth Day is the source of inspiration - is **“Living the Gospel together in a multicultural Asia”** and no better country than **Indonesia** to host an event where the Catholic Church promotes the paradigm for coexistence among the faithful of different religions starting from the younger generations while this most populous Islamic country in the world is shaken by the turmoil of radical Islam which challenges tolerance and social harmony.

The Archbishop of Jakarta and President of the Indonesian bishops, Ignazio Suharyo, clearly spells this out to Vatican Insider.

“Indonesia is a pluralist and multicultural country by nature, with over three thousand ethnic groups and eleven thousand local languages. **Through its young people, the country can teach pluralistic and peaceful coexistence among men and religions to other Asian countries. Our young people provide an example of unity**, embodying the “unity in diversity” which is the nation’s motto. But it is an approach that can and should be **exported to all Asian contexts and beyond”**.

Yogyakarta, in particular, is considered a “micro-Indonesia” for its innate religious and cultural pluralism; it hosts over sixty state and private universities, colleges and academies; it welcomes young people from all over the nation who populate streets, bars, libraries, squares, temples and markets, which make “Yogya” (as it is widely known) a multicolored oasis.

The city is in itself a special one; Yogyakarta is, in fact, the only Indonesian province still governed by a **pre-colonial sultan who has led a sort of mini-theocracy** since his father, a half-century ago, contributed to the struggle for independence from the Dutch and then agreed to be part of the Indonesian Republic.

Today, the Sultan is the illuminated leader of a cheerful, pluralistic, open, fertile city of ideas and transcultural initiatives where citizens of all religions appreciate his work and never question the institutional exception of a hereditary ruler. The city, strong in a collective consciousness and open to the most diverse contributions, hosted the Asian Youth Day, which brought over two thousand young people from 22 countries, 52 bishops (including six cardinals) and 158 priests to Yogya.

In this particular context, the Asian WYD is characterized by a **deep interreligious meaning: in the most populous Muslim country in the world, young Muslims take part in the scheduled events and are even involved in the organizing committee. The Indonesian Government also provided financial and political support** through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry for Youth and Sport.

President Joko Widodo also counts on Christians (about 10% of the 250 million inhabitants, including 7.5 million Catholics compared to 85% Muslim inhabitants) to counter, in the name of the concept of civic duty, the return of Islamic extremism that is creating widespread concern.

**The basis of civic coexistence, strongly reiterated by Widodo, is the “Pancasila”, a charter with five principles governing the social life of such a multifaceted nation which strengthen the national identity to help prevent balkanization of the country.**

**The Pancasila, by outlining a democratic state where religion has a weight, but is not the basis of a theocracy, provides shelter from the sirens of the Islamic State.**

The Caliphate set in motion a massive propaganda operation in southeast Asia, finding fertile ground in some Indonesian radical groups such as the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, which, thanks to a recent measure approved by the executive, could be banned without going through the courts.