

Groups condemn planned Koran burning

Arghea Desafti Hapsari, The Jakarta Post, 5 August 2010

Religious leaders and promoters of pluralism in the country have condemned the plans of a church in Florida in the US to burn copies of the Koran to mark the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI), the Parisada Hindu Council and the Indonesia Confucianism High Assembly (Matakin) are among the religious organizations grouped under the Movement for Pluralism that made a joint statement Wednesday denouncing the planned act as “a despicable, uncivilized [act that] must be condemned”.

Other groups in the movement include the Wahid Institute, the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), the Moderate Muslim Society and the Christian Youth Movement of Indonesia (Gamki).

The statement calls for the US government “to immediately stop the uncivilized plan [that] not only constitutes a violation of human rights, but can also trigger religious tension and conflict all over the world”.

Muslim intellectual Zuhairi Misrawi, also the director of Moderate Muslim Society, said the plan has the potential to harm the relatively conducive current atmosphere of religious tolerance around the world. “But we have to remember that [those who are planning the event] do not represent a certain religion, because most Christians have also condemned [the burning],” he said, dismissing the planners as “a tiny fringe group out of almost three billion Christians”.

The Gainesville, Florida-based Dove World Outreach Center has promoted the event on its website and Facebook page “in remembrance of the fallen victims of 9/11 and to stand against ... Islam,” reads the announcement. The page has drawn more than 3,200 fans and an inevitable rival page, which has attracted more than 8,300 “likes” from Facebook users as of late Wednesday.

Zuhairi said communities of moderate Muslims and pluralist groups in the country need to “keep the issue a local one”. “We are trying to be tolerant in seeing this issue. We believe this results from their incomprehension of Islam,” he said, adding that Muslims also lacked an understanding of Christianity.

The Movement for Pluralism also called on people around the world, especially in Indonesia, to not be encouraged to commit similar violence and to maintain security and harmony among one another.

Muslim cleric Nuril Arifin Husein, or Gus Nuril, expressed his concern over the increasing number of violent incidents committed by hard-line religious organizations in the country.

The Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace released a report in late July highlighting the escalating trend of employing violence to suppress the religious freedoms of minority groups in the world’s largest Muslim-majority country. The report shows there were 28 attacks on Christian churches between January and July this year. The figure is higher than the 2009 year-end total of 18 cases and the 17 attacks in 2008.

“Religion has become a false god nowadays. People are up in arms... some defending Islam, some defending Christianity. I’d imagine God would ask them why they are worshipping Islam or Christianity and not Him,” Gus Nuril said.

In the statement made Wednesday, the organization urged the Indonesian Government to keep doing its duty as the guardian of religious freedom in the country.