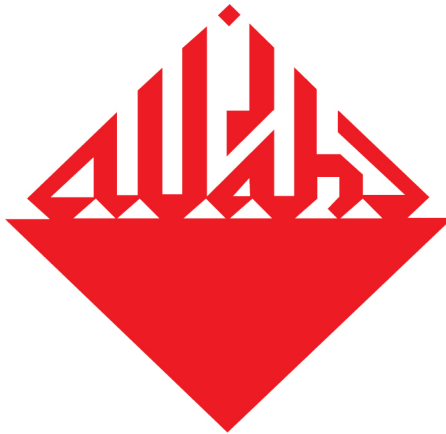


# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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Ridwan, Djayadi Hanan, & Tri Sulistianing Astuti

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*Ridwan, Djayadi Hanan, & Tri Sulistianing Astuti*

## Examining New Public Diplomacy and Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia: Cases of World Peace Forum (WPF) and Religion Twenty (R20)

**Abstract:** *This paper delves into the relationship between new public diplomacy and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia by explicating the cases of the World Peace Forum and Religion Twenty. Using qualitative methods, the article holistically explores the emergence, goals, actors, and dynamics of both religious organizations' diplomacy. This study demonstrates that both forums aim to promote world peace by introducing "Moderate Islam" as the face of Indonesian diplomacy. The findings in this paper also show several strengths and weaknesses of the two forums. This paper analyses the topic from a broader perspective by using the new public diplomacy theory and theory of change from the perspective of interfaith dialogue. Hence, this paper concentrates on enriching the academic understanding of interfaith diplomacy as a reference in the development of interfaith diplomacy in other countries.*

**Keywords:** New Public Diplomacy, Interfaith Dialogue, World Peace Forum, Religion Twenty, Indonesia.



**Abstrak:** Artikel ini menjelaskan hubungan antara diplomasi publik baru dan dialog antar-agama di Indonesia dengan mengkaji kasus World Peace Forum (Muhammadiyah) dan Religion Twenty (Nahdlatul Ulama). Menggunakan metode kualitatif, artikel ini mengeksplorasi kemunculan, tujuan, aktor, dan dinamika diplomasi dua organisasi keagamaan tersebut. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua forum tersebut bertujuan untuk mempromosikan perdamaian dunia dengan memperkenalkan “Islam Moderat” sebagai wajah diplomasi Indonesia. Temuan dalam artikel ini juga menunjukkan beberapa kekuatan dan kelemahan dari kedua forum tersebut. Dalam menganalisis, tulisan ini menggunakan pandangan yang lebih luas dengan memanfaatkan teori diplomasi publik baru dan teori perubahan dari perspektif dialog antar-agama. Karenanya, artikel ini memperkaya pemahaman akademik mengenai diplomasi antar-agama sebagai satu rujukan dalam pengembangan diplomasi publik di negara-negara lain.

**Kata kunci:** Diplomasi Publik Baru, Dialog Antariman, World Peace Forum, R20, Indonesia.

**ملخص:** يشرح هذا المقال العلاقة بين الدبلوماسية العامة الجديدة والحوار بين الأديان في إندونيسيا من خلال دراسة حالي المتدى العالمي للسلام (المحمدية) ومنتدى الدين العشرين (تحضة العلماء). وباستخدام الأساليب النوعية، يستكشف هذا المقال نشأة وأهداف والجهات الفاعلة وديناميكيات دبلوماسية المنظمين الدينيتين. وتظهر الدراسة أن كلا المنتدين يهدفان إلى تعزيز السلام العالمي من خلال تقديم “الإسلام المعتدل” كوجه للدبلوماسية الإندونيسية. كما تظهر النتائج الواردة في هذه المقالة بعض نقاط القوة والضعف في المنتدين. ويلقي المقال في تحليله نظرة أوسع من خلال استخدام نظرية الدبلوماسية العامة الجديدة ونظرية التغيير من منظور الحوار بين الأديان. ولذلك، فإن هذا المقال يثري الفهم الأكاديمي للدبلوماسية بين الأديان كمرجع في تطوير الدبلوماسية العامة في الدول الأخرى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإسلام والنسوية، حركة التقوى، مساحة للتعبير النسائي، الدعوة.

Two decades ago, a series of terrorist acts, including the 9/11 tragedy in 2001 in the United States, the Bali bombing in Indonesia, and the Madrid bombing, worsened outside perspectives on Islamic teaching and directly shaped adverse public opinion toward Muslim countries. Consequently, these events influenced how a Muslim country could narrate and conduct its public diplomacy to establish international credibility. The growing attention to religious motives and violent acts encouraged initiatives facilitating interfaith dialogue from Muslim countries and non-state actors such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and faith-based organizations. Interfaith dialogue has become an inseparable part of efforts to counter the adverse effects of religious conflicts. Carried out jointly between state and non-state actors, it is an essential part of the new public diplomacy (NPD) approach (Kim 2017; Jan Melissen 2005). NPD acknowledges the role of non-state actors, transnational and domestic, as having the capacity to be involved in public diplomacy due to the availability of information networks. The primacy of a state as a sole actor in conducting public diplomacy has ended. And the formation of public opinion, which was initially monopolistic, one-way, and limited to a government communication channel, had shifted into non-state-centric communication networks (Huijgh 2019, 174–75; Kim 2017, 301).

Interfaith dialogue is often expressed as a unique interaction between religious groups to bridge understanding between them (Hoffman and Thelen 2018, 1). In practice, interfaith dialogue is a complicated process (Zhang 2022, 2017). In Indonesia, interfaith dialogue plays a significant role in its foreign policies, especially in public diplomacy. The “Moderate Islam” project was launched by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2006, and marked one part of the involvement of Indonesia in the War on Terror in Southeast Asia (Umar 2016, 419). As a Muslim-majority country, Islam in Indonesia has been a niche narrative in public diplomacy (Azra 2015, 132), along with the democratization of international politics (Huijgh 2019, 182). In this sense, Indonesia portrays itself as an example of a Muslim-majority democratic country that has interreligious harmony. Therefore, interfaith dialogue has been integrated into Indonesian public diplomacy in response to the 9/11 tragedy and Arab Spring 2011 (Jen Melissen 2015).

The presidencies of Megawati, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Joko Widodo actively involved Islamic organizations representing moderate values, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. These organizations held interfaith dialogue events in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA): the World Peace Forum (WPF) initiated by Muhammadiyah and Religion Twenty (R20) from NU. The latest two rounds of these interfaith dialogue activities were conducted in November 2022 with an international scale of participants and organizers.

WPF has been held eight times since the 1<sup>st</sup> event in 2006 with the theme of “One Humanity, One Destiny, One Responsibility”. Din Syamsuddin initiated this first event under the umbrella of Muhammadiyah and the Multi Culture Society. Later WPFs were organized by the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC), directed by Din Syamsuddin, and The Cheng Ho Multi Culture Education Trust (CMET), founded by Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew. The 8<sup>th</sup> WPF was conducted on 16-18 November 2022 and focused on interfaith dialogue to achieve world peace and prosperity (World Peace Forum 2022).

R20 was held in Bali, 2-3 November 2022, with the theme of “Revealing and Nurturing Religion as a Source of Global Solutions: An International Movement for Shared Moral and Spiritual Values”. The idea of R20 originated from Yahya Cholil Staqf (Gus Yahya), the chairman of NU. R20 was collaboratively organized by NU and the Muslim World League (MWL). It was a side event of the G20 meetings in 2022. It was projected to be held annually at the G20 summit. However, in the G20 meetings in 2023 in India, R20 was cancelled, and instead, the G20 Inter Faith Forum was held (Ridwan 2023).

For more than two decades, Indonesia’s foreign policy has used “Moderate Islam” as part of its public diplomacy narrative. Little is known, however, about how interfaith dialogue is diffused and supports Indonesian public diplomacy. We can better understand Indonesian public diplomacy by thinking about it through NPD, interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding perspectives. We argue that there is a diffusion of interfaith dialogue and NPD because interfaith dialogue manifests public diplomacy as an instrument to promote the Indonesia’s strategy of “Moderate Islam” in world politics. We analyze

the role of the WFP and R20 since these forums were initiated. We trace the involvement of transnational non-state actors, and how they became integral to Indonesia's public diplomacy after the 9/11 tragedy. Both forums aim for long-term and sustainable diplomacy that shapes public opinion to benefit Indonesia's foreign policies.

### **Changing Circumstances: From Traditional Public Diplomacy to the New Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy as a phrase was first coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965. Diplomacy is a means to influence public attitudes about creating and implementing foreign policies by making the state an exclusive central actor (Cull 2009, 19; Jan Melissen 2005, 7; Wei 2020, 2). The state controls the dynamics of public diplomacy to maintain a positive image of the state through a hierarchical and one-way monopoly on message dissemination and feedback to shape public opinion (Jan Melissen 2005, 11–16). Government broadcast media is a critical means of communicating messages and propaganda (Rawnsley 2021, 36).

This traditional paradigm has experienced a radical transformation due to the democratization of communication, and changes in international politics after the Cold War have encouraged fundamental changes in theory and methodology in public diplomacy (Gilboa 2008, 57; Jan Melissen 2005, 7–9). The state is no longer the sole actor in public diplomacy, because non-state actors can be involved in public diplomacy due to the availability of information networks. The Internet has become a favorable ecosystem for individuals and groups to form 'networks' in NPD (Hocking 2005, 36–37). The unlimited reach of digital media reduces the state's control. For example, ideas advocating universal values outside of a public diplomacy agenda can spread through digital platforms. Consequently, diplomatic messaging from outside of the state can reach the intended and non-target public (Rawnsley 2021, 36). Nye (2008) suggests that public diplomacy as a soft power instrument should at least cover three dimensions to deal with the new conditions of the information age: (1) daily communication to explain domestic and foreign policy; (2) strategic communication on specific topics; and (3) a long-term cultural relationship to promote a positive image and policy results for a country and must beyond propaganda (Nye 2008, 101–2).

Under those circumstances, scholars coined the term NPD, highlighting the effort to fit public diplomacy into the information age and the international relations revolution (Gilboa 2008; Jan Melissen 2005). Melissen (2005) sees that NPD has been central to foreign policy. At the same time, the rise of non-state actors has created more complexity and challenges in reconciling domestic and foreign information. Therefore, two-way communication is necessary as a mode of information exchange between states and the public. Like Nye, Melissen emphasizes that NPD should be separated from propaganda, nation branding, and intercultural relationships (Jan Melissen 2005, 11–16). Similarly, Gilboa offers a comprehensive list of NPD's characteristics.

“...the interactivity between states and non-state actors; utilization of “soft power,” two-way communication, strategic public diplomacy, media framing, information management, PR, nation branding, self-presentation, and e-image; domestication of foreign policy; and addressing both short and long-term issues” (Gilboa 2008, 58)

Notwithstanding that some accounts differentiate NPD from traditional public diplomacy, Wei (2020) states that NPD and traditional diplomacy acknowledge that “the government is the initiator and important promoter.” In other words, the state remains an indispensable actor in public diplomacy even though the involvement of NGOs and the public is increasing. Diplomatic activities carried out by non-state actors represent the sovereign state, in which government remains the essential attribute (Wei 2020, 2–3). It follows that government's role in WPF and R20 should not be analytically sidelined. These two events inevitably represent Indonesia in the international world.

### **Theory of Change from the Perspective of Interfaith Dialogue**

Hurd (2015) warns against placing religion as a stable category in the formation of foreign policy or international humanitarian advocacy issues. A stable understanding of religion reduces insight into the complexity of problems, which can worsen efforts to manage and resolve conflicts democratically. She offers three concepts of religion to frame the unstable category of religion between expert religion, official religion, and lived religion. Expert religion refers to religion as defined by those who produce “policy-relevant knowledge” of religion in various situations. At this point, religion is recognized to have two “faces of

faith": providing solutions and simultaneously serving as a source of problems. These two faces shape the contemporary international relations of religious diversity among countries. By contrast, lived religion is the practice of the common people or groups that may not be related to "religion for law and governance". Finally, official religion or governed religion is defined by those "in the position of political and religious power, such as the state through the law, international organizations, and even religious organizations (Hurd 2015, 9).

At the same time, scholars have increasingly recognised that religion is a common idea, a "shared social identity", that shapes foreign policy and state action. States are also constrained by the policies and actions of actors in international relations based on those shared understandings. In this sense, from a liberal perspective, Warner & Walker (2011) suggest that to research religion and its relationship to the formulation of a state's foreign policy, "one would need to focus on institutional features of a religion and its connection with the state". Religious beliefs are typically disseminated and overseen by religious organizations. These organizations often prioritize their survival and ongoing development, which can shape their interactions with the state through strategies such as compromise, pressure, negotiation, and competition with political authorities. The actions taken by these organizations may sometimes contradict their fundamental religious beliefs. They are often pursued to achieve goals that appear to be more secularly motivated. In other words, religion requires structural mechanisms to influence foreign policy effectively. In this regard, Warner and Walker's agent-based theory highlights the significance of individuals in leadership positions in shaping foreign policy. These leaders bring their belief systems into the decision-making process, influencing the beliefs of others involved in determining policy outcomes (Warner and Walker 2011, 122–26). Hurd's three concepts of religion, and religious organizations' efforts to influence foreign policy and vice versa are the battleground for interfaith dialogue (Hurd 2015, 40) but shared religious as common ideas (Warner and Walker 2011, 122).

The increased emergence of interfaith dialogue can be traced back to the circumstances surrounding 9/11, which brought attention to the perception of religion as a source of violence. Samuel Huntington (1996) emphasized that the source of civilizational conflicts in the world is no longer based on ideology and economics but based on culture and

religion (Huntington 1996) . In the same vein, Gerrie Ter Haar (2005) states that the West re-echoes the idea that religion is one of the pillars for the emergence of most violent conflicts in the modern world (G. Ter Haar 2005). However, there was different opinion on that issue. For example, Cavanaugh (2009) argues that the idea that religion is inherently prone to violence is a foundational myth used to justify the liberal state's efforts to shift religion from the public sphere to the private sphere. For instance, the "wars of religion" in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries marked a significant milestone in the formation of the modern state. The state positioned itself as a peacemaker, demanding loyalty from various religious groups while promoting secularism in the West, based on the notion that religion tends to lead to violence. This myth has persisted over time and influences the West's response to the "non-Western Other," legitimizing violent repression. The claim about religion as "absolutist, divisive, and irrational" is false and misleading as secular ideologies such as liberalism and nationalism could birth violence as well as "absolutist, divisive, and irrational" to achieve their goal (Cavanaugh 2009, 9–13). Thus, a key issue that must be addressed in interfaith diplomacy is combating the misconception that portrays religion as a source of violence.

Interfaith dialogue is often described as a form of particular interaction between religious groups to bridge understanding and foster respect, cooperation, and collaboration. Interfaith dialogue can occur at various communication levels, from individual to institutional, wherein institutions appoint spokespersons from particular faiths. As the number of groups involved in interfaith dialogue increases, there is a risk of political motivations that can hinder understanding of the other side's position (Hoffman and Thelen 2018, 1–3). Interfaith dialogue is inherently complicated (Zhang 2022, 2017) because it involves organizations with different intentions that can hinder dialogue objectives.

David Smock (2022), in *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, mentions various interactions/activities involved in interfaith dialogue with the following details:

1. Collective talks by elite religious leaders to support peace;
2. Mediating conflicts between combatants by interfaith institutions;
3. Grassroots participants from various religious groups gather to encourage interaction between groups and create agents of reconciliation derived from dialogue participants;

4. Focusing on the similarity of scriptural teachings and values among conflicting religious groups to reduce hostility due to theological differences;
5. Organizing dialogue during conflict and post-conflict to promote reconciliation;
6. Conflict resolution training to achieve the goals of interfaith dialogue (Smock 2002, 128–31).

Although initiatives and the organization of interfaith dialogue have been in place for a long time, building respect across individuals and religious groups is not an instant process. In Smock's study, one way to change perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors through interfaith dialogue is to refer to the theory of change. The theory of change is a method that describes a series of interventions/programs in which one activity leads to a slight shift and then leads to achieving the desired long-term change based on causal analysis and available evidence (The United Nations Development Group 2017, 3).

According to Neufeldt (2011), there are three dominant ways that change occurs: theological, political, and peacebuilding perspectives (Neufeldt 2011, 24, 346). Each perspective has different characteristics, goals, and intended change levels through interfaith dialogue. Theological approaches are primarily apolitical, yet violent conflict often inspires the emergence of dialogue. Dialogue seeks to influence individuals and relationships in the conversation group and to deepen understanding of ideas, doctrines, practices, and values, maybe developing common ideals. It also seeks to foster respectful, enriching relationships that encourage active theology. Meanwhile, political perspectives are often motivated by political context and contention. It seeks structural change. Religious leaders may seek "peace agreements, public statements, or political processes" as an element of structural change. As moral leaders, religious leaders may boost the legitimacy of political peace efforts of secular leaders. But these perspectives ignore psychological and interpersonal changes, concentrating on political or diplomatic solutions. Dialogue also emphasizes social coexistence, understanding, and harmony among people of various religions rather than theological conversations. On the other hand, the peacebuilding perspective reframes interfaith dialogue as a tool for multiple transformations. It promotes understanding, mutual respect, and care,



broadens peace process participation, and serves as a foundation for community and other sector efforts (education, economic livelihoods cooperation). Thus, it aims to change the personal to the relational, structural, and cultural levels (Neufeldt 2011, 4, 365).

Peacebuilding seems to be the most suitable perspective for analyzing whether interfaith dialogue has the aim and capacity to be part of a country's public diplomacy. It seeks to influence individual and group relations to shape public opinion according to the country's diplomatic agenda. To achieve the effects of dialogue and contribute to socio-political change, the interfaith dialogue should consider the following: participants are strategically selected based on analyzing groups identified as essential in the conflict; interfaith dialogue uses the media to disseminate ideas to build broad support for change; external individuals or religious bodies often support local efforts by increasing pressure on political or religious leaders and providing resources to expand the range of activities (Neufeldt 2011, 359–60). Hence, interfaith dialogue will form the basis of networks that mitigate conflict or address the root causes of conflict. The United Nations Development Group (2017) issued practical guidelines for applying change theory, with the steps shown in Figure 2.



Figure 1. Model of Application of Theory of Change. Sources: (The United Nations Development Group 2017)

The first step begins by focusing on the high-level changes R20 and WPF aim to achieve in the context of NPD and peacebuilding. Second, identify the things needed to accomplish the intended shift, before reflecting on the assumptions about the expected change and its risks. The final step is to identify partners and actors who are best suited to the goals of change. Each step must be validated with evidence and other stakeholder perspectives during the theory development process

to ensure the theory of change is based on the overall program objectives (The United Nations Development Group 2017, 5).

### **Diffusion of Interfaith Dialogue and New Public Diplomacy**

A study by Hrynkow (2018) on Religion For Peace, a network-based global coalition in over 90 nation-states, demonstrates how multi-track diplomacy influences mutually positive relations to build peace. The nine-track diplomacy consists of a government track, a professional conflict resolution track, peacemaking through commerce track, personal involvement of private citizens in peacebuilding, peacemaking through a learning track, an activism track, a religion track, peacemaking through philanthropic funding; and peacemaking through information. Applying the nine-track diplomacy from Diamond and McDonald, he emphasized that “peacebuilding will be more effective when it is undertaken in a systematic way that draws energy from diverse paths oriented towards positive peace” (Hrynkow 2018, 62). These tracks synthesise NPD and interfaith dialogue. Therefore, the narrative of interfaith dialogue as an integral part of Indonesian public diplomacy should ideally have a clear direction in the combined model between the NPD and the *peacebuilding approach* in the theory of change. In addition, many elements of the NPD and interfaith dialogue in the perspective of peacebuilding are similar. For example:

1. Interfaith dialogue and public diplomacy have intersecting narratives, namely, the use of religion for peace. In the Indonesian context, religious moderation diplomacy has sought to improve Indonesia's image among the international public (Umar 2016, 415).
2. From the perspective of peacebuilding, the purpose of public diplomacy activities and interfaith dialogue emphasizes the importance of long-term relations that create an understanding of the importance of peace. Both require a process achieved gradually through two-way communication and interaction with domestic and foreign publics.
3. Actors in the NPD and theories of change in interfaith dialogue believe that long-term goals will only be achieved if all actors are involved. Therefore, the involvement of non-state actors is given more prominence in forming public networks.
4. The means of disseminating the ideas and messages of peace diplomacy is carried out across a media mix controlled by the

- actors involved. Interaction between actors and the public becomes a critical point for forming understanding on interfaith dialogue initiatives, including advocacy on sensitive issues, so that there is a confirmation process from the message's recipient to the sender.
5. Theories of change for interfaith dialogue and public diplomacy require a long-term commitment from the actors initiating these activities. It is necessary to maintain continuity of efforts to achieve long-term goals, identify change needs in the current context, and establish long-term relationships that benefit Indonesia and the intended public.

WPF and R20 are framed in both the theory of new public diplomacy and the peacebuilding perspective. This model focuses on the goals, methods, effects, and assessments of public diplomacy efforts involving interfaith narratives. Diplomacy's success is then assessed against short-term objectives and their influence on long-term goals. This allows for the evaluation of R20 and WFP activities to determine their effectiveness and usefulness for Indonesian public diplomacy. Neuman (2011) asserts that the qualitative method significantly emphasizes the social context as a means to comprehend the social world. It refers to a systematic investigation of social phenomena in a natural setting, encompassing various elements of human existence and behavior, organizational functioning, and the influence of interactions on relationships. In the case of WPF and R20, we collected data on the social and political backdrop to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the social and political circumstances that underlie the existence of the global interfaith movement. Moreover, this analyses how the socio-political environment motivates individuals to participate in peace initiatives within the context of globalization.

We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews as primary data in September – October 2023 with key WPF and R20 committee persons. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development of instruments and analysis of data, we did a desk review of documents about interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. We also collected supplementary materials from the forum's chairman, presenters, and participants. Furthermore, we employed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 8). Interpretive

schemes are an essential element in thematic analysis, as they link the frequency analysis of a theme with the analysis of the whole subject being studied (Boyatzis 1998).

### **Eight Times World Peace Forum: One Forum with a Broad Narrative**

The WPF has been held biannually since 2006 and has taken place eight times, with various themes and participation ranges, as shown in Table 1. In general, WPF has been attended by prominent leaders, thinkers, religious leaders, and global scholars. The emergence of WPF in 2006 was based on concerns over the increasingly widespread conflicts, wars, and violence in the 21st century which showed that "the post-Cold War peace dividend had not yet been realized". Instead, war was still being used to resolve differences among nations. This situation, according to Din Syamsuddin, suggested that "our common dream of a new world civilization based on social justice, equality, peace, harmony, and prosperity, would continue to be remote." Specifically, Rizal Sukma, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the 1st WPF, describes the forum as

"a venue for dialogue among civilizations in ensuring the primacy of peace over conflict...a venue for concerned citizens of the world to share their thought and wisdom, discuss practical ways to enhance cooperation and eradicate prejudices, and foster deeper mutual understanding among different civilizations." (World Peace Forum 2006, 5–6)

Therefore, the 1<sup>st</sup> WPF chose the theme "One Humanity, One Destiny, and One Responsibility" to underline the embeddedness of every citizen to the universal values of humanity, the destiny of humankind, and their responsibility to create peace (World Peace Forum 2006, 5–9).

The spirit of One Humanity, One Destiny, and One Responsibility remained the common thread throughout the eight WPF events, and this broad narrative impacted the variation of the forums' subsequent themes. Most were formulated to respond to Indonesia's current global issues and domestic politics. Although most of the WPF's themes did not directly state religion as the topic for achieving peace, the output shows the intertwining of religion with a peace settlement. Like in the 1<sup>st</sup> WPF, Muhammadiyah's primary emphasis was intercivilization dialogue, which was broader than religion. The religious narrative was presented in a remark from Chin Kung, who emphasized the teachings

of Prophet Muhammad, Shyakyumuni Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Hinduism: "To forgive others' mistakes is the most wonderful thing that one can do" (World Peace Forum 2006, 11–17).

Meanwhile, the Indonesian government consistently used this forum to showcase Indonesia as a democratic country that is actively addressing religious conflict, segregation, the threat of extremism, and terrorism and is actively participating in world peace. For example, Vice President Jusuf Kalla, at the 5th WPF, which was held in conjunction with the 102nd anniversary celebration of Muhammadiyah, stated that...

"...so far, Indonesia has managed to resolve 15 major conflicts that brought peace and harmony to the people. Achievements are better off compared to other countries with major Muslim populations that are still struggling to solve the conflicts" (World Peace Forum 2014, 6).

In addition, the 4<sup>th</sup> WPF was also significant due to its role in facilitating an informal peace meeting between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah and MOFA mediated this agreement, strengthening the image of democracy and Indonesia's central role in creating peace in the ASEAN (World Peace Forum 2012).

Furthermore, the forum outputs, from *The Jakarta Peace Declaration* to *The Surakarta Message*, indicated that the WPF and the government shared the common goal of using interfaith dialogue to achieve peace, which made the WPF an effective tool for public diplomacy. In fact, at the 7th WPF, it was evident that the Jokowi government utilized it to promote "Moderate Islam", which aligns with the theme "The Middle Path for the World Civilizations" of the event. Thus, the *Jakarta Message*, an agreement to uphold the middle path in political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects to drive initiatives for the global middle path movement (World Peace Forum 2018), highlights the significance of the WPF in the narrative of the Moderate Islam Project.

This ambition was continued in the 8th WPF, which favored Wasatiyah Islam, a formal policy of the Jokowi government since 2019. The WPF core team considered four points in *The Surakarta Message* and *Global Fulcrum of Wasatiyah Islam* for Indonesia's position on world peace. The *Surakarta Message* emphasized (1) world peace, especially against the backdrop of crises between superpowers,

including the Russia-Ukraine war; (2) the issue of extremism; (3) global warming; and (4) the impact of Covid-19. The message suggested that these four problems can be overcome by strengthening solidarity and fraternity associated with the middle path (psbps.ums.ac.id 2022). Moreover, implementing the Surakarta Message is the responsibility of the Global Fulcrum of Wasatiyat Islam, which Din Syamsuddin chairs (pwmu.co.id 2022).

WPF results did not always align with Indonesian foreign policy. At the 5<sup>th</sup> WPF, a critical moment occurred when the issues of Serbia and Kosovo were discussed. Muhammadiyah encouraged the government to recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state (www.antaranews.com 2014). However, to date, Indonesia has not recognized Kosovo's independence from Serbia, declared unilaterally on 17 February 2008 (kemlu.go.id 2019).

Event	Location, date	Tagline	Result	Committee	Participants
WPF 1	Jakarta, 15-16 August 2006	One Humanity, One Destiny, One Responsibility	The Jakarta Peace Declaration	Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah and Multi Culture Society	100s from 24 countries
WPF 2	Jakarta, 24-26 June 2008	Addressing Facets of Violence: What Can Be Done?	Consensus: "Religion is not the root of violence".	Muhammadiyah, the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilization (CDCC), and Cheng Ho Multicultural Education Trust (CMET)	200s from 36 countries
WPF 3	Yogyakarta, 30 June-2 July 2010	Mainstreaming Peace Education: Developing Strategy, Policy and Networking	Peace Education Curriculum Formulation Agreement	Muhammadiyah, CMET, and CDCC	110s from 38 countries
WPF 4	Bogor, 23-25 November 2012	Consolidating Multicultural Democracy	Moro Peace Talks	Muhammadiyah, CMET, and CDCC	150s from 28 countries
WPF 5	Jakarta, 20-23 November 2014	Quest for Peace: Lessons of Conflict Resolution	-	Muhammadiyah, CMET, and CDCC	200s from various countries

WPF 6	Jakarta, 1-4 November 2016	Countering Violent Extremism: Human Dignity, Global Injustice, and Collective Responsibility	Eleven Recommendations	Muhammadiyah, CMET, and CDCC	180s religious leaders
WPF 7	Jakarta, 14-16 Agustus 2018	The Middle Path for the World Civilizations	The Jakarta Message	Special Envoy for the President of the Republic of Indonesia for Interfaith and Inter-Civilization Dialogue and Cooperation, CDCC, CMET	240s from 42 countries
WPF 8	Surakarta, 16-18 November 2022	Human Fraternity and the Middle Path for A Peaceful, Just, and Prosperous World	The Surakarta Message	CDCC, CMET, Muhammadiyah, and Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta	The 80s from 20 countries

Table 1. World Peace Forum from 2006 to 2022.

At least four important actors have been involved in making WPF a means of public diplomacy. First, Din Syamsuddin, a president of Muhammadiyah (2005-2010), has been acknowledged as the central figure of every WPF. He played a significant role in initiating the 1<sup>st</sup> WPF and determining the event themes, and in mobilizing human resources and financial resources. However, according to Yayah Chisbiyah (2023), it was Rizal Sukma, Chairman of the Bureau for International Cooperation and Relations of Muhammadiyah (2005-2010), who inspired Din Syamsuddin to mobilize Muhammadiyah to hold the 1st WPF. Aside from that, Din's international networks made WPF able to invite prominent figures, ranging from religious leaders, international NGOs, politicians, and scholars to important figures in the world (Interview with Yayah Chisbiyah, Jakarta, August 25, 2023).

Second, the Cheng Ho Multicultural Education Trust (CMET), Din Syamsuddin's network, is an NGO from Malaysia heavily involved in humanitarian, peace, and interfaith dialogue activities. It has been the primary donor for WPF. The 1<sup>st</sup> WPF was held collaboratively by the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah and the Multicultural Society founded by Chin Kung, chairman of the World Confucianism Intellectual Association. In the 1<sup>st</sup> WPF, Chin Kung was represented by

Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew, a chairman of CMET. Later, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> WPF to the 8<sup>th</sup> WPF, CMET was the most prominent supporter, providing accommodation and travel for resource persons and participants. Other funds were also obtained from institutions and individuals from Din Syamsuddin's personal network (Interview with Yayah Chisbiyah, Jakarta, August 25, 2023). Despite its generous funding, there was limited information about CMET activism. The CMET Facebook account only posted a little information about CMET activities in 2016, and there was no website dedicated to CMET. Even so, Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew's activism was evident since he is a Malaysian tycoon and a founder of Country Heights Holding Berhad.

Another actor was the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilizations (CDCC). CDCC was formed by Din Syamsuddin in 2007 to focus on WPF events and to be independent from Muhammadiyah. However, many CDCC committee members are Muhammadiyah figures such as Din Syamsuddin, Bahtiar Effendy, Hajrianto Y. Thohari, Didik J. Rachbini, Rizal Sukma, etc. Consequently, the WPF is perceived as a Muhammadiyah event. However, the relationship between CDCC and Muhammadiyah is cultural rather than structural (Interview with Yayah Chisbiyah, Jakarta, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023). To some extent, this perception is undoubtedly beneficial in terms of the branding and legitimacy of public diplomacy, because of the spectrum of Muhammadiyah as a modern Islamic organization. With members reaching 60 million people in 2019, Muhammadiyah is the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia after NU (Suara Muhammadiyah 2023).

The last actor was the government. Consistently, the government representative delivered a keynote speech/speech in each WPF, pointing out the government's support and addressing it as part of the narrative of religion in public diplomacy. Like in the 1<sup>st</sup> WPF, bringing the success story of the peaceful resolution in Aceh, Vice President Jusuf Kalla mentioned many conflicts stemming from the problems of inequality and injustice in politics, and in which religion was often used to escalate these conflicts. (World Peace Forum 2006, 11–17). Moreover, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> WPF, the government support scale was evident from the attendance of President Yudhoyono to open the forum, Vice President Kalla delivered a closing remark, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hasan Wirayuda acting as a keynote speaker. They consistently addressed how Indonesia handled ethnic and religious conflict wisely



and created peace through peace settlement in Aceh and internationally under the UN mission and ASEAN. Kalla dan Wirayuda argued that Indonesia's project denotes the compatibility of Islam with democracy (World Peace Forum 2008, 33–38).

Nonetheless, Alpha Ammirahman (2023), Director of CDCC 2013-2014, mentioned that the government was supportive, but that its support was related to facilitating the event rather than substantives.

"The support is various. There are examples from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help bring in speakers or help organize a gala dinner. For example, tonight's gala dinner is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other ministries support the next gala dinner...(the support) is more about accommodation because most of the substance is more in us" (Interview with Alpha Ammirahman, Jakarta, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

The quote indicates that WPF has independence in determining its thematic events. The Government's role as a WPF actor was more evident at the 7<sup>th</sup> WPF in 2018 with the presence of the government logo. Inevitably, the inclusion of the government logo could not be separated from Din Syamsuddin's position as Special Envoy for the President of the Republic of Indonesia for Interfaith and Inter-Civilization in 2017 (setkab.go.id 2017). As a special envoy, he was tasked with promoting inter-religious international harmony in Indonesia based on *Pancasila* and playing a global role in the conflicts between Afghanistan, Palestine, and the Rakhine state. Moreover, Rifqi Muna (2023), chairman of the 7<sup>th</sup> WPF organizing committee, stated that the government allocated a budget for the forum (Interview with Rifqi Muna, Depok, West Java, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023).

### **The WPF: Lacking Impact and a Vulnerable Dependence on Din Syamsuddin**

The diffusion of interfaith dialogue and NPD required a consensus on core narratives and long-term goals, like in NPD theory (Gilboa 2008; Huijgh 2019; Jen Melissen 2015) and the peacebuilding perspective (Neufeldt 2011; United States Institute of Peace 2004). From this shared narrative, despite the changing theme in the WPF, which did not always prioritize religion as a solution, the WPF shows consistency as a mouthpiece for Indonesian diplomacy through the presence of key government figures in the WPF who reinforce Indonesia's image as a democratic country that is promoting religious harmony.

Moreover, borrowing from Hurd's concept of religion, the survival of WPF is dependent on the existence of "Moderate Islam" as a government agenda. WPF is made part of "the governing [of] religion" through various programs of the Ministry of Religion, and through "expert religion" as the Muhammadiyah leaders took part in the policy-making process. Shared ideas about moderate values removed structural barriers, a key factor in enabling religion to influence foreign policy (Warner and Walker 2011) 2011), since the state and WPF interests were not in conflict. Even though financially WPF did not depend on the government, political support and legitimacy from the state contributed to the wide reach of participants. The strong intertwining between Indonesian diplomacy and WPF thematic cannot be separated from the Moderate Islam project, which has been initiated since Megawati, Yudhoyono and Jokowi (Umar 2016), with Muhammadiyah's Progressive Islam. In 2015, Muhammadiyah's 47th Congress stated that Progressive Islam was comprised of monotheism, Islam based on the Qur'an and hadith, functional solution charity, oriented to the present and the future, and an open, tolerant, and moderate approach (Suara Muhammadiyah 2016). Progressive Islam is therefore similar to the ambition of Indonesia to become an example of Moderate Islam in world politics. This convergence was facilitated by Din Syamsuddin as structural leader and through the CDCC in which he is culturally embedded as a Muhammadiyah member. In addition, the theme of religion as a solution continues with CMET's involvement, building a global movement on religious for peace with a message disseminated by a transnational actor. Aside from the dynamic scale of participants, this forum involved a broad and diverse audience. Moreover, several WPF outcomes strengthen Indonesia's legitimacy in the international world as a peacemaker for providing the Moro Peace Talks at the 7<sup>th</sup> WPF.

Notwithstanding, the series of WPFs was weak in providing short-term and long-term impacts, due to WPF participants' loose or voluntary implementation. This raises questions about the success of WPF as an instrument of NPD (Gilboa 2008) and interfaith dialogue (Neufeldt 2011), because success is measured in terms of changes in the perceptions and behavior of actors. Short-term impact refers to the continuity of one WPF with the next and in the implementing of The Jakarta Peace Declaration and The Surakarta Message. Unfortunately,

the benevolent ideas contained in these documents depend on the capacity and networks of participants in influencing education policy in their respective countries. Khisbiyah (2023) admitted that the practical implementation of the results of the WPF was a weakness (Interview with Yayah Chisbiyah, Jakarta, 25th August 2023).

Aligning with this concern, Fealy (2023), an Indonesianist who participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> WPF, stated that he was not yet convinced that religious conferences could have a tangible impact on peaceful conflict resolution.

"...And I'm not yet convinced... that it would be good if there were religious figures who could get together, exchange opinions, and formulate declarations on various issues. But the risk is that these are just words. ... Well, there was a war between Russia and Ukraine at that time. The priest said his wish was peace in the world, but as far as I remember, no one mentioned it between Russia and Ukraine" (Interview with Greg Fealy, Canberra, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2023).

The Surakarta Message was meant to address four global issues. However, to date, there has been no media coverage or evidence of the Global Fulcrum of Wasatiyat Islam's efforts to influence peace settlements on war, as well as advocate for issues such as extremism, climate change, and post-Covid-19. It appears that the WPF outcome has only ceremonial led to the introduction of ideas without any further action.

Short-term outcomes also influence the larger narrative of interfaith dialogue for peace and long-term outcomes. 20 years after The Jakarta Peace Declaration, has a local movement initiated by alumni of WPF emerged following the WPF recommendations? Is there a measure of success, especially in shifting public norms from initially considering religion as a source of problems to becoming a solution to injustice? According to Ammirachman (2023), the real impact of WPF was left to each participant because this forum is not an implementation event.

"The real impact is brought by each participant and is implemented and actualized in each faith-based organization. If we continue to carry out actual joint actions after the event comes back, that's not true. But it strengthens our collective commitment and directs it to be implemented in each mass organization. This is not an implementation event." (Interview with Alpha Ammirahman, Jakarta, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

In other words, even though non-states have a strategic role in influencing public diplomacy in the NPD approach, the government

still has control over integrating two-way communication feedback and adopting diplomatic activities into state policy. Viewed through the lens of the theory of interfaith dialogue for peacebuilding, the WPF promises sustainable peace agreements as a result of long-term collaborative efforts between domestic institutions—CDCC and Muhammadiyah—and international institutions, CMET—and the suitability of themes with a public diplomacy agenda. Unfortunately, the main weakness of this event lies in the centrality of Din Syamsuddin as the initiator, mover, chairman, and organizer of substance, material, and participant networks. As Warner and Walker noted, individuals in the leader positions was crucial in allowing religion to shape foreign policy (Warner and Walker 2011). Similarly, Hurd (2015) maintains that religion is deeply embedded in politics and history, as mentioned above. Thus, the continuity of WPF is uncertain when Din Syamsuddin is not part of the state's religious policy-making process.

WPF is not yet an event owned by Muhammadiyah, which would offer more sustainability in promoting interfaith movement than CDCC and Din Syamsuddin. Khisbiyah (2023) states that:

"... So far, it has relied on the network owned by Pak Din. But then repetition happens, inviting the exact figures for two more years... I hope that WPF will be adopted by Muhammadiyah and become Muhammadiyah's property, with or without Brother Din "(Interview with Yah Chisbiyah, Jakarta, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

Another weakness is communication management, which hinders the dissemination of ideas. In fact, in the era of information democratization, the internet has provided unlimited communication coverage which needed to spread the idea of religion for peacebuilding (Huijgh 2019; Jan Melissen 2005). Moreover, with the increasing number of internet users worldwide that would be 64.4% of the 8.01 billion global population in 2023 (katadata.co.id 2023) and Indonesia will reach more than 221 million users by 2024 (apjii.or.id 2024) WPF organizers and the government were supposed to broadcast the event massively. Unfortunately, the majority of publications relied on press releases and press conferences. Even though mixed media was used, dissemination was still limited. Even the WPF website could not be accessed. This might be the crucial drawback of WPF as a diplomacy instrument in achieving long-term goals with the absence of peacemaking through the information diplomacy track

(Hrynkow 2018) to share the principle of one spirit, one humanity, one destiny.

### **Positioning Religion Twenty: A Single Event Contributions to Public Diplomacy Indonesia**

The impetus for R20 derives from Gus Yahya, a chairman of NU and a member of the president's advisory council. At the end of 2021, he was elected as the Chairman of NU, simultaneously with Indonesia's appointment as the G20 presidency. G20 is a community of the world's 20 largest economies annually and is chaired by the president of the country where the rotating meeting is held. It includes wealthy countries in Europe, America, Asia, Russia, and South America. Meetings are held to achieve strong, balanced, and inclusive global growth. The G20 summit was held in Indonesia on 15-17 November 2022 (kemlu.go.id 2022).

According to Suaedy (2023) from the R20 Steering Committee, Gus Yahya, took Indonesia's G20 presidency as an opportunity to actualize his vision of reinstating the significance of religion as a foundation for addressing worldwide conflicts. He also strongly criticized the secular ideas of interfaith forums that fail to address major political economic issues, as well as the absence of discussion of religion as a source of conflict resolution and peace.

"He feels that something is lacking in international and national interfaith, namely that interfaith does not try to answer the substantial or core challenges of religion itself... Religion, in terms of peace and interfaith, is more driven by secular agendas regarding punishment, climate change, economic matters, land matters, and so on. So, challenges within religion itself are never discussed or even avoided. Sometimes, you even see the similarities. It is as if religion is good and peaceful, but other dimensions are not included. Well, Gus Yahya wants to break that doubt" (Interview with Ahmad Suaedy, Depok, West Java, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

This criticism is mainly directed at the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20), a yearly event in the G20 host country that has been part of the G20 event since it was first held in 2014 in Australia. The forums have deliberated on several topics: economic models and systems, the environment, women, families, children, work, humanitarian relief, health, education, freedom of religion or belief, global security, governance, human rights, and the rule of law. The agenda is developed

by considering the yearly G20 priorities set by the host government, and the themes suggested by the many networks of religious actors. IF20 has occurred nine times, with the last forum held in India in 2023 ([www.g20interfaith.org](http://www.g20interfaith.org) 2020), and was replaced at the 2022 G20 summit in Indonesia with R20.

Gus Yahya became the central and dominant figure in successfully implementing R20 with his international networks and long effort promoting Humanitarian Islam. First, he persuaded President Widodo to support R20 as a G20 side event so that it has legitimacy as a state event, contributing to the magnitude of its publication reach and coverage of R20 compared to the 8<sup>th</sup> WPF. Fealy (2023), for example, sees "strong support for NU as a source of religious diplomacy". Second, he could secure funding for R20 from the Muslim World League based in Saudi Arabia. Yet R20 was not dependent on government financing (Interview with Safira Machrusah, Jakarta, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

Meanwhile, the organisation of R20 was mainly prepared by the Center for Shared Civilizational Values (CSCV) founded by NU leaders and Holland Taylor. CSCV was appointed as Permanent Secretariat of the R20 (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023). Mustofa Bisri who was the former Chairman of the NU Supreme Council is the chairman of CSCV. In practice, CSCV prepared the format of the meeting, and the list of invitations of speakers and moderators coming from its interfaith network. Further, a draft of the joint Communiqué was prepared by CSCV.

CSCV fully controlled events at R20, to the irritation of many in NU. Hence, a committee of R20 created by the NU Supreme Council, who were coming from members of NU Supreme Council and some academics from the NU network seemed like used as justification of all preparation by CSCV. They only supported CSCV in implementing the R20. In addition, hardly any non-NU Islamic leaders were included in the event. For example, only one speaker from Muhammadiyah was invited. Hence, this did not indicate inclusiveness by the organisers toward other Muslim organisations or other religions in the country.

The R20 was held on November 2-3 in Bali, then continued on November 4-6 in Yogyakarta. It was attended by religious leaders of G20 member countries and countries outside the G20: at least 170 delegates from countries representing all five continents, and over 300 from within Indonesia. They include the Mormon Church from the United

States, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS) from India, Wahhabi representatives from Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah from UAE, Jewish delegates from Israel and the US, and Patriarch Kirill Patriarch of Moscow. Also, most religious leaders from Russia, China, and the United States were invited to the R20. While Russia sent representatives from the Orthodox circle, although not its President, China, because COVID-19 has not subsided there, sent two of their religious leaders to participate officially online.

In contrast to established forums for interreligious dialogue, such as IF20, which provides more space for experts in religious and social studies and social activists, the R20 forum is attended chiefly by religious leaders with hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers. Selected religious leaders and a few senior intellectuals or academics with close ties to or administrative functions of a religion-linked organization delivered around 47 speeches. The speeches are expected first, to acknowledge past mistakes that Religion has made in human civilization, including acts of differentiation that have generated discrimination, violence, and war. Secondly, they should discuss a lesson-learned, or an experience of creating togetherness and equality across human history. Finally, they should discuss an initiative to create a new tradition foregrounding religion-based principles of human equality and full citizenship for a better future order. In our view, the format of meeting was not conducive for presenters because of the limited time to present their papers. There was also little room for discussion. As a result, the forum appeared to be a parade of speakers in a hurry to present their papers without meaningful dialogue.

President Widodo's speech addressed Indonesia's harmony within the framework of *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and emphasized the central role of religion and religious leaders in Indonesia's history and future.

"...Your religions constituted a major part of Indonesia's struggle for independence, achieved in 1945. Religious leaders also played a major role in achieving Indonesia's unity and ensuring the success of the government's programs of national development" (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 2).

Shaykh Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, expressed his high appreciation as co-chair of R20 to NU in this event. He contended,

"Instead, we must move towards convening a civilized alliance among all. This alliance is based upon the firm and strong foundation: shared religious and human values, some of which can promote peace in our world" (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 15).

In a farewell conversation on the plane about returning to his country, he told Gus Yahya that implementing R20 was crucial, especially in substance and a focus on achievements. He did not forget to express his appreciation for *Pancasila* as the basis of the philosophy of the state and nation of Indonesia. In the same tone, Shaykh Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Alam, Chairman of Egypt's *Dar al-Ifia* (Fatwa Institute), called for going beyond traditional dialogue patterns, which have brought little progress in enhancing friendship and humanity moving towards a civilized alliance meeting among all.

"I value the view of R20 for strengthening world peace and advancing dialogue between civilizations. This forum has cast light. Because of these efforts, it is a prominent model for raising cooperation between religious believers in the interests of all humanity" (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 14).

Meanwhile, Pope Francis of the Vatican, who delivered a videotaped speech citing the "Document on the Fraternity of Peoples for World Peace and Common Life" signed in Abu Dhabi together with Egypt's Sheikh Al-Azhar on 4 February 2019, called for the establishment of an ethic of mutual concern for the earth and people through the increasingly crucial role of religion in creating peace. He said that talking about transcendence reminds us, "The highest human aspirations cannot be excluded from public life and relegated merely to the private sphere."

In his opening remarks, Gus Yahya maintained that R20 was a sincere initiative to engage many actors. This event would not be the first or the last, but would be a continuous and growing movement (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 326). In his closing remarks, Gus Yahya highlighted that:

"The R20 is a natural and spontaneous outgrowth of a long-term effort that we in Nahdlatul Ulama have engaged in. From time to time, we reach out to find friends, partners, and allies all over the world to build a global movement to ensure a constructive and positive contribution by Religion to the betterment of Indonesia and towards a better future for humanity and human civilization as a whole (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 346)."



Gus Yahya continued:

"Ours is a universal call: we engage whoever answers. You have answered our call. So here we are, together, striving towards a shared vision. I believe that today, we all agree that the R20 should not merely be a one-off event but rather should become a global movement (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 346)."

Finally, he argued:

"We call upon religious and political leaders and people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join this endeavor with us: to build a global alliance founded upon shared civilizational values."

The next G20 president after Indonesia was India. Sri Ram Madhav praised Indonesia's situation and the holding of R20 in Bali. Madhav maintained that this beautiful and overwhelmingly Hindu-majority province lives comfortably and peacefully within the Muslim-majority Indonesian state of *Pancasila*. Similarly, both the leaders of Russia and China, through their representatives in Jakarta, greatly appreciated the efforts of religion to make a significant contribution to world peace efforts based on humanity derived from religion itself.

Ram Madhav maintains that:

"What is the R20? Is it another interfaith talk shop? Where each of us comes to sing the praises of our religion, speak courteously about other religions, and return home convinced that we are the best? I think R20 has or should have, a much larger vision and objective. As an extension of the G20, the R20 must address the diverse crises humanity is facing. In that sense, it is not just a religion-centric event. It is a humanity-centric event..." (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 321).

In the last event, R20 released a joint Communiqué addressing the multidimensional crises of the global era, including "Environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters, poverty, unemployment, refugees, extremism, unemployment, and terrorism" (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 336–38). However, responding to such challenges is more difficult amid competing significant forces based on religious identity worldwide. The communiqué had issued eleven items of steps that need to be taken together for religions around the world, including honest dialogue and continuous problems within religions themselves to be resolved, such as encouraging honest conversation among faiths and beliefs around the world, stopping hatred, preventing the use of religion as a weapon in conflict and violence, as well as utilizing

spiritual, ecological wisdom in the world's religious traditions and instilling moral and spiritual values in the social, political and economic power structures of the world (Azca, Shah, and Taylor 2023, 336–38).

Despite Sri Ram Madhav's strong statement above, India did not hold an R20 in 2023, and IF20 was held again as a side event of G20 (Ridwan 2023). The next host for G20 was Brazil, which involved the G20 Interfaith Forum 2024 as part of its programme in August 2024. IF20 also collaborated with the Germany-based International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PARD) to organise the interfaith event. There seem to be no signs that R20 will happen in Brazil this year. If this is the case, R20 in Indonesia was a once off event tied to Indonesia's rotating role in the G20. It does not represent a sustainable form of new public diplomacy.

### **Strong Aligning Message with Indonesia Public Diplomacy, Less Political Power to Sustain**

It is evident that NU and the government have similar aims in diplomacy, imagining themselves as a moderate representation of Islam. The grand "Islamic Humanitarian" narrative promoted by NU suits Indonesia's role in the international world under the 1945 Constitution. Moreover, NU's large mass base makes it easier for the government's religious diplomacy program to get support for implementation. In other words, as long as religion is still a niche narrative for Indonesian diplomacy, both NU and the government have a symbiotic mutualism. They are included in the implementation of R20.

As an international event with a new approach, R20 has attracted some criticism. Three forms of criticism can be categorized here. The first is criticism of the R20's primary objective of "religion as a solution." This objective is considered inappropriate and out of date. The critics argue that religion is more a source of conflict and violence rather than a solution (Hasyim 2023, 4). Historically, there have been religious wars in the European past, such as the Thirty Years' War, described as catalysing the Enlightenment critique of Religion. A grand narrative of the Enlightenment historiography, represented by Edward Gibbon and Voltaire, has viewed religious wars as the last gasp of medieval barbarism and fanaticism before darkness gave way to light. Until recently, Western European society generally had a negative view of the place of religion in the public sphere. In this case, religion is

seen as a source of conflict and violence that manifests itself in acts of violence and terrorism, as mentioned above (Asad 2008).

Second, R20 was criticized for involving a delegation of an Indian Hindu organisation that has become an ally with the ruling party in India, where persecution of minorities, especially Muslim minorities. The delegate under question was Sri Ram Madhav, the leader of the Indian Hindu right-wing group RSS with strong connections to India's ruling BJP. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian government has passed a Citizenship Law that does not only discriminate but also allows oppression against minorities, predominantly India's Muslim minority (apnews.com 2024). NU Supreme Council defends that the involvement of Madhav can be beneficial because he and India's team can learn about tolerance from Indonesia and R20 discussions (news.detik.com 2022). We argue, however, that Madhav and India's team did not influence the Indian government, which ended with a failure to implement R20 in India. The third criticism related to MLW as a Wahhabi co-host. It is known as anti-dialogue and finances violent movements against tolerance and indigenous religious practices worldwide, especially in the Islamic world (Hasyim 2023, 6). Beyond these criticisms, we argue that the R20 needs to be interpreted as a dynamic process. As a representative of RSS (Indian Hindu right-wing group), Madhav acknowledged the difficulties RSS were facing but promised the changes needed to transform India. In addition to giving a lengthy speech, Madhav also had the opportunity to meet Gus Yahya in person, who, according to Yahya, made a promise of transformation. Gus Yahya said that PBNU and MWL are prioritizing a persuasive approach and encouraging transformation from within their respective religions to make religion the motor of transformation towards respect for humanity and equality of citizens in all countries. Nevertheless, this negative feedback was a setback for Indonesian religious diplomacy and NU, which wants to present itself as a proponent of moderation.

The attachment of R20 to government events benefits from broad media coverage. However, the impact this on public opinion is not visible. If one of the parameters of success is the adoption of religious ideas as a solution, which is manifested in the implementation of R20 by other countries, then the messages and discourse during the event did not succeed in changing public perception. This failure is suggested by India's reluctance to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> R20 at the G20 meetings in 2023.

The main weakness of R20 as a form of diffusion between NPD and interfaith dialogue from a peacebuilding perspective is its unsustainability. It failed to change international public norms and establish religion as a source of peace. Instead, R20 aligns more with the theological perspective on interfaith, with its lower-level binding power as the way to achieve the desired change. Religious leaders' commitments do not reflect states' commitments, because they have their own religious interests. As a result, the R20 results are more voluntary than binding.

Another point of view can also be attached to the R20, which is one of the religious diplomacy projects among a series of efforts from NU and the government in the grand narrative of Moderate Islam. Failing to implement R20 in India does not mean the government's and NU's collaboration has ended. For example, NU has again taken the initiative to initiate the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference (IIDC) as part of the ASEAN Summit, where Indonesia is the host. The basic idea of R20 IIDC is to strengthen the consolidation of religious figures and leaders in the ASEAN environment and the network of ASEAN countries, including America, Japan, and India ([www.nu.or.id](http://www.nu.or.id) 2023).

## **Concluding Remarks**

NPD and Interfaith dialogue emerged in Indonesia because of global conditions, plagued by religious violence and a perceived clash of civilizations. In this context, Muhammadiyah and NU organizations have played the role of interfaith diplomacy. Although Muhammadiyah did not directly declare WPF as part of its interfaith diplomacy activities, the involvement of Muhammadiyah administrators and activists proves that WPF is informally a Muhammadiyah activity. In interfaith diplomacy, funding is generally carried out by cooperating with donors from other parties because it requires significant funds and minimal financial support from the government. However, the government also contributed in implementing these activities through the foreign ministry. We have discussed the critical role of Din Syamsuddin within the interfaith diplomacy activities. However, dependence on figures is a weakness in terms of the sustainability of interfaith diplomacy.

WPF activities are traditional, large-scale meetings involving presentations of speakers who share their respective domestic problems

and success stories achieved in each country. The global and national socio-political context also influences the themes and topics of discussion and support from the government. WPF also seems more sustainable than R20 because, from the beginning, WPF did not depend on the government and was free to criticize the government. At the same time, R20 was born from the blessing of the Indonesian government, which leveraged the momentum of the G20 in Indonesia. Therefore, given its reliance on government support, the sustainability of R20 is a question, suggested by the failure of R20 in India in 2023. Implementing the planned R20 in Brazil in 2024 is also a question.

The support of domestic and foreign religious leaders, academics, and peace observers has positively affected interfaith diplomacy. Support from the wider community needs to be encouraged so that there are echoes of activities that religious communities themselves can accept. However, there are also many criticisms directed at WPF and R20 activities. In addition to being elitist and not touching the grassroots, these activities display more aspects of the prominence of the organization and its office holders. Furthermore, the impact, results, and implementation of the communiqué or declaration is not evident. Nevertheless, the impact of interfaith diplomacy resonates globally, as it displays a positive image on Indonesia in support of global peace.

Viewed from the perspective of NPD, the interfaith diplomacy of NU and Muhammadiyah mass organizations succeeded in promoting moderate Islam. The role of NU and Muhammadiyah is between recognizing internal problems – conflict problems and religious realities in Indonesia – and presenting solutions that become models and bridges for achieving peace as goals from the perspective of peacebuilding at the global level. From the theory of change in interfaith dialogue, it seems Indonesia's interfaith diplomacy, through WPF and R20, is more representative of theological than peacebuilding approaches, as seen in field findings. However, Indonesia is proud of this effort of interfaith diplomacy despite the several weaknesses revealed above.

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5. Utriza, Ayang. 2008. "Mencari Model Kerukunan Antaragama." *Kompas*. March 19: 59.
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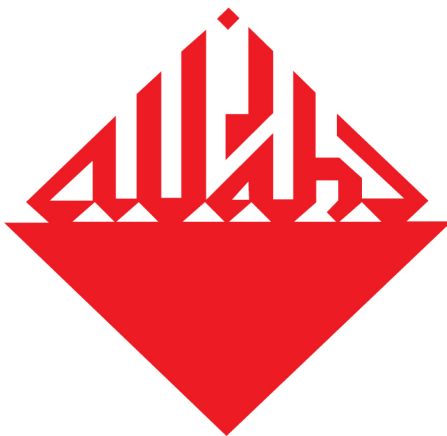


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## MAINTAINING LIFE UNDER NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIMAH LABORERS IN SOLO RAYA, INDONESIA

Diatyka Widya Permata Yasih & Inaya Rakhmani

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## MOVING OUT OF ISLAM ON YOUTUBE: ACEHNESE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND COUNTERPUBLICS IN INDONESIA

Muhammad Ansor

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اءءاباءء ءماهيرية فيء الءركاءء الاءءماعية:  
ءراسء مقارئة بين أءاءء ءءيقة ءميزيء الأركية  
وءركءء الءفانء عن الإسلام الإنءونيسية

أنيقة الأمة و أءءيا فرءانا و فرمان نور

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