

# STUDIA ISLAMIKA



# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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Contest between Literal-Conservative and Liberal-Moderate Muslims in Indonesia

The 45<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress

## Contest between Literal-Conservative and Liberal-Moderate Muslims in Indonesia

Ahmad Najib Burhani

*Muhammadiyah's 45<sup>th</sup> Congress, held in Malang, East Java from July 3-8, 2005, saw the inauguration of thirteen new high officials for the Board of Muhammadiyah for the 2005-2010 term. The congress also swore in Muhammadiyah's new leader, Professor Din Syamsuddin. The elections for the second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia were not, however, the focus of this congress. The primary issue of concern was on how this organization would prepare itself to develop further after one century of existence in Indonesia. The theme of the congress was "Movement for Enlightenment" This congress is projected to be a stepping-stone for the resurgence (kebangkitan) of the organization, which was first established in Jogjakarta in 1912.*

*There are two wings of Muhammadiyah that both play important roles in deciding the organization's direction. These two groups represent the literal-conservative and liberal-moderate sections of the organization, and both often have very different perspectives in understanding social and religious matters. For example, they have a different approach to interpreting the holy book:*

*Seven of the thirteen newly elected high officials are considered to be "newcomers" to the upper ranks of the leadership. The seven individuals are Bambang Sudibyo, Sudibyo Markus, Dahlan Rais, Zamroni, Fasich, Yunahar Ilyas, and Goodwill Zubir, the final two of whom are known to belong to the literal-conservative block. In looking at the leadership structure in detail, it is interesting to note that such personalities as Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Amin Abdullah, Abdul Munir Mul Khan, Hajriyanto Y Thohari and Dawam Rahardjo are not included in the executive board. It is suspected that their exclusion is closely related to the fact that they are considered to be part of the liberal wing.*

### *Important Notes from the Congress*

*Under the leadership of Syafii Maarif, Muhammadiyah clearly positioned the organization against those who are seeking to have Shari'ah implemented in Indonesia, however it is unclear whether Muhammadiyah's new leadership will stick to this position or take a different path. This is a particularly important issue because quite a large number of Muhammadiyah followers demand that the organization actively support efforts to implement Islamic law in Indonesia. Evidently, this was one of the most serious issues that this moderate Islamic organization had to deal with during the congress.*

*The call for Muhammadiyah to join other Islamic groups in their efforts to have Shariah implemented in Indonesia is, in fact, not a new call. In some regions, such as in Garut, Cianjur and Banten, Muhammadiyah followers have been amongst the strongest supporters for the implementation of Islamic law. Abu Bakar Baasyir, one of the leading figures of the Islamic law movement, has approached Muhammadiyah leaders several times to request their support in lobbying for the implementation of Islamic law. The previous leadership, however, turned*

down the calls for the implementation of Islamic law. With the change of leadership, we will have to wait and see if there is a change in the position taken by Muhammadiyah in this regards.

In similar a vein, Commission D also sought to mitigate the spread of liberalism. One member of the commission demanded that the organization disband one of Muhammadiyah's sister organizations, Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah (JIMM, the Muhammadiyah Youth Intellectual Network), or at least have them drop "Muhammadiyah" from their title. Similar to the above-mentioned issue, this is indeed not a new issue within the Muhammadiyah circle. Among the older generation, JIMM is seen as betraying the original mission of Muhammadiyah and as maintaining different ideals to Muhammadiyah. It is for this reason that they have demanded that this organization be disbanded, and expressed their contempt for JIMM by labeling them as malevolent. A similar matter concerning Majelis Tarjih also arose during this congress. Commision A, which is in charge of discussing general issues, demanded that Majelis Tarjih omit from its title the words "Developing Islamic Thought", which were added by officials of the previous leadership like Amin Abdullah.

The congress also displayed signs of a rise in the resistance to the inclusion of women in the organization. One of the participants in this congress noted that of the 35 regional Muhammadiyah leaders, only 8 of them allowed women in their groups. Prior to this congress, however, this modernist Moslem organization obliged the regional leaders to include women in their teams to attend the congress. Furthermore, Commission C, which deals with the organization's structure, rejects the idea of including women in the candidacy for the thirteen positions of high rank official. Although women were provided with ample opportunities to be elected as high ranking officials under the leadership of Buya Syafii, such a notion was rejected by this congress.

Muhammadiyah's strong resistance to the idea of gender equality became more apparent in the congress when it came to nominate thirty-nine



*candidates for positions in the central organization for the 2005-2010 term. This is because no women appeared on the list, although Siti Chamamah Suratno, previously the head of Aisyiah (the women's wing of Muhammadiyah), was almost nominated. Suratno was listed as the fortieth nominee, only one vote behind Prof. Syafri Syairin from Yogyakarta, who received the last nomination. The fact that Suratno was seemingly forced from the final list has to be seen as the logical consequence of the fact that there were only a small number of women represented at the congress.*

*For the conservative wing, the existence of Aisyiah as the sister organization of Muhammadiyah is part of the reason they refuse to allow women to be included at the official level of Muhammadiyah's central organization. They argue that if women want to lead Muhammadiyah, they would have to dump Aisyiah first, after which they could compete for positions in the Muhammadiyah leadership.*

*One of the items of the mandate of contract for the Central Committee for the period of 2005-2010 is that this organization will not act as a political vehicle of any political party. With this commitment, the thirteen members of the Central Committee are automatically ineligible to run for presidency in the next general election in 2009. Another consequence of this mandate is that all of the members of the Central Committee have to resign from any political parties to which they are affiliated.*

*From what we know of Din Syamsudin, it is evident that he has strong political ambitions. Some analysts predict that Din may use his power at Muhammadiyah to complement his position at MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council), in order to become the next Indonesian president.*

*Aside from his political ambitions however, in what direction does Din want to point this organization? Even though Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, Islam has always been peripheral in Indonesian politics. The center of Islam is the Middle East, notably Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and home of the Holy Ka'abah. In this context, it is evident that Din would like to bring Indonesian Islam to the*

*international arena. He and his team strongly assert the need for Indonesian Islam to build an international network. As the leader of the Indonesian Committee for Religion and Peace (ICOMRP) and the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP), he often speaks on behalf of Islam when he attends various international events. Many times he has talked about the relation of Indonesian Islam to the rest of the Islamic world. It is from such words that we can see that Din appears to have an intention of bringing Muhammadiyah to the global platform.*

*Another question that we may like to ponder is what kind of Islam Din would like Muhammadiyah to present to the world. In one of his speeches following his election as the chairman of Muhammadiyah, Din strongly expressed his belief that under the current state of affairs around the world, Indonesian Muslims should not be striving for physical jihad but rather jihad al muwajahah, or always working in a positive way. With this he strongly encouraged Indonesian Muslims to do good not only for Muslims but also for those of other religious beliefs.*

*(This article was translated from Bahasa Indonesia into English by Dina Afrianty)*

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