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ISLAM IN INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY:  
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## Muhammadiyah Congress: Preparing the New Millennium

**Y**ear 2000—popularly called as new millennium era—is a year full of congress for social and political organization as a preparation for facing new challenges of the new era. Some social and political organization such as The Party of Crescent (Partai Bulan Bintang), The Struggle Party of Indonesian Democracy (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan), Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and also Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic social organization after NU. Muhammadiyah held its 44<sup>th</sup> congress in Jakarta. Along with the congress, some organization under-bow Muhammadiyah such as its Women section, Aisyiah and Nasyiatul Aisyiah, and its youth organization Ikatan Remaja Muhammadiyah (IRM) also held their congress.

Muhammadiyah founded by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan 90 years ago held its 44<sup>th</sup> congress. At its early period, the Muhammadiyah congress was held yearly, and then two years, three years and then currently five years. This routine congress has guaranteed the continuation of Muhammadiyah leadership. The 44<sup>th</sup> congress was a special congress as it was conducted in the time of political, social, religious and economical reformation in Indonesia after the fall of the New Order. During the New Order regime,

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almost 32 years the government controlled all political and economical affairs of the people. Therefore, after the fall of the New Order there were changes in the political and economical atmosphere in Indonesia. Some of big Islamic organizations were keen to involve in politics, though not in a direct way. NU for instant initiated and supported the establishment of The Awakening Nation Party (PKB), and Muhammadiyah allowed its leader, M. Amin Rais, to form The National Mandate Party (PAN). It is in this shadow of reformation euphoria that the congresses of Islamic Organization held in the year 2000, have its important meaning and position. Muhammadiyah congress also used this momentum to reformulate and its program in order to answer new political, economical, religious and social challenges.

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Seen from its ideals and program, Muhammadiyah can be regarded as a reformist Islamic organization. In the middle of the domination of traditional education emphasizing on religious teaching based on books written by ulama of 17<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammadiyah proposed education that taught not only religious knowledge but also secular knowledge. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah also sponsored to use a class-based school, which promoted grading system, unlike an education system employed at traditional schools such as pesantren—Islamic boarding school—which used a communal (bandongan) and individual (sorogan) system of education.

In addition, KH. Ahmad Dahlan's support of the opening the ijtihad gate which allows Muslims to have an attempt of religious reasoning to meet current situation and condition. Based on the slogan of "return to the Qur'ân and the Sunnah" the opening of the ijtihad gate is launched.

Because of Muhammadiyah developed its religious program through modern education, it has been helping the upward mobilization of Muslims which enables them to enter into urban societies. This is one of the reason the urban-centered-organization of Muhammadiyah. The urban phenomena of Muhammadiyah also bring about frictions with other urban communities. This can be seen from the strong stance of Muhammadiyah members against Christianity and Western values, which is apparent in urban societies.

Since few decades ago, however, the modernist label of Muhammadiyah seems fading away. There are some criticism addressed to Muhammadiyah as they have lost their spirits of modernist organization. Azyumardi Azra,

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*a vocal Muslim intellectual, launched a serious criticism that Muhammadiyah, which is previously regarded as reformer organization, needs reformation itself. If there is no serious effort of reformation within Muhammadiyah, which can inject new spirit of reformation, Muhammadiyah will leave its thousands schools and hospitals stranded in the era of globalization. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah should also involved in solving problems currently faced by Indonesia such as economic, political and social crisis.*

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*The Muhammadiyah congress also made a recommendation to the new leadership team to focus on empowering the ummah economy. After for a long time Muhammadiyah has emphasized its program on education and dakwah (Islamic propagation), Muhammadiyah should give more attention on economic aspects. Dawam Rahardjo the leader of economic team of Muhammadiyah is given task to formulate the new economic paradigm. As a pilot project of the economic program, Jakarta and Yogyakarta are chosen. As a start the economic team will develop a retail industry called as Al-Markaz. The money for the development of this industry comes from people's donation. To support that enterprise, Muhammadiyah in collaboration with banking sector will make a multi-function credit card.*

*In addition to this program, Muhammadiyah will also have share in industrial sector. Currently Muhammadiyah has 45% share in PT Solar International, which operates on several sectors such as chicken breeding, tannery and other sectors. Some of the Muhammadiyah business is a joint venture with international companies.*

*Furthermore, in rural areas, Muhammadiyah supports the establishment of Local Islamic Bank (BMT), which collects the zakat and sadakah. The money collected then is used to finance productive business, which can be done by all Muslim. All this economic activities and practices were answers for criticism toward Muhammadiyah, which neglected the economic sector of the ummah.*

*The making of economy as the priority program of Muhammadiyah has been started since Amin Rais led Muhammadiyah. The intention to empowering the ummah economy is propelled by the idea to make Muhammadiyah as an independent organization financially. If Muhammadiyah has sufficient money, Muhammadiyah can conduct dakwah whether through education or social works. In education section,*

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currently, Muhammadiyah has 3,718 Kindergartens, 838 Primary Schools for Learning Qur'an (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an), 1,128 Elementary Schools, 1,179 Junior High Schools, 541 High Schools, 249 Vocational Schools, 1,768 Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), 534 Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah), 171 Islamic High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah), 55 Pesantren, 84 Universities and Colleges, and 48 Academies.<sup>1</sup> All these need a strong financial support from Muhammadiyah. Therefore, empowering the ummah economy is a strategic program for the future of Muhammadiyah.

The intention to strengthen the economic sector was inspired by the economic crisis currently faced Indonesia. By empowering the economic potentials of the people, Muhammadiyah wants to help to recover the Indonesian economy. Without people's participation in economic recovery, the government's program will only do little. Therefore, the stress on the economic aspect is also a sign of Muhammadiyah sense of urgency in responding contemporary problem.

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The Muhammadiyah Congress discussed some important issues. One of important issue is the demand of some branch of Muhammadiyah, especially from Aceh, to return to Islam as the basis for Muhammadiyah. As the New Order regime forced all Indonesian political and social organizations to use Pancasila as the sole basis for the organization, Muhammadiyah also used Pancasila as its basis. However, since the fall of the New Order, a lot of social and political organizations returned to their original basis, because the decision to use the Pancasila as the sole basis was coercive. Therefore, when the state allowed them to use any basis except communism, a lot of social and political organizations return to their original basis. Some members of Muhammadiyah also wanted to use Islam as the basis of Muhammadiyah replacing Pancasila.

Initially the proposal of replacing Pancasila with Islam was discussed in the commission C. After long and serious discussion, the commission decided to use voting mechanism. The proposal was rejected after the majority of the members in the commission voted "no." When the result of the commission was brought to the plenary session, some members rejected

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<sup>1</sup>Source from the Central Board of Muhammadiyah 2000.

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it. They demanded to install Islam or otherwise they would quite from Muhammadiyah. After suspended for few minutes, the plenary session decided to use Islam as the basis for Muhammadiyah.

The controversy on Islam as the basis of organization is difficult, since Muhammadiyah never uses Islam as the basis for the organization. The basis of Muhammadiyah is formulated in a long phrase that does not specifically refer to Islam. The basis formulation is stated in the chapter 1 verse 2 of the basic principles (Anggaran Dasar) of Muhammadiyah organization, which says: "Muhammadiyah is an Islamic organization and dakwah promoting on good deeds (amar makruf) and preventing evil deeds (nahi munkar), which uses Islam as the basis and uses Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah as the primary sources." If it is traced back, actually Muhammadiyah never makes a special chapter for the basis of the organization. Only after the New Order regime force every social and political organization in Indonesia to use Pancasila as the sole basis, Muhammadiyah used it. Therefore, if Muhammadiyah wanted to return to its original formulation, it should be no special chapter for stating Islam as the basis for Muhammadiyah. The formulation cited above has explicitly mentioned Islam as the basis of Muhammadiyah.

The tendency to return to Islam as the basis, which is also taken by Nahdlatul Ulama at its recent congress in Kediri is a sign of the emergence of "symbolic Islam," meaning stressing more on formalistic formulation and character of Islam rather than on its substantive aspects. In Muhammadiyah there is a faction of Muhammadiyah members who tend to take "revivalism form", meaning practicing religion in a more formalistic and symbolic way. This revivalist faction attempts to express their religiosity in formal ways, such the dress, and the manner of eating and physical performance. It seems that this revivalist group has become the trend of modernist organization such as Muhammadiyah. It is understandable if the demand to return to Islam as the basis is strong in Muhammadiyah.

Moreover, it is also an indication of the rise of "political identity" of Muslim in Indonesia. These tendencies escalate after the fall of New Order, which provided political reason to reformulate political identity of Muslim. The fall of the New Order facilitated Muslims to liberate themselves from all of regulations made by the government. As putting Pancasila as the sole basis for all organizations was actually the government's enforcement, therefore, Muslims rejected Pancasila.

Observed from democratic point of view, which becomes the main

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feature for the new Indonesia, the emergence of Islamic political identity among Muslims expressed in their return to symbolic Islam is a way of expressing their participation in a democratic era. However, it should be given note that the return to Islamic identity should not close the door of plurality and tolerance.

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Another important issues emerged from Muhammadiyah congress was the question of leadership. There was a significant move from the youth of Muhammadiyah to give younger leaders opportunity to lead Muhammadiyah. They argued that the leadership of Muhammadiyah is dominated by senior generation that brought about the slowness of Muhammadiyah in responding members' needs.

The second issue regarding the leadership is the need to have a leadership who can bridge the gap between Muhammadiyah and other Islamic organization, especially of the traditionalist camp such as NU. It has been felt that the relation between Muhammadiyah and NU has not been in a good relation, especially after there are significant differences in political stances between Abdurrahman Wahid, representation of NU, and Amin Rais, representation of Muhammadiyah.

Another important issue of leadership is the demand from women members of Muhammadiyah. They wanted to be represented in the leadership team of Muhammadiyah. This move, however, did not get big support, although in the election to choose 39 candidates, there was a woman elected. In the future, the issue of woman leadership will certainly appear in a stronger move.

Through two processes of election, the leader of Muhammadiyah is decided. At the first process, 39 candidates were chosen. The second election is to choose 13 candidates from 39 names elected at the first process to be the core team of Muhammadiyah leadership. These 13 candidates then discussed (musyawarah) to elect one leader who would lead Muhammadiyah. After following these processes, Prof. Dr. Syafi'i Ma'arif, an alumni of Chicago University, was elected.

The election of Syafi'i Ma'arif was predicted before, as he is not only the incumbent leader of Muhammadiyah replacing Amin Rais after resigning from Muhammadiyah to lead a political party, but also is he the best candidate. Firstly, he had an excellent intellectual capability to promote "neo-modernism" as he is one of three students—the other two are

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*Nurcholish Madjid and Amin Rais—of Fazlur Rahman at Chicago University. Secondly, Syafi'i Ma'arif is known his modest life, which attracts sympathy from masses. Thirdly, in term of political stance, Syafi'i could maintain his political independence to stand neutral to all political power. Finally, Syafi'i has been involved in an international network of World Conference on Religion and Peace which advocates tolerance among members of the world's religions. As promised in his speech after the election, Syafi'i would lead Muhammadiyah with "salt philosophy," a basic ingredient for all cooks. Therefore, he would make Muhammadiyah like salt which is need by all people. In doing so, Syafi'i will built a strategic alliance with all nation's potentials to deepen the feeling of the unity and togetherness of Indonesian society in large. Congratulation and good luck.*

Jamhari