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Extremists 'Infiltrating Mainstream'

Throwing a gauntlet down at the feet of radical Islam, a group of mainstream Muslim leaders led by former President Abdurrahman Wahid on Thursday announced the release of a book asserting that Indonesia is being infiltrated by foreign-funded extremists bent on turning the country into an Islamic state.

The 321-page Indonesian-language publication, "The Illusion of an Islamic State: The Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia," will be released in the coming days by The Wahid Institute, Maarif Institute and the newly-formed Bhinneka Tunngal Ika, or Unity in Diversity, Movement.

The book claims that radical domestic religious and political organizations, backed by Middle Eastern petrodollars including from Saudi Arabia, have infiltrated the country's most senior Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU, and Muhammadiyah; the Indonesian Council of Ulema; the central government; and state universities and institutes.

According to the book, radical international movements, such as Wahabism, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbut Tahrir, which has a branch in Indonesia, are trying to enforce their extremist views in the country.

'They are jeopardizing the future of our multi-religious nation for the sake of private political ambitions'

Abdurrahman Wahid

And in allegations that could have implications for the coming elections, the book accuses the Islam-based Prosperous Justice Party, or PKS, of attempting to grab political power by infiltrating mainstream Islamic organizations and winning converts by building village mosques funded with Saudi money.

"Opportunistic politicians who work with extremist political parties and groups have joined the radicals in driving our nation towards a deep chasm," Wahid said in written comments prepared for the book launch. "They are jeopardizing the future of our multireligious and multiethnic nation, for the sake of private political ambitions."

According to its authors, dozens of researchers from Islamic universities and institutes across 17 provinces worked for two years on the book. The research was conducted by the US-based LibForAll Foundation, including interviews with 591 Muslim extremist figures from 58 different organizations.

"Small, narrow minds cannot provide a solution as to what constitutes an Islamic state or government," said Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif, former chairman of Muhammadiyah, who co-authored the publication.

The book claims that PKS's infiltration of Muhammadiyah was so extreme that it prompted the organization's central board to issue a decree in December 2006 banning its members from associating with the political party.

Zulkieflimansyah, PKS's deputy chairman for political affairs, dismissed the book's allegations as a smear campaign and denied the party pushed radical views.

"They just want to put us in the 'radical' corner, and say that they are the face of moderate Islam," he said.

Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, a spokesman for Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, also denied the book's allegations, saying his organization was not in a position to infiltrate Muhammadiyah or the NU.

Azyumardi Azra, director of the graduate school at the State Islamic University in Jakarta, said he was asked to contribute to the book but did not agree completely with its conclusions.

"[The threat] is probably not as wide as stated in that book," he said. "People in these groups try to control the mosques. They are very active."