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LibForAll pushes on after loss of leader

Anti-extremism organization motivated to preserve legacy

By Martin Desmarais

SAN FRANCISCO – Tech vet Ravi Krishnamurthy found a passion with LibForAll Foundation and its quest to counter Muslim extremism. Now, with the death of the organization's influential Muslim head Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, Krishnamurthy and the remaining leaders are striving forward to continue his legacy and make sure LibForAll prospers.



Krishnamurthy

Founded in 2003 by Wahid, former Indonesian president and long-time head of the 40-million-member Muslim group Nahdlatul Ulama, and American entrepreneur and businessman C. Holland Taylor, the Winston-Salem, N.C.-based LibForAll supports peaceful, moderate and progressive Muslims in their fight against radical Muslim extremists. The non-profit organization's strategy involves building a global counter-extremism network of top Muslim leaders who possess the moral and theological authority to counter radicalization within their societies. This network fights Muslim extremism through religious education, pop culture, government, business and media. Wahid's widow Ibu Hajjah Sinta Nuriyah, will serve as LibForAll's patron and senior advisor in her husband's wake.

Wahid, who died peacefully on Dec. 30, 2009, had been in bad health for some time.

Krishnamurthy, LibForAll's vice president, fully believes that the groundwork the organization has laid in the Muslim world since it was founded will allow its advances to continue even with the loss of its spiritual and emotional head.

"We have been following a strategy of building a global counter-extremism network and that strategy has continued and we will continue to move full speed ahead," Krishnamurthy said.

"We are a strong organization. We will move ahead," he added. "It looks like we will be able to execute effectively on his vision."

If anything, Krishnamurthy believes Wahid's death has strengthened the resolve of those involved with LibForAll to succeed and to work even harder to match Wahid's effort. "The universal reaction from people who are close to us has been – 'How do we step in and do the heaving lifting?'" he said.

One of the areas in which Wahid will be truly missed is his ability to connect with Muslim leaders around the world and lay the groundwork for establishing a worldwide network of counter-extremism. Krishnamurthy, a Hindu, and LibForAll Chief Executive Officer Taylor, a Christian who grew up in Iran and later met Wahid when he moved to Indonesia in the late 1990s, define their beliefs as Universalist and bring religious depth to the organization. However, it is hard to argue that LibForAll's global reach is not heavily due to Wahid's influence in the Muslim world.

Krishnamurthy agrees, but he says that Wahid's dedication to establishing LibForAll and preparing for the organization to go forward without him guarantees it will be able to do so. Key to this has been Wahid's one-on-one level of relationship building with other Muslim leaders.

"That level of building relationships and so on will continue," Krishnamurthy said. "We have a wide network of Muslim leaders [and will continue to connect with more]."

"As we have success and we build more trust that process becomes easier – it is a snowballing process,"

he added. "Our penetration in the Muslim world is the key to our success ... because we are an inside-out organization."

In its battle against extremism, LibForAll has worked with various media to expose extremist activity and mobilize organizations, elite society and the general public to reject extremist political parties and activity; launched a "Musical Jihad" in the form of an album from Muslim rock star Ahmad Dhani called "Laskar Cinta" (Warriors of Love), which aimed to inspire millions of youth to say, "Yes to the Warriors of Love, no to the Warriors of Jihad"; and organized the Bali Holocaust Conference that refuted the Holocaust denial rhetoric of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The organization has also created a counter-extremism video series for broadcast on television. The video features a combination of top theologians and commercial producers/directors. The video will be translated into Arabic, Turkish and German. LibForAll is also seeking to extend this video series to South Asia.

Krishnamurthy, a native of Chennai, joined LibForAll in 2006 not long after meeting Taylor socially. In turn, Krishnamurthy met Wahid and was so impressed that he quickly decided to join the Muslim leader. He has a background in electrical engineering and co-founded software company Enlite Networks prior to joining LibForAll.

As LibForAll vice president, Krishnamurthy's main tasks include building the expertise and infrastructure of the organization, building partnerships with other organizations and fund raising.

Reflecting on his time with Wahid, Krishnamurthy levels only the highest praise.

"He was one of the most remarkable human beings I have ever met ... His love for people and humanity shines through in everything he ever did," he said. "To me personally it is like losing a father-figure ... He was somebody who inspired, somebody who was always there.

"More than anything his love and his presence not only filled the room it filled the organization," he added. "And in some sense it still does."

For Krishnamurthy, Wahid has set an example he can only hope to live up to. "In a very real sense I actually feel more motivated than before. There is a real sense of responsibility," he said. "[His] is a very unique story. It is a testament to the human spirit ... He had a position of power and he really used it to help people and that is a very rare quality today."

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