

News

Indonesian Cleric Plans to Promote Moderate Muslim Philosophy in Europe

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Photo: AP

Islam's holy book – Quran

A prestigious Indonesian Islamic theologian is traveling to Europe to promote the country's tolerant, pluralist interpretation of Islam and counter the violent ideology of radical extremists. The tour is organized by groups that promote pluralism and is part of a plan to develop a network of Muslim leaders to give voice to what they call the "great silent majority" of peace-loving Muslims.

Preaching tolerance and moderation

Kyai Haji Achmad Mustofa Bisri, an influential Islamic cleric and member of the supreme council of Nahdlatul Ulama, an Indonesian Muslim organization with 40 million members, has preached tolerance and moderation for over 30 years. Now he has agreed to travel to Europe to help reconcile what he describes as growing animosity between Muslims and Christians there.

He says his perception of the world that we live in is that it is like very dry grass that is easy to catch fire and burn.

Islam, the cleric says, is a religion that promotes love, peace and tolerance.

He says if one misreads the message of love to give rise to hatred, then clearly there is a failure to understand.

And Bisri says that both Islamic extremists and those who hate Muslims share the misguided view that Islam sanctions violence.

Mission to promote democracy, education

Next month, Bisri will give speeches and meet with government officials and Muslim leaders in Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. The trip is organized by two international groups that promote democracy and education in Muslim-majority countries.

C. Holland Taylor heads one of the organizations, the [LibForAll Foundation](#). He says Indonesian police have been effective in marginalizing terrorist groups, and religious leaders like Bisri have helped counter the radical ideology. He wants to export Indonesia's moderate Muslim philosophy to the world.

"It is our belief that Indonesia is best suited to play not a military role, not an economic role, not a political role, but rather to exercise soft power in the field of Islam," Taylor said. "Helping to educate people around the world, helping to educate decision-makers, mass media, public policy, intellectuals and the public regarding the nature of Islam and how to overcome the crisis of misunderstanding that afflicts so many people in both East and West."

Denounces violence, repression

Indonesia has its share of religious conflict. Fundamentalist groups and a government minister have called for the Ahmadiyah sect to be disbanded because mainstream Muslims do not agree with some of its teachings. And some Christian groups have been attacked. Bisri says his organization has spoken out against these acts of violence and repression.

Rainer Heufers is with the other organizing group, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty. He says similar tensions are growing in countries such as Germany, which has seen an influx of Muslim immigrants from Turkey.

"A lot of people feel that the country is changing and are not comfortable with it," said Heufers. "Politics play a role here to mitigate that but as we all know, politics sometimes also play a not so good role on capitalizing on these feelings."

Sending Bisri to Europe, he says, could help alleviate these tensions by reinforcing a non-threatening, non-political image of Islam.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/Indonesian-Cleric-Plans-to-Promote-Moderate-Muslim-Philosophy-in-Europe--103621474.html>