

Scholars set to tackle Muslim ‘orthodoxy’

LAUREN FARROW | Australian Associated Press | May 20, 2017

As Indonesia’s capital still reels from the jailing of their former governor for blasphemy, hundreds of Islamic scholars are set to converge in East Java to create a ‘roadmap’ to combat rising radicalism in the archipelago and abroad.

When one of Indonesia’s leading Islamic organisations, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and its 5 million-strong youth movement, GP Ansor, began discussing the need last year for a strategy to tackle ultra-conservatism, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama aka Ahok was beginning to feel the effects of religion as a political weapon.

His fall was swift and unnerving. By April, the Christian of Chinese descent had lost the election. Earlier this month he was sentenced to two years for blasphemy over comments he made referring to the Koran.

While radicalism is not new in Indonesia, NU’s Supreme Council general secretary, Yahya Cholil Staquf, told AAP the movement is clearly becoming stronger.

In the hopes of coming up with a strategy to combat extremism and rising Islamophobia, more than 400 scholars from Indonesia, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe and America are expected to attend a conference in East Java on Sunday and Monday.

Through theological debate, Mr Staquf said they hope to challenge some of the “problematic” elements of Islam, which are being promoted by the ultra-conservative orthodoxy.

This includes the relationship of a Muslim to a non-Muslim - and the “current orthodoxy”, he says that suggests Muslims should be “suspicious” of non-Muslims and that somehow they are unequal.

Mr Staquf also wants to examine how conflicts are dealt with in Islam.

“For example, what happened in Rohingya with the Buddhist attacked Muslim there are elements that say that is a legitimate reason to take on all Buddhist universally as an enemy of Islam.”

But providing alternative ideas to these views is not enough, Mr Staquf said.

“We also need a political strategy that will provide sufficient authority to any new ideas that emerge through the theological review.”

“The NU cannot do it alone .. the current existing orthodoxy is a threat to the whole of humanity and civilisation.”

In Jakarta prosecutors and Ahok's legal team are both appealing the sentence meted out earlier this month.

In an unusual move, Prosecutors disagree with the court's decision. They had called for him to face probation and be found not guilty of blasphemy but a lesser charge.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/scholars-set-to-tackle-muslim-orthodoxy/news-story/29f607b8c83ec8ef24824f1d8da44d69>