

Pence Meets Leader of Indonesia's Largest Muslim Group Days After ISIS Church Bombings

By Samuel Smith, CP Reporter | May 18, 2018 7:16 AM



(PHOTO: TWITTER.COM/VICE PRESIDENT MIKE PENCE)

United States Vice President Mike Pence (R) meets with Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, the general secretary of the Indonesian-based Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama, at the White House on May 17, 2018.

Just days after the spate of deadly suicide bombings targeting three churches and a police station in Surabaya, Indonesia, Vice President Mike Pence met with the leader of the world's largest Islamic organization to stand in solidarity for religious freedom and peaceful coexistence.

At the White House on Thursday afternoon, Pence met with Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Supreme Council, an Indonesian-based Sunni Islamic education organization that funds schools and hospitals throughout the country and also promotes religious tolerance in the world's largest Muslim country.

"It is quite an amazing thing to see the vice president of the United States and the leader of the largest Muslim organization in the world who is very intent on the promotion of religious liberty and the combating of extremism," Johnnie Moore, an evangelical communications executive and international religious freedom advocate involved in Thursday's meeting, told *The Christian Post*.

"The timing couldn't be more appropriate given the events of this past weekend. Obviously, there is spiritual significance with this Muslim leader in the Muslim world with it being Ramadan."

The meeting lasted about 20 minutes and included Moore, the vice president, Yahya, and one of Pence's senior advisers. A pre-meeting included other staffers.

Moore said that Pence even greeted Yahya with a traditional Ramadan kareem greeting.

Moore, a de-facto spokesperson for the group of conservative evangelical leaders who informally advise the Trump administration, said that the meeting came as Yahya is in the U.S. on a pre-planned trip for a number of meetings across the country. The meeting with Pence was not originally on the itinerary.

"The vice president found out he was in town and asked to see him," Moore said, adding that Pence knows Yahya from a multi-faith event they both attended in Indonesia last year. "I have been in lots of these meetings. You can tell when a meeting is warm and a meeting is cordial. This was a very warm conversation. It was a special time. And it was substantive, I would say."

Earlier in the week, three families of suicide bombers killed about 13 people and injured over 50 in attacks on Saint Mary Catholic Church, Indonesia Christian Church, Surabaya Central Pentecost Church, and the Surabaya Police Headquarters; and there was also an accidental explosion at an apartment complex in Sidoarjo. The attacks were claimed by the Islamic State organization (also known as IS, ISIS, or ISIL).

During the meeting, Pence offered his condolences to Yahya for the tragedies in his home nation, Moore explained.

While Christians were clearly targeted in the attacks, Moore noted that the Muslim majority was also targeted.

Pence and Yahya were said to have left the meeting in "total agreement" about the need to protect religious minorities and to fight religious extremism.

"The vice president was very clear in conveying to Yahya that the support for religious freedom begins at the Oval Office, that this is a priority to this president (Donald Trump)," Moore explained. "And that the United States is a friend to this organization and its efforts to combat extremism."

Yahya's NU has over 90 million members and was established in 1926. The organization is rooted in principles of justice, diversity and tolerance.

"It is not an organization led by lay Muslims," explained Moore, author of *The Martyr's Oath: Living for the Jesus They're Willing to Die For*. "It is an organization that has been a historic leader in that part of the world for generations in promoting tolerant Islam that is totally cohesive with values of religious liberty and peaceful coexistence and loving one's neighbors."

Following the meeting, Pence tweeted a photo with Yahya and praised him for his organization's efforts.

"Their efforts opposing radical Islam are critical in Indonesia — where we saw despicable attacks on Christians," Pence [tweeted](#). "@POTUS Trump's admin stands with NU in its fight for religious freedom & against jihad."

According to Open Doors USA's 2018 World Watch List, Indonesia ranks as the 38th worst country in the world when it comes to Christian persecution.

Earlier this month, an Indonesian pastor was [sentenced to four years in prison](#) after he was accused of blasphemy for evangelizing to a Muslim cab driver.

Additionally, radical Muslim outrage to a doctored video led to the prosecution and [conviction last year](#) of Jakarta's former Christian governor on charges of blasphemy in a case that gained the world's attention.

"As the largest Islamic country in the world, like all other countries, it has had its bouts with extremism," Moore said. "It has a track record of being able to find a way where moderation wins over extremism."

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