



TONY PERKINS' WASHINGTON UPDATE



Supporting Indonesia's Religious Freedom-Loving Muslims

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The world is growing darker in many ways, and often in ways and in places the public is unaware. For instance, how many have heard about the [Rohingya people of Myanmar](#)? This group of primarily Muslim people is trying to simply live peacefully in the north of that country. Yet in a campaign of ethnic and religious cleansing, the Myanmar military is slaughtering its civilian population, pushing many of them into squalid refugee camps in Bangladesh. It is a horror that world leaders must collectively denounce and use their influence to end.

Yet for every disheartening story we hear about, there is also one of hope that is unknown and yet needs to be told. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority country, and is home to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization.

NU is also an organization that has taken a definitive and clear stance against violent Islam, with NU Secretary General Yahya Cholil Staquf at one point [stating](#):

"Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam."

I expect many Americans have never heard of Mr. Staquf, or of NU. Yet such a clear-eyed partner is just the type that religious freedom advocates need. So it makes sense that Vice President Pence [met with Staquf recently](#) at the White House, where they discussed recent attacks against Christians in Indonesia. These attacks are concerning, for although jihadists are a small minority in Indonesia, they have gained visibility in recent years as they have undertaken a string of assaults on worship gatherings. One of the victims of a recent attack was a Christian actually trained by the Muslim organization NU to guard churches from attacks.

Such collaborative efforts between Muslims, Christians, and others who support religious freedom must continue, for without change at the grassroots, cultural level, violations of religious freedom will persist. It is incumbent upon all with a stake in this issue to also recognize that protecting religious freedom will also [help achieve security](#), both near and far. Indeed, an overview of the [connection between religious freedom and national security](#) reveals there is hardly any nation which is a security threat to the United States that is not also a major violator of religious freedom.

Thus, we all have a stake in whether Indonesia continues to nurture and grow in its protection of religious freedom, or whether it slides toward violent jihad. We must continue to encourage and come along side people like Mr. Staquf and organizations like NU -- for without their help, the likelihood that we will achieve the former certainly goes down.

Our desire is for governments worldwide to protect the ability of everyone to choose their faith, and to live out that faith. We should invite everyone who shares this desire to join in achieving it.

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