

THE FOUNDRY

Blog

Passing of an Indonesian Giant

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Most Americans do not know Abdurrahman Wahid (more affectionately known as Gus Dur) - Indonesia's fourth President. To American eyes, his appearance alone could be a bit disorienting and difficult to rationalize with his towering influence.

Even as President of one of the world's largest, most consequential countries, Gus Dur dressed in casual clothes and often slipped his sandals off in conversations with visiting dignitaries. At the time, 1999-2001, his informality was slightly absurd - a symbol for what seemed like a chaotic presidential administration. Certainly President Wahid made some questionable judgments as President, but in retrospect, the informality looks less like chaos and more like profound comfort, a tranquil confidence in himself, his nation and his faith. Wahid made no apologies for who he was. He was a truly fearless defender of Indonesia's traditions of decency, tolerance, pluralism and constitutionalism - matters of not only national legacy, but personal legacy. And even as serious a man as he was, the young man who routinely skipped his classes at Al-Azhar to watch American movies and soccer was always just below the surface.

Indonesia and the world will miss Gus Dur dearly. Fortunately, his legacy lives on in, among other things, two organizations he established, [Libforall Foundation](#) and [The Wahid Institute](#). One can also hope that it is preserved in the spirit of [Nahdlatul Ulama](#), the largest Muslim social service organization in the world, an organization founded by his grandfather, over which Gus Dur presided for a time, and in which he was long a leader.

Gus Dur will probably not be remembered as one of Indonesia's greatest presidents. But he will be [remembered as one of its greatest men](#) and hopefully a model for its future.



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