

New MUI chairman to embrace beleaguered minority groups

Haeril Halim, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Headlines | Fri, August 28 2015, 5:57 PM

The National Meeting of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Surabaya, East Java on Thursday elected senior cleric Ma'ruf Amin as chairman of the organization for the 2015-2020 term, replacing outgoing leader Din Syamsuddin.

In the past, the MUI has often been criticized for discriminating against minority groups like the Ahmadiyah and Shiite Muslims.

Ma'ruf said that he was determined to change the image of the MUI from a bulwark of conservatism to a moderate institution.

He said that minority sects, especially Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, which many in Indonesian Muslims deem "deviant" from mainstream Islam, would be embraced by the MUI under his watch.

"We will not tolerate any persecution [of minority religious groups in Indonesia]. The new MUI will try its best to prohibit and even to prevent [any form of persecution] from happening. The new MUI will campaign for religious harmony without any form of violence," Ma'ruf told *The Jakarta Post* on Thursday night, just hours after his election.

Earlier, the MUI had issued an edict confirming that Ahmadis were "deviant" because they believed that there was another prophet after Muhammad.

As for Shia Islam, some local branches of the MUI issued an edict condemning it as "heretic" for believing that the leadership of Islam should be held only by those from the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad.

Ma'ruf said that although the MUI could not change its basic tenets regarding Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, it could start to apply a softer stance in dealing with them in the future.

"The first thing we will do is inform them of the true teaching of Islam through good manners without any form of violence. We then will embrace them and live with them peacefully, because they claim to be a part of Islam. If we can live peacefully with non-Muslims, why can't we do that with people who claim to be part of Islam?" Ma'ruf said.

Din, who is also former chairman of the country's second largest Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, said the MUI under Ma'ruf should serve as an umbrella for all Islamic

organizations in the country in order to solve the problems faced by the roughly 210 million Muslims living in Indonesia.

“We will also establish dialogue with other minority groups from other religions, not only from Islam, in order to build a harmonious religious life in Indonesia,” said Din, who was elected as head of the MUI advisory council.

However, Islamic political analyst Ahmad Fuad Fanani from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) said that Ma’ruf could be seen as a traditional conservative.

Fuad said that Ma’ruf was known for his conservative views on Islamic theology especially on the issue of Ahmadiyah and Shia Islam, given his former position as the head of the MUI edict division.

“We don’t know whether he will continue to hold on to the same stance after his election. Probably he will tend to be more moderate after the election because we can see that the new board of leadership at the MUI is filled with people from various backgrounds,” Fuad said.

“We hope that the presence of Din Syamsuddin and Azyumardi Azra on the advisory board of the MUI could balance against the conservative elements in MUI,” Fuad said.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/28/new-mui-chairman-embrace-beleaguered-minority-groups.html>