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NU cleric visits Israel to ‘support’ Palestine

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Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) cleric Yahya Cholil Staquf greets journalists after his inauguration as a member of the Presidential Advisory Board (Wantimpres) at the State Palace in Jakarta on May 31. (Antara/Wahyu Putro A.)

A top Muslim cleric from Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Yahya Cholil Staquf, has broken his silence regarding his visit to Jerusalem to fulfill an invitation from an Israeli organization, saying his visit was made in part to support Palestine.

“I stand here for Palestine. I stand here on the basis that we have to honor Palestine's sovereignty as a free country,” he said in a statement posted on NU's official website, *nu.or.id*.

The cleric explained that Indonesia’s and NU’s active role was to continue former president Abdurrahman Wahid’s mission to create world peace.

Yahya – also known as Gus Yahya – clarified the reasons behind his visit after speaking in a discussion held by the America Jewish Committee (AJC) Global Forum in Jerusalem.

It was previously reported that he was invited by the Israel Council on Foreign Relations to deliver a speech titled “Shifting Geopolitical Calculus: From Conflict to Cooperation” at the David Amar World North African Jewish Heritage Center in Jerusalem on June 13.

NU executive Robikin Emhas confirmed on June 9 that the invitation was for Yahya but denied a claim that the cleric represented NU, asserting it was a personal invitation. Robikin said he believed Gus Yahya’s presence in Israel was to support Palestinians.

Yahya's clarification came amid polemics surrounding Tel Aviv’s plan to bar Indonesians from entering Israel in retaliation against Jakarta’s move to deny visas to dozens of Israeli citizens. The policy was initially to take effect on June 9 but waived until June 26.

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