

Netanyahu gets impromptu visit from head of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with Yahya Cholil Staquf, secretary general of the 60-million member Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, at his office in Jerusalem. Photo by Haim Zach/GPO.

(June 15, 2018 / JNS) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu got an impromptu meeting with the leader of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization.

Yahya Cholil Staquf, secretary general of the 60-million member Nahdlatul Ulama, visited with Netanyahu at his office in Jerusalem on Thursday. Staquf had been in Israel at the invitation of the American Jewish Committee.

During their discussion, Netanyahu explained to the Indonesian Islamic leader that many Muslim countries are getting closer to Israel for various reasons, the first being security—the common struggle against the Iranian regime and Daesh—and the second technology.

“Israel is the innovation nation, and I’m very happy to see that the Arab countries and many Muslim countries getting closer to Israel,” he said. “I hope that we have some movement with Indonesia.”

However, Staquf’s visit to Israel and subsequent meeting with the prime minister has drawn some angry reactions back in Indonesia, which is the world’s largest Muslim country and does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

“Some people here are amazed by my decision to come because they think it must be dangerous for this man to come, thinking that many, many Muslims must be threatening him with death or something,” Staquf told the Associated Press.

Staquf, who addressed the AJC’s Global Forum conference earlier in the week and has other meetings planned with local Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders in Israel, says that there needs to be a “new discourse” between Muslims and non-Muslims, and that they should be able to coexist peacefully.

“These elements are problematic because they are not compatible anymore with the current reality of our civilization,” he said.

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