



YOUTH PEACE ESSAY

ASEAN-IPR



The Strategic Role of Muslim Youth in Explaining Peace and Tolerance in the Contemporary Era

by Muhammad Ghifari

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Introduction

Often nowadays, Islam is still judged as a religion that is scary, anti-Western, vicious, rigid, dogmatic, radical, and even suspected to be a gathering place for terrorists. This assessment is due to some Muslim communities itself. However, the findings of the *Global Terrorism Index 2022* (2022: 2) shows that terrorism-related deaths in Nigeria more than doubled in 2020. Such increase led the world community to develop what is termed by some scholars as "Islamophobia".¹

On the other hand, it is also important to look at the research of Alex P. Schmid (2017:4) in the book *Moderate Muslims and Islamist Terrorism: Between Denial and Resistance* which stated that the number of terrorisms in the name of Islam, which has been subscribed by 100,000 people does not reflect millions more who express the religious belief peacefully and moderately. In this context, is it true that some Islamic teachings do teach anti-Western actions, anarchy, and even terrorism. The challenge is how to create harmonious relations among religious communities, especially between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world. To answer all these questions, I think that Muslim youth have a strategic role to present the face of Islam as a religion that is tolerant, moderate, peaceful, free, pluralist, inclusive, and merciful to all mankind.

So why Muslim youth? Generally, young people psychologically are full of energy and ambition for major changes. They have great idealistic values to achieve life transformation. Here, in my opinion, youth idealism should be oriented towards transformation as well as affirmation of the values of world peace and tolerance. Not only that, in Islam itself, youth can achieve greater religious and humanitarian contributions. For example, this is shown through the traditions (hadiths) of the Prophet Muhammad, which stated that youth who obey

¹ The Runnymede Trust offers a new definition of Islamophobia called Anti-Muslim Racism. The agency defines in detail by borrowing the definition of Racism from the United Nations, as all actions, exclusions, restrictions, and preferences against Muslims (or those who are considered Muslim) aimed at nullifying or impairing recognition, comfort at the level of equality in human rights and fundamental freedoms in aspects of human rights. political, economic, social, cultural and other aspects of social life. See The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia Still A Challenge for us All*. (London: The Runnymede, 2017), p. 13.



God will be given help² and traditions from the companions of the Prophet who entrusted Zaid bin Thabit as a young man in codifying the Qur'an.

The Doctrine of Harmony and Tolerance in Islam

Before I discuss the role of Muslim youth in promoting peace and tolerance, I think it is necessary that we all must first verify the teachings of Islam. Is it true that his teachings demand acts of terrorism and are anti-peace? To find out the answer, it is necessary to refer to the holy book of the Muslim community and the primary reference, namely the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (*al-Sunnah*).

As a Muslim scholar, there are indeed several verses of the Qur'an that indicate aggressive actions in the form of legalization of war against non-Muslims. However, these verses must be understood according to their context. For example, in the verse Q.S At-Taubah: 29³ which is often understood at a glance or partially as a justification for terrorism must be interpreted by looking at other verses, namely: Q.S Al-Hajj: 39⁴ and Q.S At-Taubah: 36⁵ in tandem. According to experts (*mufassir*), these verses help clarify each other (*yufassiru ba'duha*). Thus, the command to fight (*al-Qital* or *Jihad bil al-Qital*) is nothing but valid when there is an aggressive attack from outsiders - thus a form of self-defense.

Meanwhile, in Muhammad's own tradition, there are many signs that he is a tolerant and harmonious figure. For example, when he received gifts from non-Muslims, and Muhammad's attitude towards the aggressive attacks of the non-Muslim residents of taif by praying for them.⁶ These two patterns of tradition are sufficient to show that Muhammad's tradition is a one of dialogue and harmony

² See Muhammad's tradition no. 660 in Abdullah Muhammad bin 'Ismail al- Bukhari. (2011). *Mutân Shahîh al-Bukhâri*. Ed: Dr. Muhammad Tâmir, Vol. 1, (Cairo, Darl Hadits, 2010), p. 120.

³ Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled (Q.S At-Taubah: 29).

⁴ Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory (Q.S Al-Hajj: 39)

⁵ Indeed, the number of months with Allah is twelve [lunar] months in the register of Allah [from] the day He created the heavens and the earth; of these, four are sacred. That is the correct religion, so do not wrong yourselves during them. And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively. And know that Allah is with the righteous [who fear Him] (Q.S At-Taubah: 36)

⁶ See Muhammad's tradition no. 3231 in Abdullah Muhammad bin 'Ismail al- Bukhari..., p. 527.

building. This is what the Qur'an itself commands according to Q.S Al-Mumtahanah: 8⁷ & Q.S Al-Ra'd: 40⁸.

Quo Vadis Muslim Youth?

What is the role of Muslim youth in voicing the message of peace and tolerance, especially in the midst of accusations that Muslim communities believe in a religion that is accused of being anti-tolerance, anti-Western and anti-progress?

To answer this, according to the author, there are five strategic steps that must be taken by Muslim youth. *First:* Affirmations Islamic Worldview. What is meant by the term? Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1999: 2) mentions "*What is meant by 'Worldview', according to the perspective of Islam, is the vision of reality and truth that appears before our mind's eye and revealing what existence is all about; for it is the world of existence in its totality that Islam is projecting. Thus by 'worldview' we mean ru'yat islam li al-wujud*". In the context of tolerance and peace, this affirmation opens the basic principle of Muslim youth to always see with the heart that Islam is a teaching that is merciful to all of nature and in all its forms. Thus, the invitation to radicalist interpretations must be rejected.

Secondly: Calling for Al-Qur'an pluralism values. There are 3 verses that inspire tolerance between religious communities in life, namely Q.S Al-Baqarah: 62⁹, Q.S Al-Hujurat: 13¹⁰, and Q.S Al-Hajj: 40¹¹. These three verses are explicitly clear that the core of religion is faith and good deeds. In the context of inter-

⁷ Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly (Q.S Al-Mumtahanah: 8)

⁸ And whether We show you part of what We promise them or take you in death, upon you is only the [duty of] notification, and upon Us is the account (Q.S Al-Rad: 40).

⁹ Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve (Q.S Al-Baqarah: 62).

¹⁰ O mankind, indeed, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted (Q.S Al-Hujurat: 13)

¹¹ [They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right - only because they say, "Our Lord is Allah." And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might (Q.S Al-Hajj: 40).

religious life, this verse must be used, and the focus be on helping each other, kindness, and tolerance for progress without falling into debates on theological truths. Each religion has its own characteristics in assessing the truth. Once again, the point lies in focusing on good deeds, peace, and tolerance between religious communities.

Thirdly: Implementing Islamic Moderation Patterns (*wasathiyah Islam*). Simply put, moderate Islam, namely the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, is the very representative of Al-Azhar As-Syarief, Muslims or insiders. The terminology is understood as "Points of view, attitudes, and behavior always take a middle position, always act fairly, and are not extreme in religion" (Kemenag, 2019: 17). This is where the youth, after calling for the values of tolerance in the Qur'an, must present - a moderate Muslim face. Not too textual in understanding or interpreting Islamic teachings and not too free to lose identity as a Muslim. In this context, Muslims youth are required to be proportional in facing the realities of life. This mode of Islamic moderation, if realized consciously by muslim youth, will counter radicalist interpretation movements in the name of Islam.

Fourthly: Mediatization, Publication, and Digitization Movement (MPD Movement). The next step that must be considered jointly by Muslim youth is mediating, publishing, and digitizing the face of moderate Islam. Thus, this encourages Muslim youth to present digital innovations such as essays published on websites so that they can be accessed by all members of the world community. Furthermore, Muslim youth are required to also build big scientific ideas and be published in international journals such as the Journal of Islamic Studies (Published by Oxford Center of Islamic Studies), the journal sociology of religion (Published by the Association for the Sociology of Islamic Studies), ASR, Muslim World, etc.

The last step: cooperation and participating in international events for peace and tolerance. In this context, Muslim youth are required to foster cooperation between youths for progress. For example, by participating in the MUN simulation, OIC Mulism Youth, Al-Azhar Conferences in Egypt, Kingdom Youth Conference, Religion for Peace, and international greenfaith events. The themes of tolerance and peace will be more realistic and to be applied by respecting differences of opinion.

Conclusion

The five strategic steps in the form of Affirmation of Islamic Worldview, Al-Qur'an Pluralism, Islamic Moderation, MPD Movements, and participation in

international events are very important and need to be implemented by Muslim youth. All of these steps will open the cognitive horizons of Muslim youth so that their activities are always within the values of tolerance and peace among religious communities. Moreover, these five strategic steps will also show the world that the Muslim community loves peace, tolerance, and compassion and that they are agents for the removal of the stigma of Islamophobia.

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