



Written Testimony of

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**Before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
on the**

**“U.S. Presidency of the G20 –
An Opportunity to Champion Human Rights”**

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 2 p.m.

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Chairman McGovern, and Honorable Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

The General Chairman of the world's largest Muslim organization, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, has asked me to convey his personal greetings and thanks to you for convening this important hearing.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before this Commission to discuss how U.S. recognition of the G20 Religion Forum, or R20, offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to position human rights at the heart of the world's political and economic agenda.

A distinguished coalition of 84 American religious leaders and foreign policy experts, representing a broad spectrum of faith traditions — including my colleague and fellow expert witness Prof. Mary Ann Glendon — wrote to President Trump in November 2025, urging him to officially “recognize the R20 Summit as part of America's G20 presidency in 2026.” As this R20 Coalition Letter stated:

The R20 Summit brings together religious leaders from the world's major faith traditions whose voices and insights are indispensable for policy making that serves human flourishing, dignity, and security. R20 is particularly dedicated to advancing international religious freedom and deradicalization — principles that are vital to America's long term national security interests and those of the world.

1. Indonesia's multireligious civilization: the fertile soil from which the R20 emerged

For the past twenty-three years I have worked closely with senior leaders of the world's largest Muslim organization, Indonesia's 100-million-member Nahdlatul Ulama — or NU — to counter Islamist terrorism, promote human rights, and foster international peace, security, and prosperity.

In 2003, I established LibForAll (“Liberty for All”) Foundation with long-time NU chairman and former Indonesian president Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, whom *The Wall Street Journal* described in 2007 as “the single most influential religious leader in the Muslim world... [who] believes not only in democracy but in the liberalism of America's founding fathers.”

When he died in 2009, *The New York Times* wrote: “Mr. Wahid was the single most important figure not merely in Indonesia's transition from Suharto's centralized autocracy to a decentralized democracy but in ensuring that the new democracy was committed to religious and ethnic pluralism.... Abdurrahman Wahid's passing reminds one of how badly the Islamic political world needs more people like him, and how badly many in the Arab and Iranian worlds need to learn from their more numerous Muslim brethren east of the Indus.”

President Wahid was the living embodiment of an ancient civilizational tradition that combined the profound moral and spiritual teachings of Islam with the wisdom of his Javanese ancestors, who preserved a pluralistic and tolerant — rather than supremacist or violent — understanding of religion following their conversion to Islam in the early 16th century.

Although this history is little-known in the West, even among scholars, the conversion of the Malay Archipelago to Islam was triggered by political and military decisions made in China.¹

The Mongol armies that destroyed Central Asia (1219 – 21) and the Abbasid Caliphate (1258) also conquered China. Kublai Khan, who founded the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368), brought hundreds of thousands of Central Asians to China, where they served as a military and administrative interface between the Mongol overlords and their ethnic Chinese subjects, whom the Mongols did not trust. Marrying locally, these Central Asians came to form a major component of a distinct ethnic group within China known as Hui Muslims, whose prominent role within the Chinese government was soon to have a profound influence on the sociocultural and political dynamics of *Nusantara* (“East Indies”) civilization.

In 1293, Kublai Khan sent a large punitive expedition against the Hindu/Buddhist Singhasari dynasty, based in Java, which had replaced the Buddhist Kingdom of Srivijaya as the dominant maritime power in the Malay Archipelago and refused to acknowledge Mongol suzerainty. Small vassal states throughout the Archipelago, including many along the coasts of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, quickly submitted to Kublai Khan’s maritime expedition, which was commanded by a Hui general and consisted primarily of Hui and ethnic Chinese soldiers. Although the Mongol expedition ultimately ended in defeat and disgrace in Java, at the hands of Raden Wijaya, founder of the Majapahit dynasty, it helped set in motion a process whereby, over the next two centuries, political power in the East Indies — and, hence, the official state religion — gradually shifted from Hindu/Buddhist to Muslim polities. It is noteworthy that the first Muslim state in present-day Indonesia was established in 1297, when the ruler of Pasai, in northern Sumatra, converted to Islam.

This process accelerated dramatically a century later, when the Yongle emperor of the Ming dynasty, who came to power with Muslim support and whose mother was said to be descended from Hui Muslims, dispatched a massive Chinese naval expedition to Southeast Asia led by a Hui admiral named Zheng He (aka “Cheng Ho”), with an express mandate “to fragment the unity of the Outer Barbarians of the Western Ocean,” and encourage local rulers to establish a direct tribute relationship with China. Zheng He was the great-great-great-grandson of Sayyid Ajal Shams al-Din Omar, a Persian who served in the administration of the Mongol empire and was the governor

¹ For a more complete description of these historical developments, please see C. Holland Taylor. 2018. “Maneuver in the narrative space: Lessons from Islam Nusantara.” *Strategic Review* 8:1 (January – March 2018), pp. 36-51. https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2018/Strategic-Review_Manuevering-within-Islam's-narrative-space_c.holland.taylor_Jan-Mar-2018.pdf

of Yunnan during the early Yuan dynasty. Zheng He's grandfather was a *haji*, a Muslim who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In 1405, Zheng He visited northern Java on the first of seven Chinese naval expeditions to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and East Africa during the next 28 years. These expeditions, each comprising hundreds of ships and crews numbering more than 20,000, many of them Hui Muslims, were ostensibly commercial and diplomatic in character, yet also constituted an overwhelming display of military force by the Ming dynasty, which was sufficient to permanently transform the political and religious dynamics of the East Indies. The expeditions' immediate impact was to stimulate trade, destabilize the Hindu/Buddhist Majapahit empire, which claimed suzerainty over the Malay Archipelago, and accelerate the process of Islamization throughout the region.

This tectonic shift in the political and religious balance of power in maritime Southeast Asia also triggered a century-long conflict on the heavily populated island of Java, between adherents of two radically different ways of understanding and practicing Islam: i.e., *between those (primarily diaspora Chinese and Arabs) who harnessed the jurisprudential aspects of Islam to acquire military, political, and economic power, and those (primarily indigenous Javanese converts to Islam) who emphasized its spiritual essence, as a source of universal love and compassion (rahmah).*

As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Bret Stephens noted in an article titled "The Last King of Java": at the end of this multigenerational conflict, President Wahid's Muslim ancestors defeated the 16th-century equivalent of ISIS and *reestablished* freedom of religion for all Javanese.² ***This was 200 years before similar ideas took firm political root in the West***, through passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

2. Nahdlatul Ulama and the Humanitarian Islam movement

The island of Java represents the cultural heartland of the world's largest Muslim organization, Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama, which has more than 100 million followers and 28,000 Islamic boarding schools. Hence, it is not surprising that this organization should play a leading role in the promotion of human rights not only in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and democracy, but also among Muslims who dwell in the Sunni and Shiite heartlands of the Middle East, as well as in Europe, North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia.

On 24 December 2021, a close disciple of Abdurrahman Wahid, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, was elected General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board — a position President Wahid held from 1984 to 1999. During those 15 years, Abdurrahman Wahid laid the foundation for the recontextualization (i.e., reform) of "obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy"

² Bret Stephens. 2007. "The Last King of Java." *The Wall Street Journal*. 7 April 2007. https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB117591182092262904?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWetsqfsm5lTyhg_kmeHv-EvjUO5wK3t8qJOWcrYWU-t9sU8c7HfzKUc5LhhrhW3anA%3D&gaa_ts=69a1b40e&gaa_sig=DkVXLtx7KMAhKRrjYMqkMp3Bg20cpUAA69BgL5XvXxrZaW7iFgA4tgLMvBRaWd-Wm4UtoFa2dYposfxB6GkqpO%3D%3D.

that may be readily weaponized to justify religious hatred, supremacy, and violence. In fact, it is precisely these tenets of classical Islamic law, or *fiqh*, that Islamists use to deny religious freedom, justify the persecution of non-Muslims, and reject the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as incompatible with the teachings of Islam.

For years prior to his election as General Chairman, Mr. Staquf worked to build on President Wahid's legacy. Serving first as Nahdlatul Ulama's Secretary for Political and International Affairs (2010 – 2015) and then as General Secretary of the NU Supreme Council (2015 – 2021), Mr. Staquf revived President Wahid's agenda and dramatically expanded Nahdlatul Ulama's reach worldwide. For example, in 2015 NU launched what a front-page article in *The New York Times* described as “the opening salvo in a global campaign by the world's largest Muslim group to challenge [Islamic State] ideology head-on.”³

In 2017, Gerakan Pemuda Anshor — NU's eight-million-member young adults organization — launched the Humanitarian Islam movement, which seeks to restore *rahmah* (universal love and compassion) to its rightful place as a primary message of Islam. It does so by addressing obsolete and problematic elements within Islamic orthodoxy⁴ that lend themselves to tyranny — including the rejection of fundamental human rights — while positioning these efforts within a much broader initiative to reject any and all forms of tyranny, and foster the emergence of a global civilization endowed with noble character.

The inspiration for Humanitarian Islam is the unique example of the *Wali Songo* (“Nine Saints”) who in the 15th and 16th centuries proselytized *Islam Nusantara* or “East Indies Islam,” emphasizing the principle of *rahmah*. They stressed the need to contextualize Islamic teachings and adapt these to the ever-changing realities of space and time, while presenting Islam not as a supremacist ideology or vehicle for conquest, but rather, as one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfection.⁵

While it remains premature to assess the global impact of the Humanitarian Islam movement, several developments to date are particularly noteworthy.

In June of 2017, several organizations affiliated with the spiritual wing of Nahdlatul Ulama — including GP Anshor, Bayt ar-Rahmah, and LibForAll Foundation — launched a strategic messaging campaign and began implementation of the Humanitarian Islam road map. In July, this

³ Joe Cochrane. 2015. “From Indonesia, a Muslim Challenge to the Ideology of the Islamic State.” *New York Times*. 26 November 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/indonesia-islam-nahdlatul-ulama.html>.

⁴ Rüdiger Lohlker. 2016. “Theology Matters: The Case of jihadi Islam.” *Strategic Review* 6:3, pp. 92-105. https://baytarrahmah.org/media/2016/Strategic-Review_Theology-matters-The-case-of-jihadi-Islam_Jul-Sep-2016_highlighted.pdf.

⁵ Yahya Cholil Staquf. 2015. “How Islam learned to adapt in ‘Nusantara.’” *Strategic Review* 5:2 (April – June 2015), pp. 18-28. https://baytarrahmah.org/media/2015/Strategic-Review_How-Islam-learned-to-adapt-in-Nusantara_Apr-Jun-2015.pdf.

messaging penetrated to the heart of the European Union, via the Rotating Presidency of the European Council and the EU's Terrorism Working Party.⁶ On 19 August, one of Germany's leading newspapers, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), published a hard-hitting interview⁷ with then-General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf. Titled “*Terrorismus und Islam hängen zusammen*” (“Terrorism and Islam are Intimately Connected”), the interview promptly went viral amidst an historic national election campaign in Germany.⁸

In November 2017, political analyst James Dorsey cited the FAZ interview⁹ with Mr. Staquf as having “lent justification” to moves by the Belgian government “to wrest control from Saudi Arabia of Brussels’ downtown Grand Mosque,” where Saudi-appointed imams had been radicalizing Belgian Muslims for years,¹⁰ including those who masterminded the 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris.¹¹ Four months later, Reuters published an article stating that

Belgium is taking back control of the Grand Mosque of Brussels by terminating Saudi Arabia’s lease of the building with immediate effect over concerns it promotes radicalism, the government said on Friday.

Belgium leased the Grand Mosque to Riyadh in 1969, giving Saudi-backed imams access to a growing Muslim immigrant community, mostly from Morocco and Turkey, in return for cheaper oil for its industry.

It has been run by the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL), a missionary society mainly funded by Saudi Arabia. The MWL denies it espouses violence.

⁶ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da‘wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin. 2017. “Presentation to EU Council TWP (Terrorism Working Party).” 18 July 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/2017_07_18_presentation-to-eu-council/.

⁷ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da‘wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin. 2017. “*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.” 19 August 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/2017_08_19_frankfurter-allgemeine-zeitung/.

⁸ Marco Stahlhut. 2017. ““*Terrorismus und Islam hängen zusammen: Ein Gespräch mit Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, dem Generalsekretär der grössten Muslim Vereinigung in Indonesien.*” (“Terrorism and Islam are Intimately Connected: A conversation with Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of Indonesia’s largest Muslim organization).” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 19 August 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/media/2017/FAZ_A-Conversation-with-Kyai-Haji-Yahya-Cholil-Staquf_08-19-17.pdf.

⁹ James Dorsey. 2017. “Did they or didn’t they? The battle for control of Brussels’ Grand Mosque.” *Modern Diplomacy*. 17 November 2017. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2017/11/17/did-they-or-didn-t-they-the-battle-for-control-of-brussels-grand-mosque/>.

¹⁰ Marco Stahlhut. 2017. ““*Naturlijk is er een verband tussen terreur en islam.*” (“Of course there is a connection between terrorism and Islam”). *Knack*, 23 August 2017, pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da‘wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin. 2017 “Saudi Mosque in Brussels.” 17 November 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/2017_11_17_saudi-mosque-in-brussels/.

*Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon tweeted of Friday's announcement that "in this way we are tackling Salafist, violent extremist influences."*¹²

Hence, it is not surprising that in July 2022 a senior Saudi figure who reports directly to Mohammed bin Salman told Nahdlatul Ulama leaders that "for years" Mr. Staquf's engagement with the West had significantly impacted Saudi Arabia's geopolitical calculations and agenda.¹³ It may, however, genuinely surprise many Western observers — who lack visibility into these dynamics within the Muslim world — to realize that Saudi Arabia's historic turn away from Wahhabism, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was partly due to strategic influence projected by Nahdlatul Ulama's Humanitarian Islam movement.

3. Promoting respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being

In a major break with Islamic conservatism, in February 2019 Nahdlatul Ulama ruled that the *fiqh* category of infidel, or *kafir* — which has long cast a shadow over the faith's relationships with other religions — is no longer relevant as a legal concept within modern nation states. At a gathering of some 20,000 *ulama* in Banjar, West Java (the 2019 "National Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Scholars," or "2019 Munas"), NU endorsed the concept of a nation state rather than caliphate and recognized all citizens, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or creed, as having equal rights and obligations.

Bahtsul Masa'il PBNU — a division of the NU Supreme Council whose members are prominent experts on *fiqh* (*fuqaha*) qualified to pronounce authoritative rulings on matters related to Islamic jurisprudence — issued a 9-page decree titled *The Nation, State Law, and Citizenship*.¹⁴ This ruling decreed that: (1) the modern nation state is theologically legitimate; (2) there is no legal category of infidel (*kafir*) within a modern nation state, only "fellow citizens"; (3) Muslims must obey the laws of any modern nation state in which they dwell; and (4) Muslims have a religious obligation to foster peace rather than automatically wage war on behalf of their co-religionists, whenever conflict erupts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations anywhere in the world.¹⁵

¹² Alissa De Carbonnel. 2018. "Belgium takes back Brussels' Grand Mosque from Saudi government." Reuters. 16 March 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/belgium-takes-back-brussels-grand-mosque-from-saudi-government-idUSKCN1GS2HP/>.

¹³ Personal communications between KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf and the witness.

¹⁴ Nahdlatul Ulama Bahtsul Masa'il Ad-Diniyyah Al-Maudluiyyah. 2019. *2019 Munas Findings of Bahtsul Masa'il ad-Diniyyah al-Maudluiyyah Regarding the Nation, State Law, Citizenship and Peace*. 1 March 2019. https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2019/2019-Munas_Findings-of-Bahtsul-Masa%E2%80%99il-Maudluiyyah.pdf.

¹⁵ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da'wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-'Alamin. 2019. "NU Rejects the Relevance of 'Infidel' as a Legal Category within Modern Nation States." 16 October 2019. https://baytarrahmah.org/2019_10_16_world-first-nahdlatul-ulama-abolishes-the-%20legal-category-of-infidel-within-islamic-law/.

The implications of these rulings for universal human rights may be glimpsed from the fact that — absent the *fiqh* category of infidel — there is no theological basis for Muslims to foster enmity or perpetrate acts of violence (e.g., *jihadi* terrorism) against those perceived to be non-Muslim.¹⁶ As reported by the Public Radio International (PRI) network: “When someone calls you a *kafir*, that means you’re considered someone who is godless,” said Alex Arifianto, an Indonesian political scientist with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. “Or you’re someone whose religion is considered inferior to the Islamic belief,” he said. “That’s why this is so significant. The largest Muslim organization in the world is saying, ‘Look, we have to treat non-Muslims as equals.’”

4. The establishment of the R20: a global movement for shared civilizational values

One of KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf’s first acts, after his election as NU Chairman, was to establish the G20 Religion Forum (R20) in March 2022, in conjunction with Indonesia’s G20 Presidency that year. In the words of Mr. Staquf:

The purpose of the R20 is to ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems, in the 21st century. Through the R20, we hope to facilitate the emergence of a global movement, in which people of goodwill of every faith and nation will help bring the world’s geopolitical and economic power structures into alignment with the highest moral and spiritual values, for the sake of all humanity.¹⁷

Nahdlatul Ulama and the Mecca-based Muslim World League co-hosted the R20 Summit on the ancient Hindu “Island of the Gods” (*Pulau Dewata*) from 2 – 3 November 2022 — two weeks before the 17th annual G20 Heads of State and Government Summit, which also took place in Nusa Dua, Bali. The Government of Indonesia incorporated the inaugural R20 Summit of International Religious Leaders into the official program of G20 Main Events and recognized the R20 as an official G20 Engagement Group — the first time that religion was ever placed on the formal G20 agenda.

In an article published in the *Bulletin de L’Observatoire International du Religieux*,¹⁸ produced under the auspices of the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), Jonathan Benthall

¹⁶ Tassia Sipahutar and Arys Aditya. 2019. “Indonesia’s Largest Islamic Group Seeks End to ‘Infidel’ Usage.” Bloomberg. 1 March 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-02/indonesia-s-largest-islamic-group-seeks-end-to-infidel-usage>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Najib Azca, Timothy Samuel Shah, and C. Holland Taylor, eds. 2023. *Proceedings of the R20 Summit of International Religious Leaders in Bali, Indonesia*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: University of Gadjah Mada Press, Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, Center for Shared Civilizational Values, and Muslim World League.

¹⁸ Established at the height of the Islamic State movement, when over 4,000 French citizens joined ISIS, *L’Observatoire International du Religieux* is a research program that seeks to clarify contemporary religious phenomena and their interaction with politics. Financially supported by the Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy of France’s Ministry of Armed Forces, *L’Observatoire* has published more than 50 bulletins since its creation in 2016, addressing themes as diverse as the religions of the Middle East, the relationship between

observed: “It would be truly a game changer, I will suggest, if the R20 were to stimulate the world’s most important religious authorities to reform their traditions from within and become forces for peace, carrying along with them the huge number of adherents that each of them could mobilize.”¹⁹

It is particularly noteworthy that Nahdlatul Ulama chose to invite Shaykh Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, to co-chair the inaugural R20 Summit in Bali with KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf. Since his ascension to power in 2017, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has reoriented Saudi policy, reversing its long-standing support for ultraconservative Sunni Islam, both domestically and internationally. This change of policy is proving to be especially significant in regard to the Muslim World League, which was founded in 1962 and long served as a vehicle for propagating Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood ideology worldwide.

Reflecting this significant change in direction, in May 2019 the Muslim World League convened many of the world’s leading *ulama* to discuss and adopt the *Charter of Makkah*, a fourteen-page document that explicitly rejects the use of religion to foster hatred, supremacy, and violence, while supporting religious and cultural diversity. At the end of a four-day conference in Mecca, the historic document was approved by Islamic leaders from 139 countries and signed by approximately 1,200 prominent Muslim figures.²⁰ Furthermore, the following January Shaykh Mohammad Al-Issa visited Auschwitz in the company of prominent rabbis. And for years, since promulgating the *Charter of Makkah*, Shaykh Al-Issa has consistently advised European Muslims to obey the laws of the jurisdictions in which they live.

These dramatic shifts in Saudi policy are consistent with, and followed, Nahdlatul Ulama’s 2016 pledge “to consolidate the global *ahlusunnah wal jamaah* (Sunni Muslim) community, in order to bring about a world in which Islam, and Muslims, are truly beneficent and contribute to the well-being of all humanity.”²¹ Indeed, they followed in the wake of Nahdlatul Ulama’s Humanitarian Islam initiative, whose launch was prominently covered by *The New York Times* and other international media.²²

Christianity and governments in Asia, Islam in North Africa, Pentecostalism in Brazil, the Russian Orthodox Church’s influence in Africa, and religious dimensions of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

¹⁹ Jonathan Benthall. 2023. “R20: the G20 Religion Forum led by Indonesia.” *Bulletin de L’Observatoire International du Religieux*. Paris, France: Sciences Po. Bulletin No. 41, January 2023. <https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/r20-the-g20-religion-forum-led-by-indonesia-english-version/>.

²⁰ Muslim World League. 2019. *The Charter of Makkah*. Mecca, Saudi Arabia: Muslim World League. <https://themwl.org/sites/default/files/TheCharterofMakkah.pdf>.

²¹ Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board. 2016. *International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration*. Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, 10 May 2016. https://baytarrahmah.org/media/2016/Nahdlatul-Ulama-Declaration_05-10-16.pdf.

²² Joe Cochrane. 2017. “Indonesians Seek to Export a Modernized Vision of Islam.” *New York Times*. 1 May 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/01/world/asia/indonesia-islam.html>.

The 2017 *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* highlighted the fact that “[t]he Wahhabi/ultraconservative view of Islam—which is embraced not only by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but also by al-Qaeda and ISIS — is intricately wedded to those elements of classical Islamic law that foster sectarian hatred and violence.”²³ The *Declaration* also noted that “U.S. government policy ignores the direct correlation that exists between Saudi and Qatari support of ultraconservative Sunni movements, and the spread of terrorism worldwide,” while urging “both Muslim and non-Muslim governments to consistently view and adjust their relations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United States and Iran in light of their actions in regard to Islamist extremism.”²⁴

As a result of Mohammed bin Salman’s shift from a Wahhabi-oriented to a modernization-driven agenda, the Muslim World League — which is strategically based in the Blessed City of Mecca (*Makkah al-Mukarramah*) — is free to productively engage with the world’s largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, whose center of gravity lies in the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation and democracy.

In 2023, this engagement included Shaykh Mohammad Al-Issa’s participation in two major events hosted by Nahdlatul Ulama and the G20 Religion Forum (R20). The first of these — the International Congress on Islamic Jurisprudence for a Global Civilization (*al-Mu’tamar al-Dawli li-Fiqh al-Hadarah*) — was preceded by an extensive process of socialization, during which Lakpesdam (Nahdlatul Ulama’s Institute for Study and Human Resource Development) conducted a series of 231 *halaqah* (“study circles”) at Islamic boarding schools throughout Indonesia. An estimated 23,000 *ulama* (religious scholars) participated in these *halaqah*, discussing and debating the subject of *fiqh al-hadarah* and its ramifications for Islamic discourse, education, jurisprudence, and practice.²⁵

Held in conjunction with Nahdlatul Ulama’s centennial according to the Islamic calendar,²⁶ the International Congress²⁷ gave birth to a three-page document titled *Is There a Need to Establish an*

²³ Gerakan Pemuda Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah. 2017. *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*. Jombang, Indonesia. 22 May 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/media/2017/Gerakan-Pemuda-Ansor_Declaration-on-Humanitarian-Islam.pdf.

²⁴ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da’wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin. 2017. “Impact Analysis.” 19 October 2017. https://baytarrahmah.org/2017_10_19_impact-analysis/.

²⁵ Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da’wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin. 2023. “Islamic Jurisprudence for a Global Civilization.” 21 January 2023. https://baytarrahmah.org/2023_01_21_islamic-jurisprudence-for-a-global-civilization/.

²⁶ Center for Shared Civilizational Values. 2023. “Nahdlatul Ulama Centennial.” 7 February 2023. https://baytarrahmah.org/2023_02_07_nahdlatul-ulama-centennial/.

²⁷ Mohamed Abu al-Fadl. 2023. “Indonesian Islam... once again.” *Al-Ahram*. 16 February 2023. https://civilizationalvalues.org/media/2023/al-ahram_Indonesian-Islam_once-again_English-Arabic_02-16-23.pdf.

*Islamic Legal (Fiqhi) Foundation for Global Peace and Harmony?*²⁸ and to the *Nahdlatul Ulama Centennial Proclamation*.²⁹ The *Proclamation* concludes:

In the view of Nahdlatul Ulama, the most appropriate and effective means to promote the wellbeing of Muslims worldwide (al-ummah al-Islamiyyah) is to foster the wellbeing of all humanity, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and to acknowledge the brotherhood of all human beings (ukhuwwah basyariyah).

The Charter of the United Nations and the United Nations Organization are imperfect, and, indeed, remain problematic to the present day. However, the UN Charter was intended to end the destructive warfare and savagery that have characterized international relations throughout human history. Thus, the UN Charter and United Nations Organization may constitute the strongest available foundation upon which to develop a new fiqh for a peaceful and harmonious future for human civilization.

*Rather than aspire and seek to consolidate the world's Muslim population into a single unitary state, or caliphate, Nahdlatul Ulama calls upon Muslims to embrace a new vision and develop a new discourse regarding Islamic jurisprudence, which will prevent the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; promote solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, cultures, and nations of the world; and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being. Such a vision will serve to fulfil the purposes of shari'ah.*³⁰

5. Endorsement of the R20 by Centrist Democrat International

Recognizing the significance of these developments, on May 18, 2023, Centrist Democrat International (CDI) — the world's largest network of political parties — unanimously adopted a resolution *On infusing the world's geopolitical and economic power structures with universal*

²⁸ Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board and R20. 2023. *Is There a Need to Establish an Islamic Legal (Fiqhi) Foundation for Global Peace and Harmony?* Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, 6 February 2023. <https://g20religion.org/media/2023/Is-There-a-Need-to-Establish-an-Islamic-Legal-Fiqhi-Foundation-for-Global-Peace-and-Harmony.pdf>.

²⁹ James Dorsey. 2023. "Reforming Islamic jurisprudence shapes the battle to define moderate Islam." *Focus, L'Observatoire International du Religieux*. Paris, France: Sciences Po. March 2023. <https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/focus/reforming-islamic-jurisprudence-shapes-the-battle-to-define-moderate-islam/>.

³⁰ Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board and R20. 2023. *Nahdlatul Ulama Centennial Proclamation*. Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board, 7 February 2023. <https://g20religion.org/media/2023/Nahdlatul-Ulama-Centennial-Proclamation.pdf>.

*ethics and humanitarian values through the G20 Religion Forum (R20), in keeping with the vision and traditions of IDC-CDI.*³¹ That resolution reads, in part:

- *Viewing with concern heightened geopolitical rivalry, deepening cultural divides within and between societies, and the spread of violent conflicts that threaten the very foundations of the post-war international order, which has given rise to a nearly eight-decade interval of global peace and prosperity without precedent in world history;*
- *Appreciating that religions — at their best — inculcate universal ethics and humanitarian values that foster the common good, while moderating the libido dominandi, or will to power;*
- *Recognizing the potential for religious leaders to help unite, rather than divide, humanity based on shared moral and spiritual values;*
- *Noting with appreciation that in 2022 the world's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, founded the G20 Religion Forum (R20) in conjunction with Indonesia's Presidency of the G20;*
- *Noting further that the R20 functions as an inclusive, cross-cultural platform designed to infuse the world's political and economic power structures with moral and spiritual values;*
- *Lauding President Joko Widodo, the Government of Indonesia, and CDI member party PKB for incorporating the R20 into the official program of G20 Main Events in 2022, and for hosting the R20 Summit in Bali two weeks before the 17th annual G20 Heads of State and Government Summit, which also took place in Nusa Dua, Bali;*
- *Recognizing the official status held by a variety of permanent Engagement Groups within the G20, including B20 (Business), C20 (Civil Society Organizations), L20 (Labor), P20 (Parliament), S20 (Science), SAI20 (Supreme Audit Institutions), T20 (Think Tanks), U20 (Urban), W20 (Women), and Y20 (Youth);*
- *Taking into consideration that religious believers constitute the single largest demographic within the human family, whose share of the global population is estimated to exceed 80%;*
- *Recognizing that history provides countless examples of both positive and negative behavior legitimized by religion;*

³¹ Centrist Democrat International. 2023. *Resolution on infusing the world's geopolitical and economic power structures with universal ethics and humanitarian values through the G20 Religion Forum (R20), in keeping with the vision and traditions of IDC-CDI.* Bled, Slovenia. 18 May 2023. [https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2023/CDI_Resolution-on-G20-Religion-Forum-\(R20\).pdf](https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2023/CDI_Resolution-on-G20-Religion-Forum-(R20).pdf).

- *Noting with approval that the R20 explicitly seeks to “ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems,” on the world stage.*

The CDI:

- *Affirms the value of the R20 as a means of providing a seat at the G20 table for religious communities and their leaders;*
- *Calls upon its member parties, and all G20 Member States, to cooperate in securing recognition of the R20 as a permanent G20 Engagement Group;*
- *Encourages its member parties to join Nahdlatul Ulama and the Government of Indonesia in facilitating “the emergence of a global movement, in which people of goodwill of every faith and nation will help bring the world’s geopolitical and economic power structures into alignment with the highest moral and spiritual values, for the sake of all humanity” (Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board and Founding Chairman of the R20).*

Bled, Slovenia, 18 May 2023

A second resolution on the R20 was unanimously adopted by the CDI General Assembly in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on 30 May 2025. In that document, titled *Resolution on Fostering International Peace, Security, and Prosperity through Cooperation between the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and IDC-CDI*,³² Centrist Democrat International:

- *Strongly encourages the U.S. Government to recognize an R20 International Summit of Religious Authorities (R20 ISORA) as an official G20 Main Event in 2026, in conjunction with the U.S. Presidency of the G20;*
- *Calls upon its member parties, and all G20 Member States, including the United States of America, to cooperate in securing recognition of the R20 as a permanent G20 Engagement Group; and*
- *Urges CDI member parties and all G20 Member States, including the United States of America, to prioritize long-term cooperation with the world’s major religions through the existing mechanism of the G20 Religion Forum (R20), in order to foster international peace, security, and prosperity.*

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³² Centrist Democrat International. 2025. *Resolution on Fostering International Peace, Security, and Prosperity through Cooperation between the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and IDC-CDI*. Abidjan, Ivory Coast. 30 May 2025. [https://civilizationalvalues.org/media/2025/CDI_Resolution-on-Fostering-International-Peace-Security-and-Prosperity-through-Cooperation-between-the-G20-Religion-Forum-\(R20\)-and-IDC-CDI.pdf](https://civilizationalvalues.org/media/2025/CDI_Resolution-on-Fostering-International-Peace-Security-and-Prosperity-through-Cooperation-between-the-G20-Religion-Forum-(R20)-and-IDC-CDI.pdf).

It is worth noting that the largest political group in the European Parliament, the European Peoples Party (EPP), is a direct affiliate of CDI. Moreover, EPP and CDI Member Parties, including Germany's Christian Democratic Union, currently govern 14 European nations. Members of this Commission may also be interested to know that the National Democratic Institute, or NDI, is directly affiliated with CDI.

As heirs to the European and Latin American tradition of Christian Democracy, CDI Member Parties recognize that the R20 offers the U.S. Government a once-in-a-generation opportunity to place religion, and human rights, at the center of global discourse by integrating the G20 Religion Forum (R20) with this year's U.S. Presidency of the G20.

6. An historic opportunity

This opportunity is all the more historic, and significant, because America's G20 Presidency coincides with the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

As our friend and noted public intellectual Dr. Os Guinness has observed, the most salient ideological division today is between "the heirs and allies of 1776" and "the heirs and allies of 1789." Over the past two centuries, perhaps the greatest threat to human rights has been that posed by militant atheist ideologies, including Communism. Yet the R20 also acknowledges, and directly addresses, the threat to human rights posed by religious hatred, extremism, and terror.

Given the very real existence of these threats, in our current day and age, many are tempted either to enforce state-imposed religious doctrines and dogma, or to completely exclude religion from the public square. The R20, on the other hand, walks a middle path between these extremes. It does so by advocating freedom of conscience, constructive participation by religion in the public square, and systematic efforts to recontextualize (i.e., reform) obsolete and problematic tenets of religious orthodoxy that conflict with universal human rights, and thereby obstruct peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths.

R20 initiatives involving theological recontextualization entail examining and addressing teachings embedded within the world's major religions that are incompatible with a rules-based international order founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

For example, in his keynote address delivered at the opening plenary of the R20 Summit in Bali in November 2022, R20 Founder and Chairman KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf invited the world's religious leaders to join Nahdlatul Ulama in an open and honest discussion about "what values our respective traditions need to relinquish, to ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems, in the 21st century."³³

³³ G20 Religion Forum (R20). 2022. "Recontextualization." <https://g20religion.org/recontextualization-reform/>.

By giving public voice to the “highest common denominator” among our shared civilizational values, which are rooted in natural law — or what C.S. Lewis refers to as “the *Tao*” in his classic work, *The Abolition of Man* — the R20 seeks to leverage the revolutionary principles of America’s Founding, including the God-given right of all people to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, in order to recalibrate the trajectory of Western civilization and the world at large.