

# Being Young and Interreligious:

## Makassar young muslim generation views toward interfaith dialogue

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**Abstract**—This study examines the views of young Muslim generation in Makassar who are actively involved in interfaith programs. This study identified that most of students who are actively involved in interfaith dialogue are lack of theological foundation but keen to understand more about the ethic of interfaith dialogue from Quranic perspective. The study also found the reasons of why young Muslim are eager to be involved in interfaith dialogue between Muslim and Non-Muslim. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The data were collected using a depth-interviewed, observation as well as documentation. In conclusion, theological foundation of interfaith dialogue must be taught to a young generation who are involved in the interfaith movement because they are often unable to demonstrate the theological basis of interfaith dialogue. Besides, the pattern of interfaith dialogue should begin to change. The form of dialogue should not only present by discussion but also present in more interesting and interactive models.

**Keywords**—*interfaith dialogue; interreligious; young muslim; Makassar; quranic studies*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Kung, A Swiss Roman Catholic Theologian, believed that, there can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. There can be no ongoing human society without a global ethic [1]. It is very important to dialogue about religion because religion has an important role for humanity. Interestingly, there are so many kinds of religions that are embraced by human on Earth. Every religion has teachings that are different from the teachings of other religions. In addition, religious teachings also developed. Religion is not static but very dynamic. Panikkar claimed that religions are like people and cultures: they are forever dynamic, evolving, changing, and growing [2].

The Importance of Interreligious Dialogue is not only suggested by Hans Kung but also buy other scholars such as Leonard Swidler. Swidler [3] believed our understanding of truth and reality has been undergoing a radical shift. Our understanding of truth statements, in short, has become “deabsolutized” - it has become “relational,” that is, all statements about reality are now seen to be related to the historical context, praxis intentionality, perspective, etc. of the speaker, and in that sense no longer “absolute.” He assumed that our perception and description of the world is true only in

a limited sense, that is, only as seen from our place in the world. If we wish to expand our grasp of reality, we need to learn from others what they know of reality that they can perceive from their place in the world that we cannot see from ours. And that only can happen through dialogue.

As stated in Camilleri, there are two benefits of interfaith dialogue. The first benefit of interfaith dialog is the shattering of the psychological walls and fears about others. The second benefit is that interfaith dialog makes people aware of “the collective heritage of humankind” [4]. Dialogue allows us to be close to people who have different principles with us and try to understand the differences that we believe in. In the Holy Quran, one the verse of Ayah that always used to campaign dialogue is from Surah Al-Hujurat, Chapter 49:13: “*O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.*”

Interfaith dialogue itself is not a new thing. Forward believed that to dialogue with people of other religious traditions traces its history back to the Greeks and even early Christianity [5]. In other words, interfaith dialogue is a long-standing thing. It could be that dialogue between religions is as old as religion itself. According to Shafiq and Nimer, interfaith dialog means to hold on to one’s faith while simultaneously trying to understand another person’s faith [6]. Interfaith dialogue is not about changing others belief. It is a conversation between religious adherents. As Garfinkel and Zymelman explained, interfaith dialog simply as a “conversation” among people of different religions and faiths [7].

This study examines the views of young Muslim generation in Makassar who are actively involved in interfaith programs.

### II. METHODS

This research employed qualitative approach and applied descriptive method. Gay and Mills stated that Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest [8]. In this research, data obtained through a depth-interviewed, observation as well

as documentation. The data were analyzed through data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion. The subjects of this research are young Muslim generation who are actively involved in interfaith dialogue in Makassar or even in Sulawesi.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *Millenials Muslim Views toward Interfaith Dialogue in Makassar*

Since 2015, Inter-Faith Community has emerged in Makassar. Interestingly, it has been initiated by young generation. Among them are Jalin Harmoni, Gen Peace Makassar, Mahabbah Institute for Peace and Goodness, Kita Bhineka, Peace Institute of South Sulawesi, Gusdurian and Makassar Peace Gen. These communities are very active in campaigning for interfaith spirit, religious inclusivism and interfaith dialogue activities.

Although there have been many experts who define what interfaith dialogue is and what the objectives are to achieve through dialogue, there are still those who reject interfaith dialogue departing from the assumption that interfaith dialogue is understood as an attempt to convert others to another religion. This may happen because there is a tendency to equalize between religious debates and interfaith dialogue. However, this tendency did not occur among young people who involved in interfaith dialogue in Makassar. Their willingness to participate and be involved in interfaith dialogue not based on the desire to invite other religions adherents to convert to their religion. This has implications for how they define interfaith dialogue. Their definition is built on their empirical experience by being directly involved in interfaith activities. Their definition is not even built based on the theoretical foundation of experts in interfaith dialogue.

In general, interfaith dialogue is understood as a forum or dialogue activity between followers of different religions, which serves as a bridge between religious communities to be able to understand each other's different teachings. There are three important things that are prerequisites for an interfaith dialogue activity. First, there is a dialogue forum. Secondly, it was attended by representatives from different religions. Third, it is intended to build mutual understanding between different religions. These three meeting points are addressed by those involved in cross-faith activities.

What is different is how interfaith dialogue is reviewed from the goal side. Some see that interfaith dialogue aims to discuss religious problems and their solutions. Some of them see it as a space to equalize perceptions and find common ground. Few of them see it as a way to learn one's religion and other people's religions. Others see it as a place where they can learn to accept and understand differences. There is also join it to find good values in every religion. Interfaith dialogue does not focus on the differences between religions and does not aim to make all parties agree with each other. Being differences has been considered common in interfaith dialogue because dialogue is not understood as an attempt to equate a different one.

However, the meaning of interfaith dialogue as mentioned above shows that interfaith dialogue is still understood in a conventional form where activities must always be in the form of dialogue or in the form of official discussions. In fact, on a broader spectrum, interfaith dialogue can occur in the mode of dialogue of life. Dialogue of life is a model of activities in which those of different faiths can work together and do not see religion as limitation. It can happen in various forms such as cooperation in cleaning roads, jointly cleaning houses of worship, or playing football together.

There are two basic reasons why people are interested in being involved in interfaith dialogue. Those are theological foundation and normative foundation. Those who are involved in the interfaith dialogue movement because of theological foundation consider dialogue as a part of religious teaching. There is a verse in a Holy Book which ask people to have a dialogue with different people. While those of people who join interreligious dialogue based on normative foundation believe that interfaith dialogue is important for a diverse society where religion is often misunderstood. The presence of interfaith dialogue helps religious believers to understand each other's teachings.

In Makassar, the involvement of young people in the interfaith dialogue is more influenced by the normative foundation than by theological foundation. Young generation join interfaith dialogue because of some reasons such as: (1) They want to study other religions directly from the main source. (2) They believe that there are many conflicts between religions due to errors in understanding other religions. (3) They want to be agents of peace. (4) They want to prevent conflicts between religions. (5) They want to be a more open person. (5) They want to get new friends and new experiences.

#### B. *Interfaith Dialogue: What to Discuss About*

As a pluralistic country which accommodates many religions, the presence of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is very important and crucial. The inter-faith forums enable the dialogue between the followers of different faiths. In recent years, the presence of interfaith institutions in various cities in Indonesia like Jakarta, Bandung, Medan, Jogjakarta and Makassar, has provided positive impact for the continuation of the interfaith relationship in Indonesia. In Makassar, the biggest city in the Eastern part of Indonesia, Islam is majority religion. Islam and Makassar are like two sides of coin. However, although Islam is a majority religion, this city is a multicultural city. There are other religious adherents who also live side by side with Muslim in Makassar. Due to its religious diversity, stimulating interreligious dialogue among religious communities is a must.

Interreligious dialogue is believed to be able to prevent a religious conflict. Rather than seeing religion as source of conflict because the differences among religious teaching, Gülen looked the other way. Gülen [9] stressed that religion embraces all beliefs and races in brotherhood, and exalts love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood and freedom via its prophets". It can be achieved through Interfaith dialogue [9].

Merdjanova and Brodeur defined all forms of interactions and communication through speech, writing, and/or any kind of shared activities that help mutual understanding and/or cooperation between people who self-identify religiously in one form or another as interreligious dialogue [10]. Swidler identified Interreligious dialogue as dialogue on a religious subject by persons who understand themselves to be in different religious traditions and communities [3].

One interesting study in interfaith dialogue is how to understand boundaries and what themes can be discussed in dialogue. Some people want the theme of conversation only revolves around social issues without touching theological issues. Dialogue should only apply to social matters which are carried out for the common good, while theological issues are stored in the respective religious space without having a chance to be discussed. However, the theme of dialogue that occurred in the interfaith community in Makassar is not only limited to social issues but also issues that related to worship and even theology. The courage to discuss these issues motivated by the desire to understand the teachings of the different religion. The goal of the discussion is not about finding the truest religious teachings, but to be able to understand each other's teachings.

In theological issues, Muslim and Christianity share and discusses many issues like divinity, Trinity in Christianity, Tawheed and the holy book. Muslim, in general, is very curious to know the concept Trinity and how Jesus is understood in Christian teachings. They also keen to know about the worship time. Why some Christians worship on Sundays and others on Saturdays. While generally, Christians are eager to know about five times prayer, Jihad concept, Shi'ah, and zakat.

The themes in social issues are very broad and interesting. The topic of discussion are often influenced by themes that are commonly discussed by the community, for example about the Rohingya tragedy or the issue of blasphemy. Other themes that also emerged included: discrimination, tolerance, gender equality, religious harmony, woman leader, and environmental issues. The variance issues used in the dialogue shows that religious dialogue is no longer limited to merely discussing social issues but also other issues. The interfaith dialogue model in Makassar is a dialogue model that allows theological questions.

### C. *The Ethics of Interfaith Dialogue; Millenials Perspective*

At least, there are six basic ethics that can be used as basic values in carrying out interfaith dialogue. These six basic ethics are based on the experience of young people in Makassar who are involved in interfaith dialogue. That is: (1) In a good way. Dialogue is not intended to find out who is wrong and who is right. Denial and disagreement must be demonstrated in a polite and respectful way. (2) Based on the principle of justice. Dialogue must be based on justice. In the dialogue, everyone has the right to ask and everyone has the right to answer. There should not be one religious group that dominates the discussion. (3) Mutual Benefit. The main purpose of interfaith dialogue is not to impose an understanding of a religious owner. Although everyone in an interfaith dialogue will tend to be subjective, but they understand that the main purpose of this

discussion is the common good. (4) In accordance with norms and morals. Disagreement is shown in polite ways. Those who join dialogue must have an empathetic attitude built in the name of humanity. (5) Upholding the Ethics of Dialogue. The ethics of dialogue include acceptance and positive thinking as well as maintaining the feeling of dialogue partner. Sometimes, a dialogue which intended for common good often ends in debate and hostility because people who involved in dialogue shows an anti-dialogue attitude. (6) Upholding the principle of peace. Dialogue is not a debate. The aims of dialogue are not to maintain a view and impose views on other groups. Interfaith dialogue aims to achieve inter-religious peace.

The six main points were built on the experiences and feelings of the participants. The overall points are good. It based on their experience and what they think is good to do. However, these six points are not based on theological foundation. In fact, the invitation to do good, uphold ethics, live peacefully and act fairly has a clear theological foundation in the Qur'an and Hadith. For example, in the Holy Quran, Surah Al-Mumtahanah, Chapter 60:8: Gos asked people to show kindness and act justly. Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice.

Unfortunately, this understanding is not well understood by young Muslims. Supposedly, those who are involved in interfaith dialogue need to understand the theological foundation to strengthen their beliefs while convincing them that what they do does not conflict with their religious values.

### D. *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue in Makassar*

As a big city in the Eastern part of Indonesia, there is a hope that Makassar can be transformed as a pilot city of peace as well as a pilot city for interfaith dialogue activities in the eastern part of Indonesia. Previously the Mayor of Makassar and the Peace Gen Indonesia had raised the theme of Makassar as Compassionated City. This is based on reality that many interfaith movements have emerged in this city. Even so, there are still some fundamental concerns of young generation who involved in the interfaith movement in Makassar. Among others are;

1) *The intensity of dialogue is still lacking:* Interfaith dialogue activities are still very limited. This activity takes place only at certain times. The dialogue may happen once in one month or two month. Normally, these activities should be hold once in every two weeks. By meeting regularly, it enable them to think more about another breakthrough for interfaith relation, especially for young generation.

2) *Dialogue should be focused on young people:* There is an assumption that interfaith dialogue only occurs among elite' such lecturers and religious leaders. It does not provide space for young people who also want to be involved in interfaith activities. FKUB (Religious Harmony Forum), which is considered a government forum for interfaith relations, is only filled with religious and intellectual leaders and it doesn't accommodate young people. That's in one of

the reasons why interfaith movement which arose lately giving more focus on young generation. However, FKUB as an official institution that is accommodated by the state and inhabited by those who are scientifically religious is considered more understand about theological foundation of interfaith dialogue. FKUB is expected to guide the young generation who have a special interest in the interfaith world.

3) *Embracing other communities in interfaith dialogue:* Involving other communities in the interfaith movement is very important so that interfaith dialogue is not only become a consumption of people who focus on this issue or young people who study in comparative religions. It is important to embrace other communities that may not be in touch with interfaith issues at all. For example, the education community, literacy community or sports community. Even these communities were considered not directly intersecting with an interfaith issue, but the involvement of other communities in interfaith dialogue would make this movement well-known and open to anyone.

4) *The use of social media in campaigning interfaith dialogue:* Given that the majority of those who were the source of interviews in this study were young people, their hopes were that interfaith dialogue should be packaged in a contemporary model that could be understood by many people, especially young generation. During this time, the model of interfaith dialogue has always only focused on dialogues behind the desk or through seminars ending with question and answer. The use of social media should be involved. This is considered to be in accordance with the needs of the times and does not seem very rigid.

5) *The interfaith dialogue is limited to certain interfaith communities:* There is an assumption that interfaith dialogue is still exclusive and only enjoyed by certain groups. Even among fellow interfaith institutions itself, often this dialogue occurs only in certain circles. Some young people still feel awkward, embarrassed and uncomfortable to have a interfaith dialogue with other groups even though the group also has the same concern about interfaith relation. This may be due to issues of trust and security to share with other people. For this reason, interfaith groups must meet frequently so that they may know each other and trust each other.

6) *The interfaith dialogue is limited to certain elite groups:* This assumption is based on the fact that interfaith dialogue belongs only to religious leaders who understand religion while those who are not in the elite circle cannot be involved in interfaith dialogue. This view arises because interfaith dialogue often appears only in the form of a formal dialogue and also seminars held in place where only certain people can access it. Those who do not have an invitation or are not part of the implementing organization will usually feel hesitant or reluctant to attend and be involved in this interfaith dialogue.

The emergence of non-government institutions which focus on the issue of world peace and interfaith relation has become an advantage for the city of Makassar. These

institutions are expected to help government in maintaining peace between religious communities in Makassar. The presence of NGOs or interfaith groups successfully made the FKUB's role (Religious Harmony Forum) in South Sulawesi a lot easier. However, as explained earlier, it is necessary to strengthen the religious understanding and theological foundation for interfaith dialogue especially for young generation. The government is also expected to give a contribution to the continuity of interfaith dialogue in this city. This form of assistance is not only by giving a financial support but also providing a security for interfaith dialogue activities. In some interfaith dialogue activities, intimidation often arises from groups which consider interfaith dialogue carries out hidden agenda. Another thing to note that interfaith institutions should not work alone. Working alone giving rise to the impression that there is competition among interfaith institutions to show who among them cares most about the issue of peace. They should collaborate with each other more often in carrying out interfaith activities.

If we look at the age of the respondents who in general are still very young, we should be optimistic that the spirit of interfaith dialogue in Makassar will continue for a long time. The increasing awareness of the millennial generation about interfaith dialogue and their curiosity to find out about other religions is a positive thing that must be maintained in the midst of the rise of radicalism and religious exclusivist that has recently emerged in Indonesia.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Inter-religious Dialogue is very crucial for our world today especially in pluralistic society where interaction between people who have different belief are needed. The involvement of young people be inevitable considering that commonly the interfaith dialogue movement has only centered on adults and has not involved young people who are in fact captivated in engaging in interfaith dialogue. However, the theological foundation of interfaith dialogue and the ethics of dialogue must be taught to a young generation who are involved in the interfaith movement because they are often unable to demonstrate the theological basis due to their incomprehension of religious teaching.

For young Muslim generation, the Basics, and Ethics of the Interfaith Dialogue taught by the Qur'an should be campaigned and taught given that there are many interfaith young Muslims activists who do not understand the basic teaching of interfaith dialogue from Holy Quran. Beside of the religious basic teaching about interfaith dialogue, the pattern of interfaith dialogue should begin to change. The form of dialogue should not only present by discussion but also present in more interesting and interactive models such as, interactive short videos, peace camp or in sport activities.

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