

No. 160

**Towards a Middle Way Islam in Southeast Asia:
Contributions of the Gülen Movement**

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Singapore

2 June 2008

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to show that the Gülen movement can reverse the current distorted state of Islam back to its original form. It will attempt to demonstrate how the Gülen movement can serve as an important counter-trend to extremist ideology through some of its activities such as educational activities and encouraging inter-religious discussion in the region. The paper will first examine Fethullah Gülen's views on extremism and inter-religious dialogue. The paper will then proceed to examine case studies of organizations inspired by Gülen in Singapore and Indonesia and how these organizations utilized his ideas to enhance inter-religious dialogue and provide an alternative to the legalistic discourse on Islam. This section will also attempt to compare and contrast the approach of the organization in a Muslim-majority country (Indonesia) and in a Muslim minority country (Singapore). The paper will conclude by charting a trajectory of the movement's role and its potential contributions to the development of moderate Islam in Southeast Asia

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Towards a Middle Way Islam in Southeast Asia: Contributions of the Gülen Movement¹

The emergence of Islam as a political force is a recent development in Southeast Asia. Earlier, the impact of the resurgence of Islam had been felt both in the social and cultural realms, through the mushrooming of Muslim organizations attempting to promote a “purer” form of Islam in the region. In more recent times, however, the expression of religiosity has been brought about by way of participation in political parties and groups. More shockingly, some of these groups, such as the terror network known as Jemaah Islamiyah, have sought to use violence to achieve their aims. This has had severe ramifications for both intra-Muslim relations and Muslim-non-Muslim relations in the region. In this chaotic socio-political climate, a group has emerged in the region advocating peace, tolerance and understanding between people of different races and religions. This group is known as the Gülen Movement, or is commonly referred to as the *hizmet* in Turkey.²

This paper intends to demonstrate how the Gülen Movement has addressed the issues facing them and remained relevant by developing a counter-trend through proactive measures to oppose extremist ideology and enhance inter-religious discussion in the Southeast Asian region. Its key thrust is to show that the Gülen Movement can reverse the current distorted state of Islam back to its original form. The teachings of Islam, which are the teachings of the Middle Way, can accommodate cultural differences in Southeast Asia and enhance inter-religious ties between Muslims and non-Muslims in the region. It first examines Fethullah Gülen’s views on extremism and inter-religious dialogue. The paper then proceeds to examine case studies of organizations inspired by Gülen in Singapore and Indonesia and how these organizations have utilized his ideas to enhance inter-religious dialogue and provide an alternative to the legalistic discourse on Islam. This section also attempts to compare and contrast the approach of the organization in a Muslim-majority country (Indonesia) and in a Muslim minority country (Singapore). The paper concludes by charting a trajectory of the movement’s role and its potential contributions to the development of moderate Islam in Southeast Asia. It argues that these contributions will become important counters to extremist

¹ Parts of this paper were presented at the conference, “Muslim World in Transition: Contribution of the Gülen Movement”, organized by the House of Lords, SOAS and LSE held on 25–27 of October 2007.

² *Hizmet* literally means “service to humanity” in Turkish and is often used by followers of Gülen to describe his movement.

ideologies and enhance ties among Muslims and between members of different faiths in the region.³

Fethullah Gülen and His Movement

Fethullah Gülen (born 1941) is an important Turkish scholar, educationalist and popular preacher, influential not only in Turkey but also in other parts of the world. His reach transcends world borders and cultures. He is well respected by many world leaders, including those in Southeast Asia. The former president of Indonesia and a prominent Muslim scholar, Abdurrahman Wahid, said, “It is a must for us to study from Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen in Turkey who emphasized good moral standard” (PASIAD, 2006: 2). His standing as a widely respected religious scholar has inspired many people in Turkey to establish educational institutions. These institutions were first started in Turkey and subsequently spread to other parts of the world by people inspired by Gülen’s teachings. These people collectively form what is commonly known as the Gülen Movement. The loose nature of this movement has made it difficult for one to assess the real numbers of those involved in it. This has led an observer to suggest that “Gülen has made himself a most likely candidate for religious leader of the new Turkey” (Bulent, 1998: 27). Hakan Yavuz describes the Gülen Movement as a web of formal and informal relations that constantly activates its members’ loyalty. These relations are carried out within a set of networks in which commitment to the goals of the movement are maintained through informal living spaces—lighthouses, dormitories, summer camps—and through regular fund-raising activities (Yavuz, 2003: 32). Perhaps, more importantly, these networks are gelled together through a common belief in the ideas of Gülen. The next section will discuss Gülen’s ideas on extremism, tolerance and dialogue.

Gülen on Dialogue and Tolerance

Gülen’s emphasis on dialogue is based on his belief that Islam is a religion of peace and dialogue. He advocates an Anatolian-Islam that puts an emphasis on tolerance and Turkish

³ The research for this paper combines field and documentary research methods with a qualitative approach. The field research component is based on data gathered through participatory observation (in the case of Singapore) and interviews with key figures of Gülen-inspired organizations as well as local partners of these organizations. The documentary research component of the paper gathers data from the movement’s publications, including books, newspaper articles and online materials.

modernity, emphasizing that this discourse of Islam is not in contradiction with the modern world (Yilmaz, 2005: 397). At the same time, Gülen advocates for the return of Islam, which he sees as a middle way encapsulated in the Qur'anic definition of the Muslim community as *ummataŋ wasataŋ* (community of the Middle Way) (Kuru, 2003: 120). Gülen has written that the Qur'an strongly urges and also calls for tolerance, forgiveness and humility, which he sees as central Islamic ethical values that are also interrelated. For Gülen, those who close the road of tolerance are beasts that have lost their humanity. It is only through forgiveness and tolerance that wounds could be healed (Gülen, 1999: 76). Gülen finds the roots of these themes in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. He gave the example of the Prophet and Abu Jahl.⁴ Once in an assembly where Abu Jahl's son Ikrima was present, the Prophet admonished a companion for insulting Abu Jahl (Ünal and Williams, 2000: 196), despite the fact that Abu Jahl was strongly opposed to Islam.

For Gülen, dialogue and tolerance must first start among Muslims. He exemplified this spirit through his engagements with the Alevi and Kurdish communities in Turkey. Of the Alevies, he noted that the community enriches Turkish culture. He also supported the setting up of Alevi meeting or prayer houses (Ünal and Williams, 2000: 70). Gülen's emphasis for dialogue and tolerance is not limited to Muslims but also extends to include non-Muslims. Gülen wrote about this need by citing a story of the great Sufi scholar, Mevlana Jalaleddin Rumi, and a Christian priest. According to the story, the priest had visited Rumi and wanted to kiss his hands out of respect but Rumi kissed the hands of the priest first. According to Gülen, therefore, dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions is an integral part of an Islamic ethic that has been neglected for a long time (Gülen, 1999: 76).

Gülen once again acted upon his own calling by meeting important Christian leaders such as Pope John Paul and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew. The visit was an important step in Muslim-Christian relations. Their efforts bore fruit in the form of an inter-faith conference organized by an inter-faith dialogue organization, the Foundation of Journalists and Writers, in Turkey. This conference, called the Abraham Symposium, was held in southeast Turkey in the city of Urfa, believed to be the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham (Saritoprak and Griffith, 2005: 336). The meeting with the Greek patriarch also brought about better relations between the Greeks and the Turks, two communities long

⁴ Abu Jahl (or Amr ibn Hishām) was one of the chieftains of Makkah during the life of the Prophet. He was known for his cruelty and given the name Abu Jahl or Father of Ignorance for his opposition to the Prophet.

known for their enmity. The spirit that Gülen creates among Muslims ensures that the true teachings of Islam, which is moderate and characterized by a path of the Middle Way, are emphasized.

Beyond expressing support for peace, tolerance and inter-faith dialogue, Gülen is also vehemently against violence and extremism. Gülen points to the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings and lack of education as the prime reasons for Muslim extremism and terrorism. He believes that many extremist Muslims read Islamic texts and sources literally and mostly out of context, without understanding the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions or the interpretations of prominent Muslim scholars (Albayrak, 2007: 140). For Gülen, in true Islam, terrorism does not exist (Ergün, 2004: 1). He has stated clearly that in Islam no group or individual could declare war. The prerogative of such an action is that of the state (Ergün, 2004: 2). To counter the threat of extremism and terrorism, Gülen has proposed enhancing the reach of education and inter-religious dialogue among Muslims. To implement this, Gülen has called for the establishment of schools with a comprehensive educational system that will produce well-educated, cultured people who are cognizant of their religious and civic duties (Ergün, 2004: 5). Gülen's vision was achieved when many of his students and supporters started schools all over the world, from Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific to Tanzania in Africa. The success of these schools in encouraging tolerance and inter-faith dialogue are best encapsulated in the observations made by Thomas Michel, the secretary for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Society of Jesus in Rome. He remarks that the Philippine-Turkish School of Tolerance in Zamboanga, Philippines, offers Muslim and Christian Filipino children a positive way of living and relating to each other (Michel, 2003: 71). This is especially important in a country bogged down by more than 300 years of conflict between Christians and Muslims. The school also marks an important step in countering terrorism, as the value system taught in the school prevents students, especially those from the Muslim community, from being influenced by Muslim terrorist groups in the region.

Gülen's thinking on the issues of tolerance, dialogue and terrorism has enhanced relations among Muslims as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims in many parts of the world. It has also provided a blueprint for the development of a Middle Way Islam, which is none other than the original and traditional teachings of the Prophet. The case studies of the movement in Southeast Asia later will reveal that his ideas are not abstract or theoretical in

nature but are in fact practical and easy to implement. Examples of the movement in Singapore and Indonesia will attest to this.

The Gülen Movement in Southeast Asia

Individuals from Turkey who were influenced by Gülen's idea first arrived in the region in the 1980s. But it was only in 1993 that the first school was started in the region. Today, the movement has schools in virtually all the Southeast Asian countries. Interestingly, the movement started a school in Cambodia in the late 1990s, when the country was just recovering from the political turmoil following the genocide perpetrated by its dictator, Pol Pot, against the Cambodians. Members of the Gülen Movement, through the encouragement of peers, made their way to certain cities after first assessing their needs. Similar to other parts of the world, the movement in Southeast Asia adopts the same method of spearheading and promoting its activities. Businessmen from a particular city in Turkey would concentrate their efforts on a particular Southeast Asian city. For instance, the city of Gaziantep in the southeastern part of Turkey partially supports activities of certain cities in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore and Manila. Unlike Central Asia, where members of the Gülen community were sent by the movement with the aim of making contact with important companies, bureaucrats and personalities, the followers of Gülen who came to Southeast Asia did so mainly due to self-motivation or to a sense of duty to serve in places that badly needed assistance.⁵ This probably explains why a follower of Gülen from Malaysia subsequently left for Papua New Guinea, a place often linked to cannibalism and a tribal way of life, to set up a school. An organization that plays an important role in the development of the movement in the region is the Pacific Countries Social and Economic Solidarity Association (PASIAD). PASIAD plays an important linking role, assisting Turkish businessmen and students who are interested in investing or studying in a particular Asia-Pacific country by linking them up with the local Gülen Movement operating in a particular country. It also plays a "middleman" role in the disbursement of funds from Turkish businessmen to the respective Gülen Movement-school or institution they are supporting.⁶ PASIAD does not, however, oversee or direct activities of the local movements. Its role is merely a supportive one.

⁵ Refer to Bayram Balci (2003), "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, 31(2), pp. 151-177, for the Central Asian cases.

⁶ Conversation with Irfan Tibet, a staff of PASIAD, during his visit to Singapore in March 2007.

The Turkish Cultural Centre in Singapore

Context and Historical Background

Singapore is a small country of four million people. Muslims make up about 14% of the population while the remaining populace are Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Jews. Most Muslims in Singapore are ethnically Malay. Due to historical and political reasons, the Muslim minority in Singapore is often seen to be a “problematic” community.⁷ Their increased adherence to Islam and the emergence of a more puritan version of Islam among Singaporean Muslims is often viewed with trepidation by the Singaporean government. Since the 1990s, several controversies—such as the banning of the headscarf in schools, the government’s attempt to reform *madrassahs* in Singapore and the arrests of several members of the Jemaah Islamiyah terror network—had created tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.⁸ There was little effort made in formulating any form of inter-religious dialogue between the different religious communities. Ignorance of one another’s religion only went on to exacerbate the uneasiness between Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. The emergence of the Gülen Movement was timely in easing some of these tensions.

The Gülen Movement first found a foothold in Singapore when Sadik Yildiz, a journalist with the *Zaman* newspaper, first came to the island state in 1997. Just like other members of the Gülen Movement elsewhere in the world, he began to establish relations with members of the Singaporean community. In particular, he made important contacts with members of the ethnic Chinese and Indian communities, who are mostly non-Muslims, as well as with several important politicians including Sidek Saniff, then Senior Minister of State for Education. In addition, he built strong relations with several Singapore-based Turkish businessmen, including Ismail Cem, owner of a prominent Turkish restaurant (Candemir, 2007). These important links facilitated the work of the Gülen Movement in the country. Yildiz, with the assistance of the local Turkish community and Singaporeans, formed the Turkey-Central Asia Cultural Centre on the 3 April 1999. Later, the centre was renamed the Turkish Cultural Centre (TCC). Since its formation, the TCC has had three

⁷ For more on the problems of Malays in Singapore, see Lily Zubaidah Rahim (1998), *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press).

⁸ For more on these issues, see Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman (2004), *Activism of Ulama in Singapore*, unpublished academic thesis, National University of Singapore.

directors, Sadik Yildiz (1999), Halit Yuksel (1999–2004) and Necmettin Eskici (2004–present).

Yildiz also encouraged students from Gülen-inspired schools in Turkey to come to Singapore to further their studies. These students began to enrol in several universities in Singapore from 2001 (Eskici, 2007). These students, including Dr. Erkan Polatdemir, were to later form an important component of the movement in Singapore. The TCC grew in prominence after Turkey's 1999 earthquake, when it coordinated the assistance that Singapore gave to Turkey. In more recent times, the TCC assisted students from Turkey and Central Asia, most of whom were studying in Gülen-inspired schools, to acclimatize to Singapore life (Polatdemir, 2007). The support for its activities comes mainly through PASIAD, though in recent times the TCC has successfully obtained help from local businessmen and partners to support some of its activities.

Encouraging Tolerance and Dialogue

At the initial stages, the TCC, under the leadership of Yildiz, latched on to the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) to promote inter-religious dialogue in Singapore. However, due to the limited reach of the IRO, the TCC started its own initiatives (Polatdemir, 2007). The flagship event that the TCC organizes annually is the *iftar* dinner, held during the month of Ramadan. The first such dinner was organized in 1999, when about a hundred people, one-third of whom were non-Muslims, attended. A large number of the Muslim attendees were members of the Turkish community in Singapore. The event served as a platform for the community to gather and enhance their relations. Some Singaporean Muslims were also invited. These were often family members or friends of Turks staying in Singapore. Among the non-Muslims, the attendees comprised members of the IRO, including its then chairman, the Venerable Gunaratna, Christian community leaders, Buddhists and Hindus. The guest of honour was Mr. Sidek Saniff, then Senior Minister of State for Education. The *iftar* dinner was a watershed event, given the context of the time when it was organized (Eskici, 2007). Firstly, the Muslim community in Singapore was divided along religious and ideological lines. Several issues, such as the ban on the wearing of headscarf and the perceived attempt by the Singaporean government to ban Islamic religious schools, had given rise to differing opinions among Muslims. Secondly, these issues had resulted in tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore. Both the Singaporean government and the non-Muslim communities

perceived Muslims as being exclusive and failing to integrate with the larger Singaporean society. Most importantly, the *iftar* was often seen to be an exclusively Muslim event and most Singaporean Muslims were not comfortable with inviting non-Muslims to it. The smooth running of this annual event thus served as an important milestone in bridging the gap between the communities, which otherwise would have widened. Such an initiative is a replica of the larger Abant platform that the Gülen Movement had initiated and utilized in Turkey. The Journalists and Writers Association, an organization inspired by Gülen in 1998, first initiated the Abant platform.⁹ It was a platform for the discussing issues considered to be sensitive and divisive in Turkey. Ihsan Yilmaz noted that the Abant Platform has shown the Turkish public that it is possible to bring together intellectuals, academics and civil-society leaders from all walks of life, discussing and, in most cases, agreeing on every single sensitive issue in the country (Yilmaz, *Today's Zaman*, 23 March 2007).

The TCC's *iftar* dinner attendance has since grown larger in number and now includes more non-Muslims. When the author attended the *iftar* dinners of 2005 and 2006, the diverse background of the attendees pleasantly surprised him. The Muslims who attended the dinner were from different ideological types—from the those influenced by puritan Salafi teachings to the those who are more inclined towards Sufism.¹⁰ Despite their different religious ideologies, they sat at the same table and interacted well. The leaders of all major Muslim organizations were also invited to this function. More interestingly, members of the various religious communities were also present, including members of the Jewish community and various church communities such as City Harvest Church, a church known for its staunchly conservative and evangelical position. The fact that representatives of the church even came to the function was a matter of amazement for many of the attendees, and is in fact a big achievement for the TCC.¹¹ The programmes of these *iftar* dinners also feature non-Muslim speakers, such Brother Michael Broughten from the Catholic community and Mr. Hsieh Fu Hua from the Methodist community. The success of these *iftar* dinners was acknowledged even by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), a government

⁹ For all the declarations for the various Abant meetings, visit www.gyv.org.tr/bp.asp?caid=174.

¹⁰ Personal observation of author at the TCC *iftar* dinner at the Hilton Hotel, October 2006.

¹¹ The church has been at odds with the Muslim community and other communities for its aggressive proselytizing techniques. For more on this church, visit the website of City Harvest Church at www.chc.org.sg/main_landing.htm.

statutory board dealing with the affairs of Muslims in Singapore, when they decided to partially sponsor the 2006 *iftar* dinner (Eskici, 2007).

Perhaps the most important impact of these *iftar* dinners is the fact that following the events of September 11, other Muslim organizations and several mosques have begun inviting non-Muslims to their own *iftar* dinners. This used to be seen as a taboo but, learning from the example of the TCC, they began to realize the importance and value of this endeavour. For instance, as a student leader leading the National University of Singapore Muslim Society, the author himself had also organized *iftar* dinners like those done by the TCC and invited non-Muslim students to the function. As such, one could argue that the efforts of the TCC have been significant in creating a new way of inter-religious dialogue. At the same time, many of the attendees, including prominent religious and community leaders of the Singaporean society, continue to come and even look forward to the *iftar* dinners. This is a reflection of the importance of the event in enhancing their understanding of others and of Islam.

Intra- and Inter-Faith Dialogues

The TCC's inter-faith engagements go beyond *iftar* dinners. Imbibing the spirit of Gülen's teachings, they also collaborate with various local partners to organize seminars and talks aimed at creating a better image of Islam. One such event was a seminar on Islam and Modernity jointly organized with the Ba'alwi Mosque in April 2006. The seminar featured several prominent academics, including Professor Ibrahim Abu Rabi from the Hartford Seminary and Associate Professor Farid al-Attas from the National University of Singapore.¹² The key message of the speakers was that Islam is a religion of the Middle Way, which is against terrorism and extremism. Both the professors also spoke about the ideas of Fethullah Gülen in countering extremism. The session, attended by many non-Muslim Singaporeans, was significant in trying to create a better image of Islam post-September 11. Another approach adopted by the TCC to enhance inter-religious ties was to invite Singaporeans to Turkey for a "cultural immersion" programme. These trips are not only important insofar as they contribute to a deepening understanding of Turkey and its culture but also enhance the participant's knowledge of Islam. In December 2006, the TCC facilitated a trip to Turkey organized by the National University of Singapore's Scholars

¹² The author was present at this seminar.

Programme.¹³ The students, who were mostly non-Muslims, visited various Islamic historical sites and were hosted by academics from Fatih University in Istanbul. They were also introduced to Turkish Islam and the ideas of Fethullah Gülen. Upon their return to Singapore, a seminar was organized at the Harmony Centre, a centre for inter-faith activities, and they presented their impressions of Turkey. It was obvious that their knowledge of Islam has been greatly enhanced and many were clearly moved by the experience. One of the non-Muslim participants mentioned in his presentation that the teachings of Gülen would shape a positive perception of Islam that would be instrumental in the resurgence of the Muslim world.¹⁴

The TCC also organized another trip to Turkey in June 2007 for Christian community leaders in Singapore. The participants were taken on a to visit several institutions linked to the Gülen Movement. They also met and had dinner with supporters of the Gülen Movement. During those events, they developed an understanding of the Middle Way Islam that Gülen is advocating and gained an insight into why many people devoted their time and effort to the movement (Yap, 2007). One of the participants, Reverend Yap Khiam Hoe, the former Bishop of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Malaysia, said that Gülen is indeed a gifted Muslim renewer who would change the world's impression of Islam through his enlightened ideals (Yap, 2007). After the trip, Reverend Yap has become an even stauncher supporter of the TCC. He has promoted the ideas of Gülen to his Muslim friends and has requested the author to address members of the Contemporary Centre for Islamic Studies on Gülen's ideas and the movement.

The efforts of the TCC at enhancing intra- and inter-religious dialogue are indeed commendable. Besides being a trendsetter in inter-religious dialogue, the TCC is also at the forefront of organizing various events to improve the understanding of Islam. Its efforts have led to better relations among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore. The TCC will soon embark on the next stage of its intra- and inter-religious dialogue effort by starting a Turkish school in Singapore. While this seems to be an arduous task at this moment due to the Singapore government's educational policies, the positive imprint that the TCC has left in the shaping of Singapore's society may lead to the government shifting its policy on the Turkish school.

¹³ Students who are selected for this programme are among the best students in Singapore and often occupy important policy-making positions upon their graduation.

¹⁴ The author himself is also greatly impressed by the Gülen Movement. He has visited some of the institutions linked to the movement during his personal trip to Turkey in December 2006.

PASIAD Indonesia

Context and History

Indonesia is the world's largest Islamic country, with 190 to 200 million Muslims out of a total population of around 240 million. Historically, Islam in Indonesia is moderate and is known for its pluralistic nature. Yet, since the fall of the former President Suharto in 1998, a more radical form of the religion has emerged. While the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims are moderate, some are now pushing for an Islamic state to be established, through violence if necessary. Religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in some parts of Indonesia has led to thousands of lives lost. The proliferation of Islamic groups and political parties in the country also means that Muslims are increasingly divided along the lines of religious ideology.¹⁵ In these difficult times, the Gülen Movement in Indonesia remains one of the few moderate Islamic voices advocating for both intra- and inter-Muslim tolerance and dialogue.

The Gülen Movement arrived in Indonesia in 1993 when three students from Turkey came to study in the country. One of these students, Hakan Islamoğlu, is still in Indonesia today. The other two students are Kerim Tursun and Galip Kayar. The decision of these students to go to Indonesia is indeed strange, given that none of them could speak Indonesian or even knew anyone in the country. They made their approach through the contact of an Indonesian friend (who studied in Turkey). This person, Haji Alwi, was initially rather surprised to see the Turkish boys, but nevertheless assisted them to obtain places in various universities in Indonesia. Islamoglu secured a place at the University of Indonesia, in the Department of Indonesian Literature. In 1994, after about a year of studying in the university, Islamoglu told Haji Alwi about the Gülen Movement and expressed his desire to start a school in Indonesia (Islamoglu, 2007). Haji Alwi introduced him to the Governor of Indonesia's state bank, Burhanuddin Abdullah, who assisted Islamoglu in setting up the first school in Indonesia, the Pribadi High School in Depok. Another person who was instrumental in the setting up of the school was Dr. Aip Syarifuddin, an Indonesian politician (Islamoglu, 2007). To ensure that the administration of the school was managed professionally, Islamoglu

¹⁵ For a better sense of Indonesian politics and history, see Merle Ricklefs (2001), *History of Indonesia since 1200c* (Hampshire, Palgrave).

and his friends tied up with several Indonesians, including Dr. Syarifuddin and a Firman Kartiman, to start the Yenbu Indonesian Foundation (Islamoglu, 2007).

In 1997, another organization, PASIAD Indonesia, was formed to facilitate in the administration of the school. In 1996, Islamoglu decided to transfer his studies to the Gadjah Muda University in Semarang, a city located in the centre of the island of Java. Islamoglu quickly became close to the dean of the university, Professor Siti Chamamah Soeratno, and invited her to visit the school in Jakarta. Upon seeing the quality of its education, Professor Soeratno was impressed and inspired to start a similar school in Semarang. This led to the setting up of the Al-Firdaus Semarang Foundation, which then worked closely with PASIAD Indonesia to start the SMP-SMA Semesta Boarding School (PASIAD, 2006: 18). In 2002, a school was built in Bandung. Another school was built following the tsunami of 2005 in Aceh. The most recent school that was built is the Kharisma National School. This school was built with the support of a rich and prominent Indonesian family (Altun, 2007).

Besides educational activities, PASIAD Indonesia also played an important role in promoting cultural ties between Turkey and Indonesia. Since 2001, it has published several books with local partners promoting the Turkish language, including the publication of a Turkish-Indonesian dictionary in 2006 (PASIAD, 2006: 62). They have also played an important role in charity. Since 1998, PASIAD Indonesia has organized the donation of frozen meat from the Turkish community in Australia to poor Indonesians during the festival of Eid-ul-Adha. During the tsunami crisis that hit the province of Aceh, PASIAD Indonesia coordinated relief work in the region, which included rebuilding schools and houses, assisting in healthcare and providing food for the victims (PASIAD, 2006: 50–51). In the cultural realm, PASIAD was also involved in organizing a Turkish film festival as well as in several international cultural festivals (PASIAD, 2006: 60–61).

Building Tolerance Through Education

As highlighted earlier, Gülen believed that it is through education that extremism would be curbed and tolerance promoted. It was this philosophy that motivated his followers in Indonesia to build schools in the country. Islamoglu noted that intolerance occurs between the different religious groups in Indonesia due to the lack of education. He cited an incident where a Christian priest asked him whether Islamic criminal laws are applied in Turkey,

despite the fact that Turkey is one of the most secular Muslim countries in the world (Islamoglu, 2007).

In its initial stage, there were only 15 students in the school, many of whom were from a rural and poor background. Today, the number of students has increased to about 2,000, with many from a more privileged background.¹⁶ This does not mean that the schools are elitist in any way. The higher fees charge to these more privileged students are partly used to provide scholarships for students from poorer backgrounds to study in these schools (PASIAD, 2006: 20). The diverse backgrounds of the students allow for interaction between them, many of whom would not meet due to the segmented nature of the different class groups in Indonesia. This allows the richer student to understand better the challenges faced by his fellow student from a less privileged background. At the same time, about 10 per cent of the student population is not Muslim. PASIAD Indonesia also does not discriminate in the allocation of scholarships, and about 20 per cent of those who receive scholarships from PASIAD Indonesia are non-Muslim students.¹⁷ The presence of non-Muslim students allows for interaction and the building of trust and tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims in an otherwise stratified society where there is little interaction between the two communities. The universal values taught to the students meant that they tend to look beyond ethnic or religious cleavages in dealing with others. At another level, these schools serve as an excellent cultural bridge between Turkey and Indonesia. The students are exposed to aspects of Turkish culture such as its food and language. Due to this exposure, they have become an important ambassador for Turkey in Indonesia.

For many parents, the attraction of these schools lies in their high standard of education, which has produced students who have won international physics and mathematics competitions (Republica, July 2006). More importantly, many parents are aware that the teachers of these schools are good role models for their children and that the schools give the students a good education without having to induce any ideological leanings. Moreover, tolerance and an appreciation for what others do are also values advocated in these schools. In an interview with an alumnus of the school, he echoed Gülen's vision of peace and

¹⁶ The changing profile of these students is due to the high fees that the school charges. Parents pay an average of US\$100 per month in the school. See Radio Singapore International, "Turkish Delight", 3 July 2007. Accessed on 4 July 2007 from www.rsi.org.sg.

¹⁷ About 13 per cent of Indonesia's population are non-Muslims. Generally, non-Muslims are stronger economically, which explains the relatively lower number of non-Muslim students receiving scholarships from PASIAD Indonesia.

tolerance when he said that Muslims should cease to have an “us-against-them” mindset. There must be a shift in their paradigm to start thinking of everyone as fellow human beings rather than by their religious affiliations (Riaz, 2007). Mahmud Riaz is an example of the kind of educated, cultured Muslim, described by Gülen, who will never resort to terrorism or turn to extremism to pursue his aim. The Indonesia government has acknowledged the importance of these schools in countering extremist ideologies. A government leader to whom the author spoke indicated that the Department of National Education and local governments want more such schools built in Indonesia.¹⁸ This is because they recognize the Islam that Gülen advocates is an important antidote to the extremism promoted by radical groups in Indonesia. Interestingly about 70 per cent of the school’s alumni, including many non-Muslim students, have volunteered to teach in the schools despite their often prestigious educational backgrounds, which could allow them to obtain more lucrative jobs (Altun, 2007). This development would mean that more schools could be built in future as the movement receives more staff support from within its alumni.

Intra and Inter Religious Dialogue

Understanding the factional nature of Indonesian Islam and politics, PASIAD Indonesia has sought to maintain good relations with all Muslim groups and political parties in the country. PASIAD Indonesia has paid courtesy visits to the president, vice-president, various cabinet ministers as well as major Muslim organizations and political parties such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdatul Ulama, the Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS) and Golkar (PASIAD, 2006: 69–82). It is also interesting to note that despite the constant changes of leadership in Indonesia, PASIAD Indonesia was able to maintain warm ties with all the different leaders of the country. Building intra-Muslim dialogue remains an important focus for PASIAD Indonesia due to the fact that the country is overwhelmingly Muslim.

PASIAD Indonesia does this by initiating various programmes such as *iftar* dinners and *Halalbihalal* functions. *Halalbihalal* is a unique Indonesian Muslim cultural practice where Muslims seek forgiveness from one another for mistakes committed against one another in the course of the year. This often occurs at the end of the fasting month. PASIAD Indonesia has adopted this practice and has been organizing *Halalbihalal* functions annually. Staff members of the different PASIAD Indonesia’s schools as well as local partners of

¹⁸ Conversation with a government leader who had interactions with members of the Gülen Movement.

PASIAD are invited for the functions. Interestingly, PASIAD also invites various Islamic community leaders, despite differences in their religions and political ideology. The *iftar* dinner is another annual event organized by PASIAD Indonesia. Similar to the ones in Singapore, *iftar* functions in Indonesia are overwhelmingly Muslim events. The invited guests include prominent politicians and Muslim community leaders. The event is often graced by the presence of an Indonesian cabinet minister or the Vice-President of Indonesia, Yusuf Kalla. Like to the *Halalbihalal* functions, one could find politicians from secular political parties such Golkar as well as those from the more religious parties such as the PKS at the *iftar* dinners. They are also from different religious orientations. Non-Muslims were often not invited to *iftar* functions in the past. Breaking these norms, PASIAD invites non-Muslim community leaders such as leaders of various churches, Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples to these events so as to bring about inter-religious harmony between the different religious communities (Islamoglu, 2007). For many of these non-Muslim leaders, it is the first time in their lives that they attended such a function and is important in enhancing their understanding of Islam.

In another effort to increase both intra- and inter-religious tolerance, PASIAD Indonesia organizes overseas trips to Turkey. Once again, the leaders of different Muslim organizations are invited to enhance their relations with one another during such trips. Several non-Muslim leaders also accompany the delegation to Turkey (PASIAD, 2006: 88–89). In these trips, delegates are taken to various historical sites and to meet supporters of the Gülen Movement to allow them to gain insight into the movement in Turkey. Such trips are important in cementing ties between these community leaders and PASIAD Indonesia. Perhaps the most important trip organized by PASIAD Indonesia is a trip to Moscow to attend an International Symposium titled “From Terrorism to Global Ethics: Religions and Peace” (PASIAD, 2006: 90). The fact that a leader of an Islamic party, PKS, known for its conservative Islamic leanings, such as the imposition of Islamic criminal laws, decided to attend an inter-religious is remarkable. Several leaders of the Hindu, Christian and Confucian communities also attended the event. The participants of the event were exposed to the importance of inter-faith dialogue in a climate where terrorism and extremism could weaken ties between faith communities (Altun, 2007). The dialogue efforts of PASIAD Indonesia have been crucial in enhancing ties among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

This is especially so at the elite level of the Indonesian society. Such efforts have become essential, especially given the threat of religious strife and extremism that Indonesia faces.

Conclusion

The Muslim world is today in a transition phase. This is clearly seen from the intolerant and extreme acts of some Muslims. Historically, all major civilizations have undergone this phase, where members of these civilizations are insular and weak. Yet, in the midst of these uncertainties, the ideas of Fethullah Gülen have emerged to reverse the thinking and attitudes of Muslims. The Gülen Movement is a trendsetter movement that has sought to create intra- and inter-religious understanding and improve the education standards in the world. As Gülen has highlighted time and again, improving educational standards in the Muslim world is likely to change the mindset and thinking of Muslims, leading them to have a more enlightened approach in dealing with their coreligionist and non-Muslims. This development is especially important where Muslims are in the minority, such as in Singapore and Europe. In Europe, the misconceptions and prejudices held by Muslims and non-Muslims towards each other have led to worsening relations between the two parties. Yet, if Gülen's ideas are imbibed and practised by Muslims, such misconception and prejudices will slowly be eradicated. The case studies of the Gülen Movement in Indonesia and Singapore are reflective of how a small group of Gülen followers have successfully impacted the society they live in. It is also reflective of the important impact Gülen's ideas have had for people around the world. Acting upon his vision of tolerance and dialogue, his followers in both countries promote this vision by encouraging dialogue among Muslims and between Muslim and non-Muslims. In the case of Singapore, such dialogues are especially encouraged between Muslims and non-Muslims, given that Muslims are a minority in the country. The efforts of the TCC have proved significant, as they were able to change the perceptions of Islam and even gained supporters among non-Muslims for their cause. In Indonesia, PASIAD Indonesia focuses on the development of relations among Muslims due to the overwhelming number of Muslims in the country. In the process, they are not only able to reduce tension among Muslims but also to enhance ties between Muslims and non-Muslims through the Turkish schools and their inter-religious activities. The schools in Indonesia are likely to chart a new course for Islam in Indonesia—a moderate and tolerant one. The precedence given to universal values in these schools, inherent in all religions, are important in shaping

the educated, cultured Muslim who is tolerant and progressive, as Gülen had envisaged. The common values on which the Gülen Movement emphasizes are also likely to reverse the shape of Islam in Southeast Asia, which is tolerant and accommodating to other religions. Beyond the Southeast Asian region, the ideas of Gülen on inter-religious dialogue is likely to change the shape of Muslim-non-Muslim relations in places like Europe, where misconception and prejudice on both sides have led to conflict between the two groups.

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