From Toleration to Solidarity: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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On April 19, 2020, two men visited a Christian family in Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia, to warn the family to refrain from worshiping in their house. The family was only following the government’s order to avoid any gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, including any religious gatherings. The case went viral on the internet.1 A similar case arose on September 27, 2020, in Mojokerto, East Java, Indonesia. The village’s head issued a reprimand letter to a Christian villager because her house’s ongoing renovation resembled the building of a church; he rebuked her for hosting a prayer gathering.2 In addition to these two instances, other cases of intolerance are still occurring in different places during the pandemic.3

In the two cases mentioned above and in many other similar ones in Indonesia, the perpetrators have justified their action with the word “toleration.”4 This term exemplifies an inherent limitation. As Jeremy Menchik argues, Indonesia has a peculiar way of managing its religious diversity: the conventional understanding of tolerance in Indonesia differs from that assumed in Western liberal values.5 We agree with Menchik in his assessment, although for another reason. In Indonesia, toleration emphasizes responsibility more than rights: the majority is responsible for protecting the minority, and the minority should respect the

1 Tribunnews.com, “Viral Video Ibadah di Rumah Dibubarkan Oknum RT dan Tokoh Agama, Didatangi dan Langsung Marah-marah,” April 20, 2020, YouTube video, 3:12, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDJX7cffcfY
2 Dany Garjito & Chyntia Sami Bhayangkara, “Viral, Kades Ngastemi Mojokerto Larang Warga Kristen Ibadah di Wilayahnya,” Suara, September 26, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.suara.com/news/2020/09/26/211016/viral-kades-ngastemi-mojokerto-larang-warga-kristen-ibadah-di-wilayahnya?page=all
3 Alfian Putra Abdi, “Kasus Intoleransi Terus Bersemi Saat Pandemi,” Tirto, October 11, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021. https://tirto.id/kasus-intolerasi-terus-bersemi-saat-pandemi-f53b
4 Melissa Crouch, Law and Religion in Indonesia: Conflict and the Courts in West Java (London: Routledge, 2014), 160.
5 Jeremy Menchik, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4–5.
majority. This understanding has been criticized for expecting a passive, timid attitude from the minority, who must embrace the religious others as neighbors. Furthermore, we think the concept has proven futile and powerless in preventing religious conflicts and violence in certain parts of Indonesia. Thus, sustaining peace and harmony in a pluralistic context like Indonesia requires more than this type of passive toleration.

Our research focuses on Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article will delineate how the pandemic has changed the patterns of interreligious relations. It will address these questions: Is the pandemic magnifying the gap between Muslims and Christians or instead bringing them closer? How well do interreligious efforts adapt in the time of a pandemic? What are novel approaches that can effectively increase positive interreligious relations? What are the challenges and opportunities caused by the pandemic for Muslim-Christian relations? Our research demonstrates that grassroots Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other religious traditions are endeavoring to build relationships and establish interreligious cooperation instead of preserving the distance between religious communities. In short, efforts to expand toleration into solidarity are apparent and growing.

First of all, we will elaborate on the idea of toleration and its inherent limitations, and then offer several alternatives to it. The second section explores our findings on Muslim-Christian relations at both the national and grassroots levels. For the former, we analyze the positions of three major Muslim and Christian organizations on two national issues through their public statements. For the grassroots level, we focus on five cities: Ambon, Poso, Surabaya, Bogor, and Semarang. The first two cities are regarded as post-conflict areas with histories of interreligious conflicts and violence. The next two have experienced interreligious tension but are still generally categorized as having peaceful coexistence. The last city is an example of a city without nationally known conflict or tension between different religious communities. We conducted qualitative interviews with colleagues and individuals doing the grassroots work in those cities in order to gather the data. The research is far from exhaustive, but it does indicate informative trends. The final section will analyze challenges and opportunities for Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia during the pandemic.

**Toleration and the Search for a Different Paradigm**

*Toleration: Defined and Redefined*

Indonesia is a diverse country in terms of religions, cultures, ethnicities, races, and economic levels. For this pluralistic society, toleration has always been a socio-political strategy to manage its various diversities. Yet, at the same time, the number of intolerance cases related to religion in various regions keeps growing. Some scholars blame the emergence of Muslim extremist groups, especially since 1998, when Suharto fell from power. Since then, such scholars believe, the flourishing of democracy, with increased freedom of thought and speech, has been facilitating the growth of ideas inherently opposed to the very principle of toleration. We are not in a position to agree or disagree with such an opinion. Instead, our intention here is to investigate the idea of toleration in and of itself.
Catrionna McKinnon defines toleration as “a matter of putting up with that which you oppose: the motto of the tolerant person is ‘live and let live,’ even when what she lets live shocks, enrages, frightens, or disgusts her.” The definition indicates that a tolerant person is willing to put up with people, or ideas and actions, she rejects or opposes. John Horton rightly notes, “Toleration always involves two sets of considerations: reasons for showing restraint toward that which is regarded as objectionable; and reasons (or sentiments) that make something objectionable.” For instance, racist people might think that they are good people for allowing people of races different from theirs to exist, and for showing some restraint in not exerting power to accomplish what they view as correct. But is this approach really toleration? Thus, there are two significant implications related to a moral ideal: the first one corresponds to the tolerator and the second to the recipient. What does a virtue say about each of these parties and their dynamics?

Toleration involves power. Peter Nicholson states that “toleration is the virtue of refraining from exercising one’s power to interfere with others’ opinion or action although that deviates from one’s own over something important and although one morally disapproves of it.” Does the tolerator tolerate even though she has the power to do otherwise? If that is the case, then the action is done voluntarily and therefore is morally good. Nicholson further asserts that toleration is an entirely moral action and has nothing to do with feelings or inclinations. However, Baroness Warnock refutes such an argument because it associates morality totally with rationality and dismisses the role of feeling in toleration, calling emotions non-moral. She differentiates between the weak and strong senses of the word toleration: the first corresponds to one’s feeling of like or dislike and the latter to one’s perception of moral or immoral. In other words, for Warnock, it is not possible to distinguish entirely between one’s feelings and one’s moral judgment, because toleration might entail one’s feeling toward those being tolerated. Unlike Nicholson’s argument, Warnock’s presumes that toleration correlates not only with morality arising from human rationality. Thus, we conclude that Warnock is correct in asserting the interconnection between one’s feelings of distastefulness and moral disapproval.

6 Catrionna McKinnon, *Toleration: A Critical Reading* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.
7 This is the most widely accepted political science definition of tolerance. See John L. Sullivan, James Pierson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2; Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, 19.
8 John Horton, “Toleration as Virtue,” in *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, ed., David Heyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 32.
9 Horton, “Toleration as Virtue,” 32.
10 Peter P. Nicholson, “Toleration as Moral Ideal,” in *Aspects of Toleration: Philosophical Studies*, eds., John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Methuen, 1985) 162.
11 Nicholson, “Toleration as Moral Ideal,” 160−61.
12 Baroness Warnock, “The Limits of Toleration,” in *On Toleration*, eds., Susan Mendus and David Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 126.
13 Warnock, “The Limits of Toleration,” 126−27.
The notion of toleration based on moral disapproval creates what Susan Mendus called the “paradox of toleration.” Toleration is a good virtue on the part of the tolerator because the person tolerates what is inherently wrong and should not exist, or, at the least, the tolerator is pleased if the offense disappears. Such a position assumes that the tolerated persons/actions have less worth or are even completely unworthy. Mendus asserts that toleration regarding religious beliefs is most problematic, the very situation that underlies many of Indonesia’s intolerance cases. Therefore, even though we regard toleration as valuable, as it plays a significant role in the Indonesian context, we believe that ultimately its usefulness is limited. To ensure better relationships, Indonesian society (and others as well) need(s) to go beyond toleration.

Beyond Toleration: Some Alternatives

Undoubtedly, toleration has been one of the most important virtues to shape modern Western society since the Enlightenment; it is central to the political idea of influential thinkers in liberalism, such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill. Toleration developed as a strategy to prevent conflict, and that motivation underlies its key characteristics. From that need, the philosophers of the time turned to reason as its methodology. Kristen Deede Johnson states that “toleration is a plausible option in original conceptions of liberalism because reason and rationality can provide a natural, universal basis for public (political) life while religion, and other divisive differences, can peacefully remain in the private sphere.” Yet, this toleration approach has problems for today’s situations, as it is based in the connection with the Enlightenment and liberalism, which are inadequate foundations for the present Indonesian context. Detailing this gap is beyond this article’s scope, but we do explore two inherent problems with the rationalist toleration approach, and then present several alternatives to it.

First, toleration suffers from a lack of reasons to support its inherent good. Primarily, it depends on rationality as the main feature of the Enlightenment, i.e., that human beings can reason and that their reasoning tells them that toleration is the best option available to maintain society. Michael Walzer describes the origin of toleration as “simply a resigned acceptance of difference for the sake of peace.” He explains that people in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe were exhausted from many long wars based on religious hostilities. They gladly accepted the toleration model to escape further conflict. In the Indonesian context, toleration has taken on the same function, but it has operated in different ways. Toleration has always been a factor in sustaining the country’s pluralistic society since its inception as an independent political entity. However, in Indonesian society, the idea of toleration connotes beliefs that differ from those underlying the Western model. To help us understand these variations, Walzer identifies five degree of toleration that form a continuum or hierarchy of

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14 Susan Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 18—19.
15 Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism*, 19.
16 Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.
17 Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 17.
18 Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 10.
values. From the lowest to the highest degree, these are as follows: (1) a simple acceptance of others for the sake of maintaining peace, (2) a passive and indifferent attitude to difference, (3) a moral principle that others have their rights, (4) an openness and curiosity about others, and perhaps a willingness to learn from others, and (5) an enthusiastic endorsement of difference.¹⁹ All of these five attitudes of toleration exist in Indonesia’s interreligious discourses. Nevertheless, we conclude that numbers one to three represent the dominant understanding of toleration in Indonesia and relying on these three has presented challenges and even failures. Toleration for just maintaining the status quo is problematic and finally has proven incapable of curbing intolerance cases, especially toward religious minorities. Therefore, Johnson asserts, today’s extreme diversity requires a more vigorous justification for cultivating toleration, so that the goal of peace can be achieved and sustained. The lack of solid ground in toleration theory itself is perhaps why, at least on the popular level, toleration is often confused with indifference.²⁰

Secondly, toleration inherently assumes an asymmetrical power relation. As we discussed earlier, the definition of toleration entails moral disapproval rather than a willingness to accept and embrace differences. In this setting, living together under the pretext of tolerance signifies a compromise, namely “to agree not to repress the beliefs and practices with which one disagrees.”²¹ Does this arrangement make the tolerator a virtuous person? Rather, does it not imply that there is a deeper dynamic at work, that the tolerator is the powerful and the tolerated is the powerless? In Indonesia, a famous example of this situation would be the case of Meiliana, a Buddhist woman who faced a blasphemy allegation and went to jail after complaining about the volume of the call to prayer at a mosque near her home.²² She was powerless and when she sought to exert power, she faced criminal charges and imprisonment. Religious minority groups in Indonesia are often de facto powerless and tolerate certain practices of the Muslim majority for pragmatic reasons; they are not practicing acceptance.

One alternative to the traditional understanding of toleration is to move away from identifying toleration with secularism and the insistence on keeping religion and the state separate. In other words, perhaps religions per se do not necessarily have to be relegated to the private sphere as a precondition of toleration. Instead, true toleration can be attained by looking more profoundly to each particular context, and even including religious and multicultural approaches to differences.

Alfred Stepan’s theory of “twin toleration” is an example of this approach.²³ This theory states that what makes democracy possible is not “hard” secularism, which is often associated

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¹⁹ Walzer, On Toleration, 10–11.
²⁰ Johnson, Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism, 18.
²¹ Johnson, Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism, 18.
²² Kate Lamb, “Woman Jailed in Indonesia for Complaining that Call to Prayer is Too Loud,” The Guardian, August 22, 2018, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/23/woman-jailed-in-indonesia-for-saying-call-to-prayer-too-loud
²³ Alfred Stepan, “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” Journal of Democracy 11, no. 4 (2000): 37–57.
with the outcomes of the French Revolution, but a “twin toleration” between the state apparatus and religious citizens. In this dual arrangement, on their side, religious citizens must grant the state apparatus the authority to govern and not deny the latter’s authority based on religious claims. On the other side, the state must tolerate religious citizens by granting their right “to freely express their views and values within civil society, and to freely take part in politics, as long as religious activists and organizations respect other citizens’ constitutional rights and the law.”

Another alternative is multiculturalism. Tariq Moodod proposes multiculturalism as a replacement for traditional toleration: in the multiculturalism model, the paradigm is to build diversity and recognize differences. Moodod is speaking primarily from the context of contemporary Europe, especially the United Kingdom, and is addressing the dominant political strategy for ethnoreligious minorities. For Moodod, multiculturalism “is clearly beyond toleration and state neutrality for it involves active support for cultural difference, active discouragement against hostility and disapproval and the remaking of the public sphere in order to fully include marginalized identities.” Recognition of difference, including all religious identities and ethnicities, will not require uniformity or dichotomization into public/private spheres, as in classical liberalism. The mere toleration by separation that classical liberalism favors ultimately amounts to intolerance by secularist hegemony. While “hard” secularist countries like France adhere to the strict separation of religion and state, other countries demonstrate softer approaches. Moodod endorses “moderate secularism,” which encourages an institutional adjustment to include and accommodate Muslims as full citizens. Thus, he argues for expanding the term “equality” beyond its individualistic sense, which favors cultural assimilation, toward a politics of recognition. Multiculturalism therefore supports both assimilation to the dominant culture in the public sphere and recognition of different identities in both the public and private spheres.

It is imperative to go entirely beyond the classical idea of toleration with moral disapproval at its core. Based on our research, as elaborated in the next section, the next step is solidarity. This new paradigm promotes better interreligious relations, including between Muslims and Christians. The fourth and fifth attitudes on the continuum presented by Walzer are prerequisites for the cultivation of solidarity. Solidarity entails true engagement with others, including mutual works for the common good of all – a model that is

24 Alfred Stepan, “Tunisia’s Transition and the Twin Tolerations,” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no 2 (2012): 90. See also Joseph Blankholm, “‘Twin tolerations’ Today: An interview with Alfred Stepan,” *The Immanent Frame*, June 15, 2012, accessed July 1, 2021, https://tif.ssrc.org/2012/06/15/twin-tolerations-today-an-interview-with-alfred-stepan/

25 Moodod, *Multiculturalism*, 59.

26 Tariq Moodod, “Moderate Secularism, Religion as Identity and Respect for Religion” *The Political Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2010): 12.

27 Tariq Moodod, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 127–28.

28 Moodod, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*, 117.

29 Moodod, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*, 118
identical to the Indonesian core value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). Notably, solidarity cannot be imposed as an external condition or imperative. Instead, it is born from a genuine, conscious awareness of the person or community, so that people want to interact with the others.

**Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia in the Time of COVID-19**

During Eid al-Fitr on May 24, 2020, a video of three nuns went viral on Indonesian social media like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. In the video, they sing a popular Indonesian Eid al-Fitr song, *Selamat Lebaran* (Happy Eid), to congratulate Muslims. The video garnered favorable responses from citizens who said they greatly appreciated the attempt to show goodwill during the pandemic. This is one example of unprecedented creative ways to nurture positive interreligious relations, especially Muslim-Christian relations, in Indonesia. This section presents, first, examples of interfaith initiatives that involved Muslim and Christian national organizations, and then, second, data from our research on five cities.

**Cooperation between National-Level Religious Organizations**

National Muslim and Christian organizations, such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Muhammadiyah, and *Persekutuan Gereja-gereja Indonesia* (Communion of Churches in Indonesia [PGI]), play crucial roles in sustaining toleration and harmony in Indonesia. Furthermore, during the pandemic, several occasions demonstrate how they have begun to go beyond the classic understanding of toleration and move toward solidarity, as revealed on several occasions. Similar Christian and Muslim national organizations held a similar position on two draft legislations that triggered public controversy and demonstrations in 2020, *Rancangan Undang-Undang Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual* [The Eradication of Sexual Violence Bill] (RUU PKS) and *Rancangan Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* [The Job Creation Bill] (RUU CK). Their joint position reveals a form of interreligious socio-political solidarity and cooperation on the institutional level on issues that define the common good.

The RUU PKS became the focus of a public controversy because the Indonesian congress removed it from their ratification priority list for 2020. The Aisyiah and Fatayat, two women’s organizations affiliated with the Muhammadiyah and the NU, had been endorsing the bill since its drafting stage a couple of years prior, because the legislation would provide more comprehensive protection for women and children. The Muhammadiyah and the NU,
however, did not make any official statements about the withdrawal of the bill from consideration by the congress, but they shared a similar stance of endorsing the RUU PKS, although with a few amendments.\textsuperscript{32} The PGI did not issue a direct statement either, but it supported the bill during the congressional hearing in 2018 and signed a support declaration with other civic organizations during the controversy in 2020.\textsuperscript{33}

Nonetheless, all three organizations – the NU, the Muhammadiyah, and the PGI – were against the ratification of the RUU CK that occurred in October 2020. In separate statements, each organization stated that the bill’s passage during the pandemic was too hasty and insensitive to public opinion.\textsuperscript{34} The NU pointed to several problems in the RUU CK, i.e., capitalization of education, less protection of contract workers, a destructive impact on the environment, and reliance on imported food.\textsuperscript{35} Among the three, the Muhammadiyah was the earliest in demonstrating opposition to the bill, citing its internal shortcomings, including potential destruction of natural resources and the danger of centralizing too much power in the government.\textsuperscript{36} The RUU CK is the only bill ratified into law among the three.

We recognize that the work and advocacy on social-political issues by Muslim and Christian national organizations like the NU, the Muhammadiyah, and the PGI are essential for and contribute positively to Indonesian society at large, and in particular Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia. However, solidarity between Muslims and Christians must begin and continue at the grassroots level, not only at the institutional level. In the next section, we will provide examples of Muslim-Christian relations working at the grassroots level in five different cities during the pandemic.

\textsuperscript{32} M. Iqbal Al Machmudi, “NU dan Muhammadiyah Dukung RUU PKS dengan Catatan” \textit{Media Indonesia}, March 6, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://mediaindonesia.com/humaniora/294764/nu-dan-muhammeriah-dukung-ruu-pks-dengan-catatan

\textsuperscript{33} Komisi VII DPR RI, “Laporan Singkat,” October 3, 2018, https://www.dpr.go.id/dokakd/dokumen/RJ3-20181130-012617-6694.pdf, accessed July 1, 2021; Naharin Ni’matun, “Masyarakat Sipil Mendesak RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual tetap Menjadi Prioritas Prolegnas,” \textit{Aliansi Jurnalis Independen}, July 6, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://aji.or.id/read/press-release/1083/masyarakat-sipil-mendesak-ruu-penghapusan-kekerasan-seksual-tetap-menjadi-prioritas-prolegnas.html

\textsuperscript{34} “Sikap Resmi MUI, PP Muhammadiyah dan PBNU Terhadap Kontroversi UU Cipta Kerja,” \textit{Tribunnews}, October 10, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2020/10/10/sikap-resmi-mui-pp-muhammadiyah-dan-pbnu-terhadap-kontroversi-uu-cipta-kerja

\textsuperscript{35} “Sikap Resmi MUI, PP Muhammadiyah dan PBNU Terhadap Kontroversi UU Cipta Kerja.”

\textsuperscript{36} Irwan Syambudi, “Muhammadiyah Tegas Tolak RUU Ciptaker, Ormas Keagamaan Lain Abu-Abu,” \textit{Tirto}, August 24, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://tirto.id/muhammadiyah-tegas-tolak-ruu-ciptaker-ormas-keagamaan-lain-abu-abu-2Z2P. Around 102 pastors of various denominations issued a declaration to oppose the draft in July 2020, along with others who opposed its passage, including the Muhammadiyah. However, their position then did not reflect the official position of the PGI. Markus Saragih, “Pernyataan Sikap Para Pendeta Terkait Omnibus Law RUU Cipta Kerja,” PGI, July 15, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https:///cgi.or.id/pernyataan-sikap-para-pendeta-terkait-omnibus-law-ruu-cipta-kerja/.
Grassroots Relations during the Pandemic

1. Ambon

The city of Ambon is the capital of the Moluccas, a region in Eastern Indonesia where severe Muslim-Christian conflicts have occurred between 1999 and 2002/2003.37 Muslim and Christian militias were involved in those conflicts.38 International Crisis Group estimates that between 5,000 and 10,000 people have been killed and around 700,000, almost one-third of the whole population, became refugees.39 In 2011, another riot erupted in Ambon. Fortunately, the scale was not as big as the preceding conflict, although there were some casualties.40 The riot proved the inability of passive toleration to sustain peace in post-conflict society. However, in this case, the work done by a civic group named Peace Provocateur [Provokator Perdamaian] significantly reduced regional tensions.41 Their approach was to build solidarity across religious traditions contributing positively to peacebuilding.

The pandemic has had a direct impact on this area’s interreligious activities. It has impeded the tradition of exchange visits between Muslims and Christians during religious holidays. Like so many groups around the world, they have responded to these constraints and have turned to social media applications to send their greetings. Rev. Rudy Rahabeat, a Gereja Protestant Maluku pastor (The Moluccas Protestant Church; GPM), created a video congratulating Muslims on completing the Ramadan fast.42 He also received greetings from Muslim leaders during Christmas. In addition, the GPM synod produced a video of pastors and congregants singing a popular Muslim song, Assalamualaikum, to congratulate Muslim brothers and sisters during the Eid al-Fitr celebration.43 Finally, although face-to-face interfaith activities during the pandemic are decreasing due to religious communities’ need to prioritize to attend to their own needs, some churches have expanded their charity programs for the poor to include Muslim neighbors.44 This commitment to maintaining a positive relationship is honored by both Muslims and Christians in Ambon.

37 Sumanto Al-Qurtuby, Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia: Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2015).
38 Al-Qurtuby, Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia, 46–92. See also, Noorhaidi Hasan, Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 185–214.
39 International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: The Search for Peace in Maluku,” February 8, 2002, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-search-peace-maluku.
40 International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: Trouble Again in Ambon,” October 4, 2011, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-trouble-again-ambon
41 For a brief introduction to the Peace Provocateur, see Hans A. Harmakaputra, “Interfaith Relations in Contemporary Indonesia: Challenges and Progress,” Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs, Boston University and Henry Luce Foundation, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2016/11/Hans-Draft-Paper-CURA-Oct27-fin.pdf.
42 Rev. Rudy Rahabeat, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 14, 2021.
43 Multimedia Bethania Ambon, “Harmoni Gereja di Hari Lebaran,” May 23, 2020, YouTube video, 3:40, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=160E1VWAq8Y.
44 Rev. Rudy Rahabeat, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
Rev. Eklin De Fretes is a peace activist and a newly ordained pastor in this area. Before the pandemic, he started *Dongeng Damai* (Peace Tales) in 2018 to spread peace and harmony through puppet shows for children. During the pandemic, Rev. Eklin has utilized social media like Instagram to broadcast virtual children’s worship. The message is intentionally inclusive so that children of all faith traditions, especially Muslims, can benefit from the program. During Ramadan 2020, when Muslims fasted, he aired storytelling sessions every Friday for Muslim children. The stories intended to nurture peace and respect diversity.

When a Muslim village in Batu Merah was burned down, Rev. Eklin did fundraising to help the survivors. He also held storytelling events for the children who became refugees. The purpose of these storytelling events was not only to reduce their suffering but also to soothe their trauma. Further, in January 2021, he and his team visited the victims of an earthquake in Mamuju, West Sulawesi, where Muslims are the majority population. His team counseled the child refugees through storytelling. In addition to that contribution, they also listened to children’s experiences of the disaster as a way to help them recuperate from their trauma. One of them said, “Big brother when it [the earthquake] happened, I felt inside a blender. I cried ‘Allahu Akbar!’ and I was saved.”

Although the pandemic is inspiring creative ways to develop human relations, it also obstructs real human encounters necessary to strengthen interreligious relations. Ms. Helena Rijoly, a faculty member of the English Department at the University of Pattimura, Maluku, states that many Muslim students heard that they should not say “Merry Christmas” to Christians this year. This opinion created a negative feeling among Christians toward Muslims. She believes there are two reasons for this development in the pandemic: the first one lies in a high volume of hostile and intolerant social media content, and the second comes from the decrease in actual meaningful encounters. There were some webinars through Zoom, but this platform lacks a human touch and is superficial compared to in-person human encounters. For instance, before the pandemic arrived, she was gathering religious-based student organizations on her campus to host professional and educational development events, such as an information session on how to get a scholarship for studying abroad and one on English conversation training. Such gatherings facilitate interaction and cooperation between Muslim and Christian students. Further, she observes that

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45 Rev. Eklin De Fretes, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 25, 2021. One of the national television channels has covered Rev. Eklin’s peace effort. Lensa Indonesia - RTV, “Sosok Eklin Amtor De Fretes Sang Pendongeng Penebar Pesan Damai,” November 27, 2018, YouTube video, 2:52, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2iCHuKNYfM.

46 Rev. Eklin De Fretes, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.

47 Rahmat Rahman Patty, “Kebakaran Hanguskan Ratusan Rumah di Ambon, Dua Orang Tewas Terbakar,” *Kompas*, March 29, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://regional.kompas.com/read/2020/03/29/13430611/kebakaran-hanguskan-ratusan-rumah-di-ambon-dua-orang-tewsas-terbakar.

48 Rev. Eklin De Fretes, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.

49 Rev. Eklin De Fretes, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.

50 Helena Rijoly, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 18, 2021.

51 Helena Rijoly, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
more of her students are exposed to an exclusive belief system because the pandemic intensifies their personal insecurity under the threat of death. As a result, they paid more attention to seeking personal salvation.52

Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic, some grassroots movements have resumed their programs in the greater community. The Hekaleka Foundation, for example, focuses on education, with its volunteers offering after-school tutorials to children to develop their reading interests.53 Another program offers training sessions for pre-school teachers. In all of these programs, there is no discrimination based on religious identity. They consciously use education as an entry point to bring society together. Ms. Rijoly considers this the better approach, because when interfaith participants talk only about religion, the exchange often can be shallow. Common stories, not religious affiliation, bind together the current generation of young people.54

Ms. Roesda Leikawa, a Muslim who lives in Morella, a village near Ambon, explains that the pandemic has not been negatively affecting Muslim-Christian relations in her context.55 As a Muslim village, Morella has a traditional kinship relation with other villages. This connection is known as Pela Gandong. In this setting, Morella has established a family relationship with the three Christian villages of Soya, Waai, and Kaibobu. This approach is beyond toleration, because all of the four villages’ residents consider each other as relatives in one big family, regardless of religious identities. Whenever a person from a village meets someone from the kin village, they immediately recognize each other as brother or sister, and a deep feeling of affection binds the two persons.56 One of the ways to maintain the Pela Gandong system is through traditional rituals during special occasions. One ritual included in this tradition is called Pukul Sapu Lidi, which occurs during Eid al-Fitr.57 The Christian village sends a delegation of dance performers to greet and congratulate their Muslim brothers and sisters. Conversely, whenever a Christian village is having a celebration, they would invite the residents of the related Muslim village. For instance, Soya has a ritual of Cuci Negeri (Purifying the State) that consists of dance performances, a cultural purification ritual, and singing.58 Since the pandemic began, there has been no invitation from the Christian villages for large gatherings due to the health protocols. Still, when Morella inaugurated a new chief and invited representatives from the kinship Christian villages, around a hundred people attended, although the initial invitation had been extended to only ten people per village due

52 Helena Rijoly, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
53 https://www.hekaleka.org/en/about, accessed July 1, 2021.
54 Helena Rijoly, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
55 Roesda Leikawa, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 25, 2021.
56 Roesda Leikawa, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
57 For a video of the Pukul Sapu Lidi ritual that took place in 2018, see Ileng Leikawa, “Jemput Basudara Pela dari Waai & Kaibobu di Morella,” July 12, 2018, YouTube video, 7:12, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FM7dvx2SfFw.
58 Roesda Leikawa, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom. See also the 2019 celebration at Julio Soplanit, “Cuci Negeri Soya Mosaik Budaya Yang Dijaga Hingga Kini,” December 14, 2019, YouTube video, 4:58, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzEa3k6oZb4.
to the health restrictions. That more people came than allowed was due to the strong bonds between people who want to express solidarity.\footnote{Roesda Leikaw, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.}

2. Poso

Poso is located in Central Sulawesi, another area in the Eastern part of Indonesia. From 1998 to 2001, communal violence between Muslims and Christians occurred there, with approximately 500 to 1,000 deaths, more than 7,000 houses destroyed, 510 public facilities damaged, and 110,000 people displaced. The origin of the initial conflict is debated, with different and even conflicting narratives, but it began with a series of clashes between Christian and Muslim youths and soon armed militias from other cities in the region joined the fray.\footnote{Human Rights Watch, “Four Years of Communal Violence in Central Sulawesi,” \textit{HRW Report} 14, no 9 (2002): Part Two Chronology of the Conflict, accessed July 1, 2021, \url{https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/indonesia/indonesia1102-04.htm#P799_154620}.} Although formally the conflict ended with the Declaration of Malino in 2001, the trauma and bitterness left by it could not dissipate immediately. Still, proponents of civil society, especially women, have assumed vital roles in healing and breaking the cycle of violence in the post-conflict era.\footnote{A. Trihartono and N. Viartasiwi, “Engaging the Quiet Mission: Civil Society in Breaking the Cycle of Violence in the Post-Conflict Poso, Indonesia,” \textit{Procedia Environmental Sciences} 28 (2015): 115–123, \url{https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2015.07.017}; Y. Tri Subagya, “Women Stories of the Violent Conflict in Poso and Trauma Healing,” International Journal of Humanity Studies 2, no. 1 (2018): 101–113, accessed July 1, 2021, \url{https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.2018.020111}.} Poso is currently peaceful, even though the Central Sulawesi province is still preoccupied with the issue of terrorism: there have been several outbreaks of violence, including the most recent one in November 2020 in Sigi, when Muslim extremists killed a Christian family.\footnote{‘Pembunuhan’ di Sigi Tewaskan Satu Keluarga, Polisi Duga Teroris MIT Pelakunya-Operasi Tinombala yang Terus Diperpanjang Dipertanyakan,” \textit{BBC}, November 28, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, accessed July 1, 2021, \url{https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-55115609}.} Fortunately, due to improved interreligious relations in the region, such incidents did not incite more widespread violence.

Rev. Ronald Mosingi, an ordained minister at a \textit{Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah} (Central Sulawesi Christian Church; GKST) church in Poso, narrates that Christian-Muslim relations in the current post-conflict society are improving steadily.\footnote{Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 19, 2021.} In the past, people often used religious identity to discriminate against people and segregate them. For instance, Muslims lived in one area and Christians in the other, and now this tendency has decreased. Tentena, a Christian majority city, has a mosque, while churches can open in Poso. He states that during the pandemic, Christian-Muslim relations in Poso are quite the same as before.\footnote{Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.} Here, social media helps interaction between people to inquire about each other’s wellbeing and exchange greetings during religious celebrations.
In areas affected by the conflict, Muslims and Christians have remained on good terms. For example, Sintuwulemba, a village outside Poso, used to be the epicenter of the propaganda to rally Muslims due to a Muslim school massacre by an extremist Christian group. Before Christmas 2020, Muslims came to perform community service (kerja bakti) by cleaning up a local church before the Christmas celebration. Afterward, during the new year 2021, Christians took their turn by visiting Muslims and cleaning up a mosque.

The pandemic is a common problem, so society must work together to help people in need. For instance, when the pandemic started and the prediction of starvation arose, Mosintuwu Institute, a local organization with a focus on women’s empowerment and peacebuilding, initiated a program to increase local food security by distributing seeds to people. Further, during the campaign for COVID-19 vaccines, Rev. Mosingi and other Muslim and Christian religious leaders hosted social media campaigns to encourage people to register. In addition, they also responded to the natural disaster in West Sulawesi. They helped raise funds and gather goods for the refugees, with young people of different religious backgrounds as volunteers.

The Sigi tragedy increased interreligious tensions, especially among Christians. The trauma of past conflicts resurfaced. To ease the tension, religious leaders hosted an interreligious prayer meeting for solidarity. A small number of religious leaders gathered in-person, following COVID-19 health protocols, and then broadcasted the prayer online through Facebook. During the prayer, they offered consolation to the victims’ families and community, and also affirmed their commitment to live together peacefully in harmony.

3. Surabaya

Surabaya is the capital of the East Java province. Generally, the city is known for its support of religious toleration. However, in May 2018, a series of bombing attacks at five different locations, including three local churches, killed at least thirteen people and injured dozens. The perpetrators of these suicide bombings were a family of six inspired by ISIS. Clearly, the city is not immune from extremist religious views. As a result of these events,

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65 Human Rights Watch, “Four Years of Communal Violence in Central Sulawesi,” The Third Phase: Retaliation begins, May 23, 2000.
66 Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom. See also Ryan Darmawan, “Tunjukan Toleransi, Umat Islam dan Kristen Desa Sintuwulemba Poso Kerja Bakti di Masjid,” Kabar Selebes, February 6, 2021, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.kabarselebes.id/berita/2021/02/06/tunjukan-toleransi-umat-islam-dan-kristen-desa-sintuwulemba-poso-kerja-bakti-di-masjid/.
67 Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
68 Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
69 Kate Lamb, “Indonesia Church Bombings: Police Say One Family and Their Children behind Attacks,” The Guardian, May 13, 2018, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/13/deaths-bomb-attacks-churches-indonesia-surabaya.
70 Hannah Beech and MukIta Suhartono, “At the Heart of Indonesia Terror Attacks, a Well-Liked Family,” New York Times, May 18, 2018, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/world/asia/indonesia-surabaya-terrorism-dita-oepriarto.html.
civic activists, including religious leaders, are working hard to improve interreligious commitment and solidarity.

Rev. Andri Purnawan, a pastor from Gereja Kristen Indonesia (GKI), says the city’s interreligious relations have been improving steadily in the last few years.71 During the pandemic, interreligious activities and educational programs have shifted to different modes, i.e., a combination of online and in-person. For example, during Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr, Christians visited mosques, Muslim communities in villages, Islamic boarding schools, and non-profit organizations, such as Rumah Alit, which serves homeless children and teenagers. Also, in December 2020, some Muslims were brought together by Nur Cholis, an executive of the East Java branch of NU, and helped Christians decorate a Christmas tree at a local Catholic church.72 Unlike a regular Christmas tree, this one was decorated with hundreds of masks and bottles of hand sanitizer, ornaments reminding everyone to remain vigilant about the dangers of COVID-19. Nur Cholis said this is a regular event, paired with the outreach of Christians, who help Muslims with parking and coordinating traffic during the Eid al-Fitr prayer.73 Leaders of different religious traditions have been organizing a weekly Zoom meeting called Indonesia Merayakan Perbedaan (Indonesia Celebrates Diversity).74 All of the themes focus on public education for peace and harmony.

A group well-known in Surabaya that has been active in promoting positive interactions between people of varying religious backgrounds is the Gusdurian network. It brings together people inspired by the late Abdurrahman Wahid’s interfaith spirit. Wahid, the former President of Indonesia, is popularly known as Gus Dur. He was a prominent NU ulama and a well-known figure in promoting interreligious relations.75 Gusdurian has built networks in many cities, so Surabaya is only one of their chapters. The Gusdurian volunteers in Surabaya initiated visits to churches in December 2020 to place a Christmas greeting banner on the site and wish Merry Christmas to Christian communities.76 This activity demonstrates support for Christians who have had to celebrate Christmas from home. They also organized a memorial event for Rianto, a young Muslim guard who died protecting a church from a bomb attack in

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71 Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 13, 2021.
72 Ali Masduki, “Warga NU Rangkai Pohon Natal dari Ribuan Masker di Gereja Katolik Kristus Raja Surabaya,” iNews, December 18, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://jatim.inews.id/berita/warga-nu-rangkai-pohon-natal-dari-riuhan-masker-di-gereja-katolik-kristus-raja-surabaya.
73 Masduki, “Warga NU Rangkai Pohon Natal dari Ribuan Masker di Gereja Katolik Kristus Raja Surabaya.”
74 Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom. See also various themes at their Instagram account, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/indonesia_merayakan_perbedaan/?hl=en.
75 Gus Dur continues to play a significant role in shaping Indonesia’s culture of toleration and democracy. See Mirjam Künkler, “How Pluralist Democracy Became the Consensual Discourse Among Secular and Nonsecular Muslims in Indonesia,” in Democracy & Islam in Indonesia, eds. Mirjam Künkler and Alfred Stepan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 64–70.
76 Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
Mojokerto, East Java, during a Christmas Eve service in 2000. The event invited representatives from churches and adhered to the health protocols. They visited Riyanto’s tomb, his house, and the church that he protected.

Another interreligious group that is very active in social media initiatives is Roemah Bhinneka Surabaya. Their events exhibit the intersection between religion, culture, and ethnicity by demonstrating the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians to society. On December 29, 2020, Roemah Bhinneka Surabaya and Gusdurian Surabaya organized the live streaming of a Christmas service, along with the death commemoration of Gus Dur, via Zoom. The service consisted of reflections from several Christian and Muslims, and also multi-religious prayers delivered by Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, and one follower of an indigenous religion.

Generally, evangelical churches do not participate actively in interreligious activities. However, during the pandemic, these churches partook in social services to non-Christians through a program for making face-shields. Gereja Kristen Indonesia Emaus initiated it, but after receiving positive responses from other churches, the GKI synod in the East Java region spearheaded the program. Volunteers learned how to make face-shields through a YouTube video tutorial and then distributed them to those in need, including non-Christians. They consciously removed all Christian symbols, such as the church label or a cross, to make the face-shields acceptable to non-Christians. Besides face-shields, the churches also distributed other goods related to health protection to those in need in different places. Abel Aruan, a minister at GKI Emaus, states that what motivates these people is no longer a theology of other religions or denominations, but a passion for helping, which they share with fellow sufferers.

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77 Coconuts Jakarta, “Remembering Riyanto, the Muslim Youth Who Sacrificed Himself to Save a Church from a Bomb on Christmas Eve,” Coconuts, December 8, 2016, accessed July 1, 2021, https://coconuts.co/jakarta/features/remembering-riyanto-muslim-youth-who-sacrificed-himself-save-church-bomb-christmas-eve/.

78 Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.

79 The name literally means “a house of diversity in Surabaya.” The term bhinneka refers to Indonesia’s national slogan of Unity in Diversity. For their programs, see the YouTube channel of Roemah Bhinneka Surabaya, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/c/RoemahBhinnekaSurabaya/videos.

80 Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom. See the recording here, Roemah Bhinneka Surabaya, “Ibadah Natal dan Haul Gus Dur XI: Gembira Menjadi Teladan bersama Gus Dur,” December 29, 2020, YouTube video, 2:26:55, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6vBZnaWExM&t=1114s.

81 Abel Aruan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 16, 2021.

82 Abel Aruan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.

83 Sotyati, “Dengan #fightcovid19, GKI Sinwil Jatim Salurkan Bantuan,” Satu Harapan, April 4, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, http://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/dengan-fightcovid19-gki-sinwil-jatim-salurkan-bantuan.

84 Abel Aruan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
4. Bogor

Bogor is a city located in West Java. Rev. Darwin Darmawan, a local GKI pastor, states that the Muslim-Christian relationship in the city shows signs of improvement in the present time because COVID-19 serves as a common enemy. The pandemic demands mutual work and joint efforts. Moreover, physically and psychologically, people are exhausted and no longer have the energy to fight each other.

Local interfaith initiatives are still active. For instance, during Eid al-Fitr, Christian leaders visited local Muslims. Later on, interreligious leaders gathered for a multi-religious prayer at the end of the year in the city hall. It was an onsite event, adherent to the health protocols, but it was also broadcast online. On February 4, 2021, local interreligious leaders signed a Deklarasi Persahabatan Manusia (Declaration on Human Friendship) at the Bogor Cathedral to commemorate the International Day of Human Fraternity initiated by Pope Francis. The document boldly states: “We, religious figures and youths of Bogor, declare that diversity is a lofty gift from the Most Powerful. With fraternity and toleration we will protect this gift. We believe diversity is not a barrier to mutual friendship. In intimate friendship, we will strive for humanity, love the environment, and strengthen our commitment to the nation.”

Another form of interreligious activity taking place in this area is mutual community support. For instance, Gerakan Gotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation Movement; GONG), an interfaith group, fed poor people, numbered at around a thousand, for 30 days at the beginning of the pandemic. They cooperated with small food stalls to distribute the food. At the same time, the program helped the owners to keep their businesses alive. They also donated groceries for those in need. The downside is that the people who run the GONG are the same people who, before the pandemic, had always been on the frontline of the local interfaith movement.

Rev. Darmawan says that Gerakan Kemanusiaan Indonesia (Indonesia Humanitarian Movement), an institution under the GKI synod, opened a call center for COVID response that serves everyone regardless of religion. The service provides information related to the COVID test, available hospitals, and other needed connections. In addition, COVID patients can ask for counseling, including those who have to undergo independent isolation.

85 Although the city is known for its tranquility and religious toleration, there is a church-closing case that has been unresolved from 2008 until now. For a summary of the case, see Crouch, Law and Religion in Indonesia, 124–26.
86 Rev. Darwin Darmawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom, January 18, 2021.
87 Rev. Darwin Darmawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
88 iNews id, “Tokoh Lintas Agama di Kota Bogor Deklarasi Hari Persahabatan Manusia Internasional,” February 4, 2021, YouTube video, 3:25, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stc4ugq8gCc.
89 Rev. Darwin Darmawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
90 Rev. Darwin Darmawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
5. Semarang

On January 5, 2021, the city of Semarang, the capital of central Java, received the Harmony Award from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. According to the ministry, the city has succeeded in sustaining harmony between different religious communities and cultures. Ibnu Farhan, a young Muslim leader, stated that interreligious relations are becoming more vital since the pandemic began, because it challenges all people of faith together. He notes that cooperation is the key to dealing with the pandemic. Nevertheless, there were several intolerance cases in the last few years in Semarang. Fortunately, the cases were resolved with mediation by the local government of Semarang and the police.

As capital of the Central Java province, Semarang receives some benefits in terms of religious tolerance. The provincial government has established a well-constructed web of communication between religious leaders that facilitates a formal interaction pattern between religious groups. For example, Gov. Ganjar Pranowo, the governor, hosted a multi-religious prayer at the beginning of the pandemic on April 23, 2020. Afterward, he hosted another multi-religious prayer on January 22, 2021, asking God’s deliverance from the pandemic and other natural disasters in Indonesia’s many regions.

In addition to the local and provincial governments’ involvement, civic groups often partake in building positive interreligious relations and solidarity, including during the pandemic. As demonstrated in other cities, initiatives are held in-person, by observing the health protocol, or online. For instance, various religious figures visited a local Catholic church on Christmas Day 2020 to congratulate and express goodwill. A day before, members of Gusdurian Semarang (a local chapter of the Gusdurian network) also paid a visit and placed a Christmas greeting banner outside the church.
in-person Mawlid celebration hosted at Walisongo Islamic State University on November 11, 2020. The event also provided a moment of spiritual gathering and prayer for the nation to overcome the pandemic.

On April 30, 2020, a virtual discussion on YouTube was hosted by Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (Legal Aid Institution LBH) Semarang, Gusdurian Semarang, and Persaudaraan Lintas Agama (Interreligious Fraternity; PELITA) entitled “A Portrait of Interreligious Harmony in the Era of Pandemic.” The event focused on intolerance cases during the pandemic and how government and civic organizations need to work together to address them. The speakers also underlined the need to see others as human beings and to live in solidarity, especially during times of distress. One speaker noted how important it was that the distribution of goods to the poor affected by COVID-19 in Semarang was done in the name of humanity, not religion.

Another event that marked solidarity was “Sharing Blood in the time of Covid-19 Pandemic,” held on May 22, 2020. It was sponsored by various organizations, including interreligious ones. This program aims to educate and mobilize the general public to continue donating blood while adhering to the health protocols. This has been necessary because the supply of blood has been depleted since the pandemic began. This kind of interreligious voluntarism marks solidarity, harmony, and trust between people of different religions.

According to Ms. Anis Fitria, a Semarang citizen, everyday actions during the pandemic are necessary, as they embody the spirit of tolerance and demonstrate the praxis of solidarity.

Solidarity as Path to Move Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

Our research finds that the COVID-19 pandemic has not worsened or improved Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia. However, the landscape has changed, bringing hope for the future along with new challenges. These changes include the emphasis on grassroots activities, the increase in use of virtual communication, and the shift to solidarity over toleration, all of which bode well for interfaith relations; but at the same time, each has brought its restrictions and dangers. Thus, we have observed significant grassroots work being done in different regions in Indonesia. Local groups and communities are trying to foster positive relationship with others. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has had a significant impact with the shift to a virtual mode from the previous traditional approach of in-person interreligious movements and activities. We think that some of the novel approaches used here will continue to flourish even post-pandemic. Moreover,

97 Tim Web FUHum, “Prodi ISAI FUHum Jadikan Maulid Nabi sebagai Momen Menyatukan Anak Bangsa,” Fakultas Hukum UIN Walisongo, November 14, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, http://fuhum.walisongo.ac.id/prodi-isai-fuhum-jadikan-maulid-nabi-sebagai-momen-menyatukan-anak-bangsa/.
98 LBH Semarang, “Potret Kerukunan Beragama di Masa Pandemi,” April 30, 2020, YouTube, 1:10:01, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lymU92iYszc&t=339s.
99 Zulfa Anisah, “Stok PMI Menipis, Umat Antaragama Kota Semarang Berbondong-bondong Donorkan Darah,” Ini Baru, May 23, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://inibaru.id/inspirasi-indonesia/stok-pmi-menipis-umat-antaragama-kota-semarang-berbondong-donorkan-darah.
100 Ms. Anis Fitria, WhatsApp conversation with Luthfi Rahman, January 16, 2021.
there has been a shift from toleration to solidarity as a guiding paradigm for interreligious relations. This final section analyzes particular challenges and opportunities from the pandemic’s impact on Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia. Our conclusion is that solidarity is on the rise. 

First, let us take a step back and consider the place of interfaith activities in and their impact on the public sphere. Cultivating positive interreligious relationships necessitates opening spaces in the public sphere so people of all traditions can experience meaningful human encounters. Indonesia’s public sphere is still suffering from the New Order regime policies under President Suharto (in office 1966-1998): these imposed and still encourage passive toleration. This passivity acts as a formidable barrier to bringing religion into public spaces. Rev. Darmawan uses the image of a zoo to describe this approach: like animal exhibits, religious communities live together but in separate spaces. They and their differences are apparent, but the arrangement relegates religious identity to the private sphere. This treatment is analogous to the classic idea of toleration. The state’s imposition of compartmentalizing religion has proven ineffective to peaceful coexistence, because it has failed to prevent the eruption of violent conflict in some regions, even after the fall of Suharto’s regime, as in Poso and the Moluccas. As a curative measure, since then, interreligious activists have been trying to foster encounters in the public sphere. Further, they are looking to bring the full identities of persons into the public sphere, by cultivating intersectional identities. However, this effort is opposed by those who dominate the public sphere with only one religion. The intersectional nature of the interreligious movement in Indonesia is intentional. Still, it continuously faces this compartmentalizing mentality. We conclude that emphasizing just religion or religious identity will not bring people together. 

The pandemic has abruptly limited all in-person activities and has halted the efforts to bring interreligious encounters into public spaces. At the same time, these restrictions have limited engagement with and knowledge of intersectional identities. For example, in Ambon, the annual cultural festival between Muslim and Christian villages is suffering from suspension or reduced numbers of attendees. Nevertheless, new opportunities have arisen from the mushrooming of virtual spaces during the pandemic. Perhaps the definition of public spaces has changed, in response, to include the internet as a vast, new public space. But the success of this new vista for public interaction is contingent on the infrastructure, which varies from place to place. In other words, who has access? Remote areas have limited internet coverage. Therefore, we see a challenge along with an opportunity. Furthermore, based on our research, even those with access need to trust the connection being offered; one of the preconditions for successful interreligious encounters in virtual spaces, including social media, is a trust that stems from a pre-existing relationship. For instance, religious leaders, who have built relationships before the pandemic, are more likely to maintain such relations virtually by developing joint events or even offering some gesture as simple as personal greetings during religious celebrations. Beyond its challenges, however, the virtual world offers a huge opportunity – during the pandemic and beyond – and that is that these spaces allow the scope of projects to expand beyond a specific geographical location. After the Sigi tragedy in Central Sulawesi, Aan Anshori from Jaringan Islam Anti-Diskriminasi (Muslim Network for Anti-Discrimination; JIAD) organized

101 Rev. Darwin Darmawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
an interreligious gathering of reflections and prayers titled “Salibmu Adalah Salibku” (Your Cross is My Cross) on December 2, 2020.\footnote{From the Facebook page of Aan Anshori https://www.facebook.com/1561443699/videos/10223542967033236/, See also Petrus Riski, “Ajak Perkuat Persaudaraan, Umat Lintas Iman Doakan Arwah Korban Tragedi Sigi,” VOA Indonesia, December 5, 2020, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/ajak-perkuat-persaudaraan-umat-lintas-iman-doakan-arwah-korban-tragedi-sigi/5688300.html?fbclid=IwAR2Be80CCCkeSpawvvDC1LW7MGVG6SWTmcfxA_3hsYvzk_QVwn8BHbaT_JJ4.} The event’s purpose was to show support and solidarity for the affected families with a moment of prayer for the victims. The attendees came from a range of religious backgrounds and various regions in Indonesia because the event utilized Zoom and Facebook. The extent of support was much greater due to the reach of virtual media. This impact carried the element of solidarity across national differences.

Once again, however, there is a challenge that mitigates an opportunity: the second challenge to Muslim-Christian relations is the lack of digital literacy. Different regions exhibit varying levels of digital literacy due to factors like education and economic resources, generation differences, and geographical locations. For instance, our respondents from Poso and Ambon, located in the Eastern Part of Indonesia, point to the challenges of digital literacy more so than other respondents from cities in Java, where residents enjoy better economic and educational levels. This variation does not mean that the problem of digital literacy does not exist in the three other cities located in Java. For example, regardless of location, people can fail to recognize hoaxes and fake news. In Poso and Ambon, fake news contributed significantly to agitating people and provoking violent attitudes toward others. Thus, peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict regions actively employ social media as a way to improve digital literacy.\footnote{Peace Provocateur diffused the tension in Ambon riot by utilizing this strategy. Harmakaputra, “Interfaith Relations in Contemporary Indonesia,” 8–9.} These efforts must include education to counter increasing digital content propagating religious exclusivism and superiority, such as the material coming from Muslim-Christian debaters and apologists. Many of these types of videos on YouTube have increased their viewership.

One way to address this problem is by creating more positive content. In fact, the increased material on interreligious activities, including that in the virtual realm, is helping to expand digital literacy and thereby reduce exclusivist and superior paradigms that promote perception of religious others as inferior. Rev. Purnawan concurs that interreligious activities help in reducing the polemical tendencies of Christians.\footnote{Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.} Ms. Sholihah, a Muslim religious teacher from Semarang, similarly underlines the importance of countering harmful content with information that propagates peace and harmony.\footnote{Ustadza Sholihah, WhatsApp conversation with Luthfi Rahman, January 15, 2021.} One initiative that explicitly addresses digital literacy, including combating hoaxes, is Tular Nalar (Contagious Reasoning), a joint program of Masyarakat Anti Fitnah Indonesia (Indonesian Society of Anti-Defamation; MAFINDO), the Maarif Institute, and Love Frankie.\footnote{Tular Nalar, “Tentang Kami,” https://tularnalar.id/tentang-kami/, accessed July 1, 2021.} After its initiation in mid-2020, the
program has used workshops to educate more than 26,000 teachers and educators at schools and colleges located in 23 cities.107

The third challenge to positive relations has arisen from the tremendous amount of energy spent in dealing with the pandemic, including a shift of religious activities to digital mode. In short, all religious communities have had to focus on the spiritual wellbeing of their own members because of the enormous impact on all aspects of human life. Christians and Muslims often opt to focus on their own community, and their lack of attention to other communities is justifiable. When this is the case, tensions or conflicts become invisible – but invisibility does not mean harmony. In this process, tolerance can revert to passive toleration or “lazy” toleration, as mentioned by Ms. Rijoly.108 Without disregarding that possibility, our findings demonstrate the opposite: Christian and Muslim communities are showing solidarity with their neighbors through charity, fundraising, mutual cooperation, positive content on social media, education, and so on, efforts they have coordinated in order to cope with the impact of COVID-19.

Thus, the pandemic has presented another opportunity for improving Muslim-Christian relations: the pandemic is a common problem for all. This mutual vulnerability generates greater empathy for others, as all suffer regardless of religious identity. Ms. Tika, a lecturer who lives in Semarang, notes that the pandemic offers an opportunity for people of differing religious backgrounds to cooperate, motivate, and encourage each other through various activities and programs.109 Charity work in different cities is an example of this action in solidarity. Moreover, religious communities are building sensitivities to the particular situations of others, prompting them to modify their services. For instance, the churches in Surabaya consciously omitted Christian symbols from the goods they distributed. The COVID-19 Center in Bogor that counsels non-Christians has used a different “language” as well, as when Rev. de Fretes composed stories for Muslim children during Ramadan.

The inability to recruit more people for the interreligious cause is the fourth challenge that the pandemic has unveiled. Local religious leaders and activists stand at the forefront of interreligious efforts in fostering solidarity. These same people are still playing a significant role, even during the pandemic. In Indonesia, religious leaders’ roles cannot be underestimated as they can substantially impact people at the grassroots level. However, the shortcoming is that because of the leaders’ dominant involvement, people do not partake in interreligious efforts; they think it is only for the elite. Another issue here is that even with individual religious leaders participating, this often does not reflect institutional commitments. For instance,

107 “Bukan Sekadar Paham, Konsorsium Tular Nalar Dorong Cara Berpikir Kritis,” Tribunnews, March 4, 2021, accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.tribunnews.com/tribunners/2021/03/04/bukan-sekadar-paham-konsorsium-tular-nalar-dorong-cara-berpikir-kritis.
108 Helena Rijoly, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
109 Ms. Tika, WhatsApp conversation with Luthfi Rahman, January 16, 2021.
Rev. Mosingi deplores that the institutions that initiated most interreligious efforts are from outside of Poso, not local religious organizations.\textsuperscript{110}

It is true that the pandemic has offered an unprecedented massive opportunity for the impact of interreligious efforts. With this opening, it also stimulates creative ideas, such as the video of three nuns and the GPM synod singing Muslim songs, the storytelling ministry of Rev. de Fretes, and various online interreligious prayers issued for a special occasion. As noted, the internet allows a program to transgress geographical boundaries and build further significant interreligious networks. The program might not necessarily deal with religion explicitly. Rather, it might focus on common issues faced by people of different religious backgrounds, aimed at economic improvement, gender justice, ecology, cultural wisdom, and so on. Such programs have included the \textit{Tular Nalar} program and the YouTube videos of rituals of \textit{Pela Gandong} traditions in the Moluccas, like \textit{Pukul Sapu Lidi} and \textit{Cuci Negeri}.

The fifth challenge facing the improvement of Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia is the state apparatus’s essential role in maintaining peace and harmony. Many of the intolerance cases have involved state agents to some degree, including the two examples we mentioned at the beginning of this article. Functionally, this challenge sits at the intersection between politics and religion. Events in Jakarta, the epicenter of national politics, significantly affect the interreligious atmosphere in other regions outside Java, like Ambon or Poso. For instance, when Muslims in Jakarta rallied for the sake of Habib Riziez, a charismatic leader of an extremist Muslim group, Front Pembela Islam (\textit{Islamic Defender Front}; FPI), local Christians in Ambon felt contempt for Muslims and Islam.\textsuperscript{111} Furthermore, as the state apparatus monopolizes interreligious initiatives, it weakens efforts by average citizens and the grassroots interfaith movement, which may repeat the state policy’s mistake during the New Order era that perpetuates passive toleration. Interreligious relations then could deteriorate into a mere symbolic tolerance between elite religious leaders. So, there must be a delicate balance between state apparatus and activist citizens in building positive interreligious relations.

Nonetheless, our research finds that the state apparatus in the five cities studied actively facilitates and communicates with local interreligious leaders to maintain harmony between religious groups, although in diverse ways. The state apparatus in Bogor, Semarang, and Surabaya invited leaders of different religious groups for a moment of prayer and reflection during the pandemic. On one occasion, when a Muslim preacher, notoriously known for spreading intolerant ideas, came to Ambon, the local government invited a well-known Muslim preacher who represented the opposite stance to calm society.\textsuperscript{112} The local government often sponsors cultural and religious public rituals in various locations, because they improve local interreligious relations. In Surabaya, the local interfaith group even went so far as to support a particular political candidate to win the election because of the person’s commitment to diversity and equitable treatment of all religions.\textsuperscript{113} This new interdependence

\textsuperscript{110} Rev. Ronald Mosingi, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
\textsuperscript{111} Rev. Rudy Rahabeat, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
\textsuperscript{112} Rev. Rudy Rahabeat, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
\textsuperscript{113} Rev. Andri Purnawan, interview by Hans Harmakaputra via Zoom.
between state apparatus and religious leaders illustrates the application of Stepan’s “twin tolerations” concept to supporting a truly democratic climate in Indonesia.

**Conclusion**

Our research is far from exhaustive. This study offers a starting point for depicting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on interreligious relations in Indonesia, especially between Christians and Muslims. There are two significant findings. First, we observe that the traditional paradigm of toleration as a method of passive coexistence and non-interference is shifting toward the active practice of solidarity. Solidarity is based on acceptance of differences and genuine willingness to engage others in mutual works of service. We have demonstrated this shift at both the national and grassroots levels. Second, there is another shift in interreligious approaches offered by the phenomena of the pandemic. The limitation on in-person activities opens up massive virtual spaces where novel initiatives have flourished. Despite the challenges, there are opportunities signifying those interreligious efforts have been adapting quite well.