

# **Seeding Peace on the Earth**

## **Abdurrahman Wahid's Movements on Peace and Nonviolence**

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**"We must employ effective strategies to counter each of these fundamentalist strengths. This can be accomplished only by bringing the combined weight of the vast majority of peace-loving Muslims, and the non-Muslim world, to bear in a coordinated global campaign whose goal is to resolve the crisis of misunderstanding that threatens to engulf our entire world"**

**(Gus Dur, "Right Islam v Wrong Islam," *The Wall Street Journal*, 30/12/2005).**

**"Fighting terrorism with violence is counterproductive and is bound to fail. Terrorism cannot be defeated by militaristic approaches like those carried by the US but, instead, can only be defeated through peaceful measures." (<http://www.gusdur.net/english/news/index.php?option>)**

**Abdurrahman Wahid (known Gus Dur) is a rare phenomenon in the modern history of Indonesia. Gus Dur, a former President of Indonesia, is a unique, complete and controversial figure. He is a combination of lots of profession: intellectual, author, columnist, public speaker, cleric, politician, activist, peacebuilder, artist, and soccer's commentator. He is also a charismatic leader of the largest Indonesian Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), whose membership is of more than 45 million.**

**Despite coming from a "traditional" community, a strict Islamic tradition, and an isolated place, he goes beyond traditional boundaries. He has related to many people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, and tribes. Gus Dur also is well known as a "defender" of minorities' rights in Indonesia either religious minorities, such as non-Islam (especially Christianity), minority Islamic sects (e.g. Ahmadiyah, Rifa'iyah, Syi'ah, etc), minority Islamic thoughts (e.g. Liberal Islam Networks) and local/indigenous religions, or ethnic minorities, such as Chinese people, who often become the "scapegoat" and target of violence in conflicts and disturbances. His movements, credibility and reputation has brought him to international work especially dealing with peace issues, nonviolence and interreligious relationship, and he has been awarded by international communities due to these activities (see his curriculum vitae below).**

**In the same way, his movement and thought are also huge and multidiscipline, including theology, politics, anthropology, sinology, culture, history, sociology, Islamic thought, literature, and music. Since 1970s, he has written numerous books and hundreds of articles and papers on major subjects and themes. His knowledge is as an ocean, which is large and deep, like a text that can be interpreted from many approaches. Because of these backgrounds, many books and hundreds of academic works address him from different perspectives. Anyone intending to "engage" his biography can read the book that is written by Greg Barton, *Gus Dur : An Authorized Biography*.**

**This paper will focus on Gus Dur's movement and thought especially concerning peace and nonviolence. To understand these more deeply, questions, such as "What has been done by him and why?" "What are the main reasons?" are important to answer. The data that will be used for the analysis, both articles/papers and events, will be**

collected from newspapers/media, Gus Dur website (<http://www.gusdur.net/> and The Wahid Institute website <http://www.wahidinstitute.org/> of which Gus Dur was a founder. The structure of this paper will be divided into two steps, namely, 1) describe his movement and thought, 2) find out the roots of the main causes for which his peace movements.

### Movement on Peace & Nonviolence

As we described above, Gus Dur's movement without a doubt endeavored to create peace and nonviolence in the world and particularly in Indonesia. He has actively involved himself in creating a peace process with nonviolent ways in any conflict areas, such as Palestine/Israel, Iraq, South Thailand, the Philippines, and Aceh. His effort to create peace on the international level has been proved by his involvement/engagement in several peace and nonviolence NGOs and institutes, such as the International Strategic Dialogue Center, Netanya University, Israel, founded 2003, where Gus Dur as a member of the International Board along with Mikhail Gorbachev, Ehud Barak and Carl Bildt, the Nonviolence Peace Movement based in Seoul, South Korea (he has been president since 2003), the World Conference on Religion and Peace based on New York (former president 1994-1998), and the Shimon Perez Center for Peace, Tel Aviv, Israel, where he has been a founder & member since 1994, and so forth.

Gus Dur has also often been asked to resolve conflict in Palestine, South Thailand, South Philippine, Aceh and other conflict areas. Through Foreign Minister Kantathi Suphamongkon, Bangkok has asked Gus Dur to play an active role in resolving the conflict between the Muslims and the Thai government in Southern Thailand. Before that, Gus Dur met with Pansak Vinyaran, the political advisor of Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra, to find out a peaceful solution in the south Thailand conflict. After the meeting, Gus Dur said that the conflict in the region was provoked by a small group of Islamic extremists, while the majority of Thai Muslims wanted peace. Still, when the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and thousands of Muslims guerrillas met with the Philippines negotiators to discuss a government proposal of ceasefire at a jungle camp in the Mindanao island, Gus Dur attended, along with President Gloria Arroyo, international ceasefire monitors (mostly from Malaysia and Libya), Islamic block diplomats and representatives from the US embassy in Manila. Besides this, Gus Dur was also actively involved in creating a peace process in Aceh before the Helsinki Agreement signed in August 15, 2005. Recently, billionaire George Soros, a chairman of Open Society Institute, asked for him to join an organization he founded to help create peace in Iraq. Not only does he participate in resolving conflicts, Gus Dur has an important role in releasing hostages, especially Indonesian people, who were kidnapped by radical Muslim groups in Iraq and south Philippines.

Gus Dur's role in resolving conflict and creating peace also has been done through seminars, discussions, workshops both on a local and international scale many times. For instance, at the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace's Sixth International Summit in Tokyo (June 27-30, 2005), Gus Dur lectured on the role of religion in creating unity and resolving conflict. "Religions, especially Islam, are created to established peace. Hence, Muslims must inspire people to achieve peace," he said. Around 1,500 influential figures from 70 countries attended the summit. Before "the Tokyo summit", Gus Dur presented at the international conference titled "From Terrorism to Global Ethics" in Moscow, which was organized by the Turkish Dialogue Eurasia Platform and the Institute of Oriental Studies from the Russian Academy of Sciences. At that time, he explained the contribution of religion, belief and tradition to global ethics.

In the Indonesian context, Gus Dur's role is almost countless in creating peace, harmony, and nonviolent movements. Usually, there are four elements that he always criticizes because they often commit violence, injustice, disharmony, riot, etc. They are 1) government/rulers, 2) court and judiciary/attorney, 3) military/police, and 4) radical and conservative Islamic groups. When Indonesia was governed by the military-tyrannical regimes under General Soeharto called the "New Order", Gus Dur became an "avant-garde" within criticized them. Because the high risk, at that time, only a few people have enough bravery to criticize the regimes. Because of his critics, he often became a target of murder by the regimes. Gus Dur also had an important role in replacement of the dictatorial regimes in the Reformation Era in 1998.

Lots of evidence shows how Gus Dur loves peace deeply on the one hand and anti violent ways on the other hand. When he became a President of Indonesia, he made radical changes relating to military structures, such as eliminating military bodies/agencies in the national, regional and local levels, forbidding the military to be active in political spheres (except those retired or resigned from the military structures), pushing back military roles to barracks, choosing civilian figure to lead Department of Defense, etc. Gus Dur argued that the military is "the main actor" of every conflict and riot in Indonesia, so they should be reorganized. The main duty of the military, he said, was to protect Indonesian territory, not to frighten society. In one of his articles, "Terrorism Must be Fought", he said that the problem of chaos and conflict in Indonesia becomes more complicated "since security personnel have been part of law violators,

so that they are certainly reluctant to perform effective measure to prevent terror actions." According to him, politicians and government officials can not fix this mess in the national security system, as they themselves have committed political violation.

Another example of how he loves peace and rejects nonviolent ways occurred when the conflict between Christians and Muslims broke out in Ambon island several years ago. Gus Dur deployed thousands of his followers from Banser at the Surabaya port, to encounter radical Muslims groups who wanted to go war against Christian people there. He knew well that the roots of the conflict were more political than religious. Every year, Gus Dur commands his followers to guard the churches all over Indonesia from militant Muslim terror, especially in the Christmas season. One time, one of his followers died from a bomb when in charge of a church.

Likewise, when extremist Muslims groups destroyed several Churches who belonged to the Pasundan Christian Church called GKP in West Java last year, Gus Dur asked for his followers to protect them. Furthermore, Gus Dur insisted that the government dismiss militant Muslim organizations and radical Muslim groups. In August 2005, I met him, along with other religious leaders in the Nahdlatul Ulama's headquarter at Jakarta, to discuss the churches' destruction in West Java. It is important to note that radical Muslim groups not only destroy churches but also Islamic properties, such as mosques and Islamic boarding schools who belong to the Ahmadiyah sect and other Islamic minority sects. Several months ago, they also provoked people and imposed to close Liberal Islam Networks office in Jakarta. Thus, basically, they hate those who are different from their ways of thinking. They think that only their groups are true while the others are wrong and deviate.

Because of his strong critics and actions addressing radical Muslims groups, Gus Dur has been accused of being apostate, infidel, Western-Christian-Jewish agency and other bad epithets by them. However, he does not care about their insulting. He goes forward. He argues that whoever breaks the Indonesian Constitution (called Undang-Undang Dasar 1945) and Indonesian Philosophy (called Pancasila) should be punished and fought. In contrast, whoever has been discredited and marginalized must be defended either Muslim or non-muslim, Chinese or not and so forth. These are his main tenets. Because of his commitments to protect and defend minority rights and to promote religious tolerance and diversity, he has been awarded the "Father of Pluralism" and "Teacher of the Nation" by the Christian-based Peace and Welfare Party (PDS). Indonesian Hindu Youth Association awarded him "Mpu Paradah" in 2004. Chinese communities also gave him an award as "Father of Chinese". Minority people in Indonesia, including Christians and Chinese, know well his struggle to protect their rights from arrogances committed by both the government and militant Muslim groups. Gus Dur is the man who abolished the discriminative rules dealing with Chinese when he became a President of Indonesia. He is the man who allowed Chinese people to celebrate "their new year" named *Cap Go Meh* and express their cultures and traditions freely. He is the man who made Confucianism as an "official religion" admitted by the state besides Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity (Catholic and Protestant).

Finally, to disseminate his peaceful and nonviolent ideas and tenets to the global world, Gus Dur founded a website, namely, <http://www.gusdur.net/> and The Wahid Institute whose motto is "*Seeding Plural and Peaceful Islam*". Moreover, he founded the Gus Dur Foundation in order to help the poor and the victims impacted by both natural catastrophes and political forces. On December 18, 2005, he had deployed hundreds of thousands of people to declare a manifesto "Islam for Peace" at Jakarta. On the stage, he said that purpose of this event was to show the world that Islam is a religion for peace and nonviolence, not like the radical Muslim groups assume.

### The Roots of his Peace and Nonviolence Movements

There are lots of factors or roots to why Gus Dur "engages" with nonviolent struggle and peace, defends and struggles for human rights and minorities' rights, and refuses violent ways in pursuing goals. The following are some reasons. *First*, his academic and intellectual backgrounds. Since from childhood, Gus Dur has engaged with many people from different backgrounds. As a son of the first Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, he had had a lot of opportunities to meet and engage with many people. Furthermore, since he was teenager, he has studied and read many books not only dealing with Islamic themes but also books written by Western scholars, such as Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbach, William Faulkner, Johan Huizinga, Andre Malraux, Ortega Gasset, etc, and by Russian writers, such as Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Mikhail Sholokov. He also read Will Durant's book *The Story of Civilization* and Lenin's *What Is To Be Done*. When he was a youth, he was already familiar with Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, philosophy of Plato, Thales, Aristoteles and other Greece philosophers. This description blatantly proves how rich the information he had and

how wide and deep his perspective is. His experiences, knowledge, and perspectives become rich especially when he continued his undergraduate study in Egypt and Iraq, and “cruised” in the Netherlands and other cities in Europe. This background has influenced his views and movements to be pluralistic, peaceful and nonviolent.

**Second, the Nahdlatul Ulama’s milieu.** Gus Dur is the grandson from the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) named Muhammad Hasyim Asy’ari. As we mentioned above the NU is the traditional-based largest Islamic organization in Indonesia whose membership is more than 45 million people. As a “traditional Islamic organization” in which more than 80% of the NU’s members are based in villages and the suburb of the towns, NU often becomes victim of insulting especially from the urban-based “modern” Islamic organizations. Moreover, as an edge organization and a political minority, NU had bitter experiences during the dictatorial “New Order” regimes. Gus Dur was a leader of NU for more than 15 years, so that he knew well the difficulties and suffered for being NU member. On the one hand, NU was insulted of being a backward organization by “modern” Islamic organization, and on the other hand, NU was discredited by the oppressive regimes. This experiences also has influenced and shaped him as a “defender” of human rights and minorities’ rights.

**Third, the Islamic teachings.** What I meant by Islamic teachings here are Islamic universal values, such as justice, fairness, peace, diversity, tolerance, welfare, blessing, egalitarianism, etc. which is taught by Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Gus Dur differentiates between “local values” which are taken from Arabic cultures and traditions and Islamic “universal values”. For Gus Dur, “local values”, such as *jilbab* (female head covering), the amputation of hands (for theft), retaliation (for death or injury), stoning (for adultery) or obligatory beards and gowns of particular styles, even though these are cited in the Qur’an and Hadith (prophetic traditions), there is no obligation for Muslims outside of Arabia to follow such teachings because they are merely expressions of a particular local Islam in Arabia. All Muslims should practice Islam according to the “mirror” of their cultures and traditions. Even so, Muslims all over the world should take “Islamic universal values”. Why? Because Islam is a universal religion for all people in the world not only the Arabs.

Here, Gus Dur differentiates “Islamic doctrines” and “Islamic traditions”. According to him, the problem of the Islamic world today is the inability to differentiate between them. They are some Muslims who want to impose (by restrictions) the Arabic traditions and cultures to be practiced elsewhere. There are some Muslims who assume that the “true/right Muslims” are those who practice such traditions and cultures. In contrast, Muslims who do not practice such traditions are “false/wrong Muslims”. Thus, there is, in Gus Dur words, “a global crisis of misunderstanding” in the Islamic world. Hence, Gus Dur suggests all Muslims have to take the Islamic universal tenets/principles/values as mentioned in the Qur’an and other classical sources. In any case, Gus Dur often cites a verse in the Qur’an that says “I (Allah/God) do not delegate you (Muhammad) as a messenger (called *rasul*) except as a blessing for all creatures” (“*Wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan lil alamin*”). Thus, not merely for the Arabs! It means that the heart of Islam is to guard the dignity of human beings as civilized creatures. It means that all Muslims without exception must serve all people whoever they are and whatever their backgrounds, tribes, languages, faiths, ethnicities, and maintain nature, surroundings, and creatures.

The following are some universal tenets of Islamic teachings based on the Qur’anic verses and other Islamic sources which are often mentioned by him in articles/papers or seminars, to support his ideas and movements. First, the principle of erecting of justice (“*Ya ayyuha al-Jadzina amanu kunu qawwamina bi al-qisth*”). According to Gus Dur, the principle of justice is the core in the Islamic teachings and its main objective is to create prosperity in the society. The meaning of prosperity, in his understanding, not only refers to physical measures and statistical figures, such as goods possession, average age and so on, but also to mental prosperity, such as freedom of expression, law supremacy, etc. Second, the tenet of diversity/plurality (“*Inna khalaqnakum min dzakari wa al-untsa wa ja’alnakum syu’uban wa qaba’il lita’arafu*”). This verse contains the concept of mutual understanding. Third, the tenet of tolerance to the other religions (“*la ikraha fi al-din*” and “*lakum dinukum waliyadin*”). Fourth, the tenet of unity and peaceful co-existence (“*wa’tashimu bi habl Allah jami’an wa la tafarraqu*”). Fifth, the tenet of nonviolence (“*wa in tha’ifatani min al-mu’min ‘qtatalu fa’ashlihu baina huma*”).

Another thing that influences his peaceful and nonviolent movements and views is the biography/history of nonviolent movement figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Theology of Liberation figures in Latin America, and Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi. Gus Dur gives his gratitude to these historical figures, especially Gandhi. As evidence of his how of honor to Gandhi, he co-founded the NGO name Gandhi which stands for “Gerakan Anti Diskriminasi” (Anti Discrimination Movement). In addition, in his institute, The Wahid Institute, there is a Gandhi statue that symbolized the “vision and mission” of his NGO. In his article, “Gandhi dan Prinsip-Prinsipnya” (Gandhi and His Principles), he says, “At the end of January, 2004, I was invited by Gandhi Smriti to attend a Gandhi-56 year memorial day. Although at that time the weather of New Delhi was –20 C, I received the invitation. This is because I am admire him and his teachings”. What

**Gus Dur meant by Gandhi's teachings here are *Satya Graha* (struggle through peaceful ways), *Ahimsa* (struggle without exerting nonviolence), and *Swadesi* (independent).**

**He is Gus Dur, one of the symbols of nonviolent movements from Indonesia. Although since several years ago he has been almost blind because of stroke disease and has been to move by wheelchair, he persists the struggle of nonviolence, writes article in mass media, attends seminars, criticizes the government, demonstrates with the crowds, advocates and assists the victims of human rights violation and so forth. He does it for the sake of achieving justice, peace, democracy, liberty, prosperity and other universal values.\*\*\***



