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Building Tolerant Community

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**Building Tolerant Community:
A Study of Young and An Interreligious Organization “Forum Lintas Agama Deklarasi
Sancang” Bandung**

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Abstract

This article presents the importance of interreligious dialogue in Indonesia represented in Forum Lintas Agama Deklarasi Sancang (FLADS) Bandung. It is important to be examined because the involving of young as actor or participant is significant. Therefore, I document some data about the interreligious organization and analyze them using some interreligious dialogue theory by some scholars. Reflecting to Hick and Nasr preparing to respond of plurality, the result shows that interreligious dialogue is very meaningful in Bandung because various religious members commit together to build good social relation although Bandung is less conflict. Also, using Knitter perspective, FLADS is close to acceptance model of interreligious dialogue in which they stressing on respecting other without problematizing their religions Furthermore, looking at the dimension of what they share through their dialogue is dialogue of hand in which they share and commit to make a better life together.

Keyword: FLADS, Interreligious Dialogue, Tolerance, Indonesia

A. Introduction

Remembering the news of Rosnida Sari, a lecturer from Islamic State University (UIN) Ar-Raniry Aceh last year, 2015, it shows that the tolerance of us has decreased. The university gave sanctions for her because of her invitation for his students to visiting some churches in Aceh (Shaleh, 2015). Moreover she experienced some threats. Indeed, if we think her educative method is good to be practiced.

Recently, in general now many reports show the intolerance in some regions in Indonesia is increasing. For example, Aliansi National Bhineka Tunggal Ika releases new report of the intolerance in Yogyakarta, the most tolerant city, especially in Gunung Kidul district. The main issue is accusations of

Christianization/missionary activities that lead to rejecting, closing and breaking off some churches there (Rusjiyanti, Agnes Dwi et al., 2016: 103). Moreover, the members of the churches get some intimidations.

Important to note from the report is the actors. It informs that the actors come from two groups. The first group is from government starting from hamlet to regency (Rusjiyanti, Agnes Dwi et al., 2016: 109). Meanwhile, the second is non-government group: (a) Islamic organizations: Front Jihad Islam, Hizbullah and Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah; (b) FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama), a forum group promoting tolerance. This shows that the development of tolerance and intolerance is like sugar and ant. Both grow together.

Furthermore, thinking about the most often intolerant province in Indonesia in this recent year, Wahid Institute and Setara Insititute reported that intolerant actions mostly happen in West Java (Tashandra 2016, Gabrillin 2016). It is said that the intolerance develops because of the development of radical Islamic group in west Java. In general, the intolerance in some places is violence of religious freedom and discrimination. It means that understanding between member of one religion and other religion is very important.

In some places, attempts to create social harmony of some religious figures from each religion have been conducted by the emergence of some interreligious organization like FKUB, an interreligious organization that usually some regions have. However, rethinking about some interreligious organization, there is an interesting organization in center of West Java, Bandung city that is always referred because the organization has a declaration of unity and harmony between religions in the city. The name of organization is Forum Lintas Agama Deklarasi Sancang (FLADS) in which according one of the figure, Jefrey Samosir (2016) mostly young has big role in FLADS's activities although FLADS does not declare as a young organization. Therefore, analyzing the organization that mostly young involved there using theory of some scholars' interreligious dialogues is a best way to reflect the development of the intolerance and role of young today in building a peace in Bandung in particular and in Indonesia in general.

B. Definition of Interreligious Dialogue and its Development in Indonesia

Before analyzing FLADS, it is important to know what interreligious dialogue is and its development in Indonesia. It is important to know because dialogue is needed in the fact of the plurality in Indonesia, meaning that we will live in any form of differences that leads to discrimination or violence somehow. Therefore, to avoid those we need to understand each other. Understanding others, in this sense other religions is not enough by only reading some literatures, we need dialogue. Swidler (2008: 4) defines “dialogue is a two way communication between persons who hold significantly differing views on a subject with the purpose of learning more truth about the subject of other.” According to him it must be equal and there is no monopoly of one side. In addition, the dialog can be about religion or ideology, as he mentions interreligious dialogue and inter-ideological dialogue.

Interreligious dialogue therefore is dialogues between two or more religious members who communicate each other to understanding each other and changing to better acts, for example dialogue between muslims and christians. Such kind of dialogues effectively can lose some bad accusations of some muslims toward christians or reversely. As what I experience, although there is no violence between them, but sometimes some curiosities remain if they never do dialogue with different adherents of religions because of less information of each other. Moreover, intra-religious dialogue is also important if we see some cases of muslim majority and minority like case of Syi’ah and Ahmadiyah . Again as a member of a religion we should understand other religions by dialogue with them in order we can change and act accordingly for them (Swidler, 2008: 5).

In general, Swidler (2008: 5) levels dialogue in to three kinds: ideas and words, joint action or collaboration and prayer or sharing of the spiritual of some traditions in which each level can complete if it is also held intentionally and naturally. Meanwhile In particular, Bagir (2011), classifies the mainstream of interreligious dialogues in Indonesia. The first is dialogues among religious council, for example what happened in 2011 when some religious figures as the representative of government show publicly their concern about corruption, environmental crisis, poverty and the inabilities of government to defuse religious

conflicts, in which symbolically it has significant to share the meaning of togetherness to solve the problems.

Next is dialogues initiated by civil society organizations. The dialogues are promoted by non-governmental organization. The oldest of these is Dian Interfidei (Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia) established in 1991. The organization refers to faith (*iman*) because they also want to embrace religions that are not recognized by government as religion (*agama*) in Indonesia. The last is Dialogue at the academic level: Religious studies. This kind of dialogue is introduced by Mukti Ali, minister of religious affairs in the 1970s. By him, therefore it led to the emergence of comparative religion department in Islamic universities and Christian universities. Moreover, in 2006 there was emergence of Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRCS) at PhD level and Cross-Cultural Religious Studies (CRCS) at Master level. These show that the dialogue is not only happens in Islamic or Christian universities but it also in secular universities (GMU).

Seeing the development of the dialogue, it is good news. Some attempts to lead understanding each other have been conducted. However, seeing the mainstream of dialogue, it implies that there less activism of dialogue in grassroots level. The interreligious dialogues in grassroots levels are seldom. In addition, I rarely see the interreligious dialogues in some *pesantren* in Indonesia (Islamic boarding schools). In big cities, especially in universities may be some see or experience this kind of dialogues. Yet, interreligious dialogues in *pesantren* that mostly they exist in rural society are seldom. Although they don't do some intolerance like some mentioned radical groups above, I am afraid they hide some curiosity or feel superior to others. Therefore, I argue that dialogue is still important either in area without conflicts or with conflict.

C. History and Development of FLADS

In this part, I will review an interreligious dialogue by civil organization, mainly an interreligious organization called Forum Lintas Agama Deklarasi Sancang (FLADS) in Bandung city referring to the report that the highest intolerance is in West Java. Based on some information in its web *Deklarasi*

Sancang.org, the name of this organization was taken from the name of place where they read their declaration, exactly at Sancang Street, Bandung. Interestingly this initiation began last year before when the celebration of Christmas in 2006, in which a group of muslims visited some churches to congratulate and give them flowers as the sign of friendship or brotherhood. Getting inspiration of the initiation, so citizens of Bandung felt that brotherhood or harmonic relationship in Bandung is important. Therefore, to strengthening the relationship, they held “Halal Bil Halal Lintas Agama (Interreligious meeting)” until they agreed to arrange “Deklarasi Sancang” (Declaration of Sancang) in 2007.

The declaration is an agreement of some figures of Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism read in 10 November 2007. They declared that:

- a) We, religious members of Bandung City, are part of Indonesia highly appreciating oneness and unity.
- b) We, religious member of Bandung City, highly appreciate values of humanity.
- c) We, religious member of Bandung City, highly struggle to uprighing laws to create welfare, justice and peace in the name of collective happiness.
- d) We, religious members of Bandung City, promote tolerance and respecting each other.
- e) We, religious member of Bandung City, cooperate to solve social problem and environment.

In short, the ideas of the declaration clearly stated in their vision that says “membangun persaudaraan lintas agama melalui komunikasi dan dialog, juga menginisiasi program kerjasama lintas agama untuk mengatasi masalah sosial dan lingkungan (to build interreligious brotherhood through communication and initiate cooperative program to solve social and environmental problem) (FLADS, 2007). There have been many activities documented in their website since the beginning until now. Shortly, I will present the activities below from this recent year until the earlier year:

- a. Recent month, on April 10, FLADS responded to demonstration by Islamic radical groups in the front of church GPKP (Gereja Batak Karo Protestan).

FLADS required government to show their fairness because some accusations that the church has no permission there is wrong (FLADS, 2016).

- b. The interreligious organization now has routine visiting of their members, and exactly on March 13 2016, IJABI (Ikatan Jemaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia), an Islamic organization that highly respect and follow family of Prophet Muhammad as the continuity of what he taught, got the first visiting, aimed to strengthen their interreligious relationship (FLADS, 2016),
- c. In 2016, February 2, FLADS participated actively in World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) 2016 held by Magister of Religious Studies Department Sunan Gunung Jati Islamic State University Bandung, discussing about the importance of unity and peace and the social and environmental problem they have (FLADS, 2016).
- d. In 2015, December 3, the members of FLADS came to mayor of Bandung, Ridwan Kamil. They delivered their appreciation of bringing Bandung as the City of Human Right that would be released on December, 9. They also told the existence of the religious freedom in Bandung in which the mayor responded them to make routine meeting with the FLADS (FLADS, 2015).
- e. In 2014, FLADS celebrated their 7th anniversary by holding Fun Bike and Walk for Unity and Diversity on November 30 and some social agendas (FLADS, 2014). Also, on February 22, they held journalistic training in Maulana Yusuf Church.
- f. In 2013 November 2, FLADS held Young Interreligious Futsal Bandung in Santa Angela School. Also, in month of Ramadhan they held *sedekah ta'jil* (Sharing food) at Simpang Dago (FLADS 2014). In addition, they also held Donation of Flood on June 29 and July 1.
- g. In 2011 November 10, they celebrated their 4th anniversary by thanking to God because there are many supports for the declaration. They hope their commitment became strong to build peaceful Bandung, Indonesia and the world (FLADS, 2014).
- h. In 2010, November 10, they celebrated their 3rd anniversary by praying together because of people of Indonesia who experienced some disaster like

Merapi Eruption in Yogyakarta, Mentawai and Wasior. They showed their empathy by praying them together (FLADS, 2014).

- i. In 2009, November 10, they celebrated 2nd anniversary by strengthening and sharing the dream of declaration Sancang. (FLADS, 2014). Previously in the beginning of 2009, FLADS also participate in the declaration of statement responses of citizens, youths and artists of Bandung toward conflict of Israel and Palestine.
- j. In 2007, FLADS held “Halal bil Halal (interreligious meeting) that resulted Declaration of Sancang (FLADS, 2014).

D. The Significance of Interreligious Dialogue of FLADS

Indeed, reading the development of the organization that promotes unity and tolerance is very great. Although it is initiated by civil societies that mostly are young involved, they are very cooperative with some important institutions there. They can cooperate with some universities as well as the government of Bandung. Therefore, this kind of organization is very helpful to maintain the diversities there. They always invite other to avoid some intolerance in the name of religion. By their activities, they strongly promote the importance of tolerance. This can be example for other region because they strongly commit by always doing some meetings and re-reading the declaration that they have.

In fact, this is not something easy because “dialogue is a very dangerous business” (Nimer, 2000: 15). It can build beautiful relationship or reversely, but FLADS have succeeded to establish the interreligious relationship. However, although some adherents of religions from various groups in FLADS have united, but some form of intolerance sometimes happen there. I really appreciate FLADS though they cannot fully help some social or environmental problems, because uniting the groups is not something easy. FLADS showed that some repeated experiences of togetherness I think is the most valuable one like what I feel in the interreligious dialogue course and Christianity course when I am visiting some churches because it can lead to feeling of respect and love each other.

In deeper analysis, theologically the mission of FLADS is in line with one of plausible options of religion responding the fact of plurality or diversity as well

as when truth claim becomes a matter (Aslan, 1994: 103). The options are proposed by Hick, a modernist and a Christian and Nasr, a traditionalist and a Muslim. They are aware about the resurgence of religious plurality, but they have different perspective in seeing religion responding to the fact. Hick thinks that some modifications of religion can occur because of the interaction of religion that leads to removing boundaries between them, meanwhile Nasr thinks that there will not any change in the doctrinal of religion (Aslan, 1994: 123-124). In short, Hicks sees all religion is universal until some modifications of religion are allowed, but according to Nasr, religion is the sacred and the absolute.

So, the idea of the declaration or the ideas of what FLADS shares is the second option. It can be seen from the first and the forth statement of the declaration that says the members of religions have to be in unity although they are diverse by respecting each other. Also, it can be seen form one of the theme of their agenda, 7th anniversary, “unity in diversity.” Hence, this kind of perspective of religion is suitable in Indonesia because there are many kinds of religions in broad sense, it will make something confusing if they are considered universal.

In other words, it is called “re-traditionalisation” that is highly plausible option in the future of religions (Aslan, 126). The terms proposed by the Nasrian or Perennialist and suggested by Aslan is the possible option. Seeing reasons that they argue, I think there two main reasons that important to note. The first reason is because the progression of modernity promotes a totalitarian universality which destroys locality, on the one hand traditional view promotes unity within diversity which appreciates the importance locality; and the second reason is because the traditional view is more accommodative of inevitable diversity that we have (Aslan, 126).

Indeed, in details, in what manner we usually see other religions; we can refer to Knitter (2002) “Introducing Theologies of Religions.” Although his book mostly talks about Christianity, but book is really helpful to classify some views of individual or group toward others, the FLADS as well. According to him, there are four ways of how Christian or member of a religion in general views others in which they can effect in building some communications or relations to others. In other words, those can be basic theory of interreligious dialogue model:

- a. Replacement model: this can be total replacement and partial replacement (Knitter, 2002: 33-34). According to him, who sees others using first model, theologically argues that there is neither revelation nor salvation in the world of other religions. They feel that there is no value and no presence of God in them and they see them as obstacles. Meanwhile, who uses second model, they see that there is revelation or God in others, but there is no salvation there. The salvation is only by Jesus and only. Then, they receive the others to dialogue but that is not about theology.
- b. Fulfillment model: in this model, Christians think that other religions have value therefore they need dialogue to them without losing the uniqueness of Jesus (Knitter, 2002: 63). Therefore, according to them, All Hindus, Buddhist or Muslims who share kindness are related to the church (Knitter, 2002: 67). They think others who share kindness are sharing Jesus teaching, so that they are related to Jesus.
- c. Mutuality model: this model emphasizes on relationship of mutuality or balance – in which both of a different group make conversation that is really opened to learning and changing by seeing that God’s universal love presents in other religions (Knitter, 2002: 109). It stresses universality by finding some common things that can make the diversity valid, but it can break particularity because it can break the plurality (Knitter, 2002: 173).
- d. Acceptance model: as the more balancing act, this model does not feel superior to other religions nor search for common things to make them all valid, but it accepts the real diversity of all faiths (Knitter, 2002: 173). Thus, this model really respects the differences, the absolute differences without trying to find some similarities, so that agreeing or disagreeing is not a matter. The final goal is “to accept” the differences.

Thus, we can classify then, in what model what the FLADS has done. Referring to the declaration, it shows that they share the acceptance model in which they highly respect each other. What they say and what they do based on the declaration and their activities represent their acceptance of others. They don’t talk much about their religions, but they talk much about valuing humanity, in which it implies that they should respect what others believe about their own

religion by stressing on keeping harmony between religions. Certainly, this 4th model is plausible option facing the diversity in the context of Indonesia as represented by the interreligious organization.

So, the FLADS is good example on how promoting dialogue in Indonesia. They practice what they declare. There is continual or bounded relation between them as we can see their routine visiting of their members. They care with their members. They always campaign the declaration by often re-reading the declaration together when they hold agendas.

Another important thing that we should note from the interreligious organization is the cause of the existence of the declaration and the organization itself. There is no special event or social problem that influences them. Reading the history, it was begun only by an initiation of some muslims to visit churches when they celebrated Christmas in 2006. Thus, they meet and feel that muslim and christians should build lovely relationship, in which in the following years, it has inspired other members of religions to participate in. It means, meeting is the key of the formed group.

Reflecting to them, therefore, we don't need to wait certain problems or conflicts to build dialogue. We don't need dialogue after conflict like in Ambon in 1990 when religious figures of Muslims and Christians, called Tim 20 Wayame (the Peace Team of Wayame) as peace provocateur diffusing the conflict (Al-Qurtuby: 2013: 6). Thus, this directs me to think that interreligious dialogue can happen without conflict or with conflict. Some interreligious dialogues with conflict may be mostly happen in some particular place, but some dialogues without conflict only happen in big cities like in Bandung, Yogyakarta and so forth.

As my concern for those who promoting interreligious dialogue, it is better also if they share their ideas in a place with less plurality as well as less conflict. If they shares in Bandung or Yogyakarta may be it is something common if we see some interreligious forum or conference mostly held. Yet, in some small cities, like in some city in Madura as my hometown for example, such kind dialogue is seldom. May they have met and communicated each other with different identities of religion, but it is just usual communication, not an

interreligious communication. What they know about others is very limited and they rarely experience an interreligious dialogue like in Bandung. Although they act tolerantly each other, but they don't really know each other like what Swidler says about interreligious dialogue.

Again, FLADS shows that interreligious dialogue is meaningful in Bandung in which we can take example from them reflecting to news report of intolerance in some regions. They don't talk much about their particular religion, but they always meet together and share that they have to make better life, a beautiful social life by promoting tolerance as represented in their declaration. Furthermore, observing FLADS, the dimensions of their dialogues actually contains dialogue of head (stressing on understanding of others), hand (stressing to make a better world together, heart (stressing to seek beauty of other), and (w)holiness (stressing that humans are integrated each other) (Swidler, 2), but FLADS mostly stresses on dialogue of hand that all religious member support to make good and beautiful life.

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, interreligious dialogue is very meaningful in the fact of inevitable plurality today. FLADS shows that young actively participates in building a peace community, and shows that interreligious dialogue is important to strengthen the relation of members between religions, without waiting conflict happened. Thus, it implies that in some places without conflict should start like what FLADS does. Moreover, the way FLADS activates their dialogues is suitable in the context of Indonesia. Reflecting to Hick and Nasr in responding of plurality, religious members of FLADS commit together to build good social relation by respecting each other without losing their religion. Also, using Knitter perspective, FLADS is close to acceptance model of interreligious dialogue in which they stressing on respecting other without problematizing their religions. Furthermore, looking at the dimension of what they share through their dialogue is dialogue of hand in which they share and commit to make a better life together.

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