



SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

The Role of Parliamentarians in Protecting Religious Freedom and Beliefs in Anticipating the Risk Factors to Mass Atrocities in Indonesia

Meeting Summary

The Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) and its partner institutions The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia and the ASEAN Parliamentarian for Human Rights (APHR) organised the first dialogue with the Indonesian Members of Parliament (MPs) on the issue of protection of religious freedom and beliefs in Indonesia in Jakarta on 27 August 2019. The one-day dialogue was one of the key recommendations adopted in the Third Indonesian National Dialogue on R2P, which focused on the UN Framework of Analysis for Risk Factors to Atrocities held in August 2018 in Jakarta. Given the increasing risk of religious intolerance in Indonesia, particularly in an election year, served as a good justification for a dialogue with Indonesian MPs that focuses on protection of religious freedom and beliefs.

The one-day dialogue invited trigger speakers that included incumbent and former Indonesian MPs, active and former high-ranking officials from ASEAN bodies (such as the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) and the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)), a commissioner from the National

Election Monitoring Agency, as well as relevant experts and practitioners on issues related to human rights, religious freedom, as well as representative from a social media company. The dialogue was conducted under Chatham House rules, with 21 participants that also included representatives from academia and think tanks.

Dr Noel Morada, Director for Regional Diplomacy, APR2P; Dr Philips J. Vermonte, Executive Director of CSIS; and Hon. Eva K. Sundari representing APHR delivered their respective welcome remarks at the opening of the dialogue. They also expressed their appreciation for the joint collaboration in organising the meeting, which is an important and timely event given the recent elections in Indonesia. They also underscored the crucial role of the parliamentarians in managing the relevant risk factors for atrocities in Indonesia, particularly in preventing the escalation of threats to religious freedom and beliefs.

In Session 1 of the dialogue, it was acknowledged that, notwithstanding Indonesia's acceptance of the R2P in the UN General Assembly in 2005, much work still needs to be done in implementing the principle at the domestic level. In this regard, the

Indonesian parliament could play a significant role in promoting the principle by contributing to transforming the mindset of MPs and policy decision makers in the country about R2P. Specifically, it is important to view the principle not as a threat to state sovereignty but rather as part of state responsibility.

With regard to the promotion religious freedom and beliefs, the Southeast Asia Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion and Beliefs (SEAPFoRB) may be a good platform for Indonesian MPs and other legislators in the region in increasing awareness about respect for diversity of beliefs. As a regional network, the SEAPFoRB aims to mitigate religious tension and provide an advocacy platform. Apart from legislators, the regional network also includes lawyers, NGO activists, as well as representatives from various religious groups. In March 2019, SEAPFoRB organised the Jakarta Policy Dialogue on Combatting Religious Hate Speech and submitted a recommendation to the Indonesian parliament to amend the 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree to better protect religious freedom in the country.

With regard to engaging existing ASEAN mechanisms, it was acknowledged that collaboration be-

tween APHR and ASEAN-IPR is important in order to promote the “culture of peace” in the region, which is a concept that has been adopted by ASEAN. For example, the ASEAN-IPR’s Youth Conference and Exhibition, which aims to build a common understanding of and countering intolerance and violent extremism, is one area where partnership can be pursued and supported.

In Session 2, participants acknowledged the growing influence of radicalism and extremism in the country, which target government bureaucracy and universities in Indonesia. In the context of the recent presidential elections, it was pointed out that hate speech and incitement have become the main vehicle for political actors to pursue their agenda. To some extent, certain actors have manipulated the majority religion to undermine Indonesia’s pluralistic “kebhinekaan” (unity in diversity) value. Accordingly, the recently concluded national elections was clouded by strong religious sentiment and was dangerously driven by identity conflict. In this regard, participants agreed that there is a need for an effective mechanism to prevent the misuse of social media by certain groups and political actors to spread fake news, hate speech, and incitement.

In Session 3, participants discussed the issue of the government’s inability in protecting the minority groups’ religious freedom and beliefs in Indonesia. Specifically, there were criticisms about the way that law enforcement authorities have handled the religious tensions in the society, which so far has failed to uphold and protect the people’s religious freedom and beliefs. For example, it was pointed out that certain regulations (e.g., the Act on Information Technology and Electronic Transaction/ ITE, which is often used to catch individuals for committing ‘blasphemy’) and government-created institutions (e.g., Believers’ Harmony Forum/ Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) that are supposed to protect religious freedom have been abused and created problems. Accordingly, it was agreed that there

is an urgency to strengthen domestic laws in Indonesia in order to provide better protection for religious freedom.

Based on the foregoing discussion, participants in the dialogue proposed the following key recommendations to promote awareness about freedom of religion and beliefs and atrocity prevention:

1. Support the existing initiative such as Kaukus Pancasila within the Indonesian parliament, which advocates for pluralism and respect for diversity;
2. Collaborate with political parties’ schools to educate the young politicians on the R2P principle as well as understanding of the risk factors for atrocity crimes;
3. Organise follow-up meetings and training for young Indonesian parliamentarians and technical staff of parliament on the R2P principle and understanding the risk factors for atrocity crimes. In this regard, was highly recommended to encourage the UN Special Adviser for R2P visit Jakarta and hold a dialogue with young parliamentarians; and
4. Continue the dialogue with Indonesian members of parliament (MPs) with the support of APHR, APR2P, and CSIS on the role of parliamentarians in promoting freedom of religion and beliefs, as well as in implementing R2P in the Indonesian context.

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CENTRE FOR THE
RESPONSIBILITY TO
PROTECT**

Building 39A

School of Political Science
& International Studies

The University of
Queensland,
St Lucia Brisbane QLD
4072

P +61 7 3346 6435