

**RISING Women Ulama: Women Leadership  
for Peace, Prosperity and Pluralism**

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Lords

**FULL SPEAKER ADDRESSES & KEYNOTES**

## Dwi Rubiyanti Kholifah – FULL SPEECH

Indonesia Country Director for the Asian Muslim Action Network DwiRubiKholifah and winner of an N-Peace Award in 2016



My name is Ruby Kholifah. I was born in a modest family. My mother has a strong belief that a woman should be independent financially so she can have the power to decide her own life. I guess her strong belief has influenced me in choosing my life paths as a Muslim feminist. In the last 11 years, I have been serving the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) in Indonesia in strengthening community resilience in 25 villages to prevent conflict and radicalization by empowering interfaith groups of mothers.

Through my work, I have ensured women's place at the center. I have seen, in our long engagements in the community, that when we involve women, we create processes and produce results differently. By engaging with marginalized women, we become better in engaging other marginalized groups. This, in turn, enhances our legitimacy and sustainability in the community. From this journey, I am convinced that when mothers are empowered, they will bring transformation into their families and communities.

When I started working with these mothers, in 2007, Indonesia was undergoing a process of democratic transition and decentralization. The government was building the foundations for democracy and human rights, by amending our Constitution to be in compliance to human rights, revoking government control over the media, allowing freedom of expression and association, releasing political prisoners, implementing gender mainstreaming, performing security sector reforms to ensure that the military departs from politics.

I am proud that our country is one where democracy, Islam, modernity and women's empowerment can walk hand-in-hand. I am grateful that we were able to avoid the fate of other democratic transitions that have been wracked by conflicts or retreated back to undemocratic rule.

I worry seeing the trend of democratic regression in my region, Southeast Asia, where ethno-religious conflicts are rising and causing millions of people, including women and children, to be displaced or become refugees.

After 20 years of reform from our authoritarian past, Indonesia has made a lot of progress in terms of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. At least, three big reforms have taken place, such as: institutional reform on women's human rights, legal protection of women's rights, and increasing the role of women's human rights defenders and Islamic education reform.

In terms of institutional reform on women human's rights and women's empowerment, institutions have been set up to monitor implementation of gender mainstreaming and women's human rights. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was renamed as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. The National Commission on Violence Against Women (KOMNAS Perempuan) was established as a national mechanism for women's human rights. Women's Studies at the universities were spreading across the country.

On legal protection on women's rights, a presidential instruction on gender mainstreaming in 2000 paved the way for the government to endorse key legislation that protect women's rights and promote women's empowerment. These include legislation on domestic violence, women's political participation in elections and in village governance, combatting human trafficking, women's role in managing social conflicts, and gender budgeting.

Women's human rights defenders have also utilized the widening democratic space to engage in decision making from village to parliament bodies, ensuring gender-responsive and peace-oriented policies. An NGO report on Indonesia's 20-year implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action mentioned that currently there are more than 276 local regulations that are gender-sensitive.

In the area of Islamic education, formal elementary and secondary schools, the Islamic State University, and Pondok or Pesantren (our Islamic boarding schools) have developed a conducive space for boys and girls to have equal access for both religious and secular knowledge. The Pesantren, in particular, has contributed significantly to the regeneration of Islamic scholars and ulama, including women ulama, as well as promoting moderate Islam, among others by expanding the space for producing women-friendly reinterpretations of Islamic text and by directly engaging with gender equality and women's empowerment movements.

Despite these achievements, however, Indonesia's democratic space is now being challenged by the slowdown of bureaucratic reform at the risk of bringing back oligarchic power to the country. The rise of religious conservatism has made fertile ground for the mainstreaming of Islamist politics which is biased against women and minorities. This trend has resulted in 421 local regulations which KOMNAS Perempuan declared discriminatory against women and religious minorities.

Although Indonesia's Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and worship, after Reformasi, blasphemy cases have been increasingly made against faith minorities, like Shia, Ahmadiyah, Gafatar, or against even individuals. The biggest blasphemy case was made against the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (Ahok), who was accused of insulting the Qur'an. The judges sentenced him to 2 years of imprisonment after an edited version of Ahok's speech was disseminated widely via social media, and then used to mobilize a 'million Muslim' march in a campaign against having a "non-Muslim leader" and a call to put Ahok in jail. This was a wake-up call for us, as it clearly showed how successful a coalition of political pragmatism and religious fundamentalism can be.

With intolerance on the rise, as reported by several surveys (such as by the Wahid Foundation, Indonesia Survey, PPIM etc), our President Jokowi began a campaign to promote the cultural symbols associated with the Indonesian nation. He is bringing back Pancasila<sup>1</sup> and NKRI (the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) into the mainstream, as our foundational state ideology, in order to resist the extremism and terrorism which have been increasing during our Reformasi era. He also

took the step of banning Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (Party of Liberation Indonesia), which has been banned in several countries, but was widely considered controversial among Indonesians in terms of violating the freedom of expression and association. The Jokowi administration moved forward with this in the belief that it will weaken the process of radicalization in the country. However, this will only succeed if our laws are enforced, our schools are cleared from radicalization, and all of our civil servants strongly defend Pancasila and NKRI.

In response to such reality, and through my organization, AMAN Indonesia, I have embarked on four endeavors: to spread an inclusive interpretation of religious text, to build women-led community resilience, to consolidate progressive voices and to carry out advocacy. I have dedicated the last 11 years to empowering “militant interfaith mothers” through what we call ‘Women’s School for Peace’. Through these schools, we provide a 2-year peace education program for conflict transformation. Currently, in collaboration with the women at the community, we manage 25 schools with 1296 interfaith mothers in regular classes. We believe that when we have strong mothers as leaders in the community, they will be able to motivate men and the young generation to take a part in the process of development. Indonesian women have been known to be the caretakers of culture and community and, with their strong leadership, they will be able to integrate their new knowledge and skills into the whole cultural process and through day-to-day interaction.

In regional level, I have been engaging with diverse Muslim communities in Asia on conflict transformation, as part of AMAN’s 28-year endeavor to facilitate exchange knowledge on peacebuilding among inter faith young leaders and youth, and to spread progressive interpretation of Islamic text through research, humanitarian work, and intra- and inter-faith dialogues.

For me, the first Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (or KUPI for short) that was held on 25-27th April 2017, has expanded the dimension of our transformation project from within the Muslim world beginning from Indonesia. During KUPI, my organization hosted an international seminar brought together women ulama from several countries, like Nigeria, Kenya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Afghanistan. They became an integral part of our effort to reclaim the space for women ulama and to establish women ulama’s authority to interpret religious text. Moreover, the women ulama in these various countries could also utilize KUPI’s methodology in producing a gender-sensitive and peace-oriented fatwa. KUPI has reminded us all that there is still not enough space to bring about a new generation of women ulama. I, for one, am committed to take this struggle forward.

1. The official foundational Philosophy of theory with 5 principles; Belief in the One and only God, 2. A just and civilized humanity, 3. A unified Indonesia, 4. Democracy, 5. Social Justice)

## Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir – FULL SPEECH

**Founder of the Fahmina Foundation for gender, democracy and pluralism and General Secretary of the Alimat equality movement**



My name is Faqih. I was born and raised in the pesantren tradition of Indonesia, which is a traditional Islamic boarding school. From the age of seven, my studies were carried out in two systems of education: general education in the morning and religious education in the afternoon up till evening. From the age of thirteen to nineteen, I followed the pesantren education 24 hours a day in a very simple boarding school. Later, I was taught by a Muslim Sufi, Shaikh Ahmad Kaftaro, in a boarding school and, for my higher education, by an expert of Islamic jurisprudence, Shaikh Ramadan al-Buthy, at the University of Damascus in Syria.

My master's degree was obtained at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Upon return to Indonesia, with my mentor at the pesantren, KH Husein Muhammad, who is known as Indonesia's Feminist Ulama, I became engaged in Islamic activism for community empowerment and the promotion of tolerance, peace and, mainly, gender justice in the Muslim communities of Indonesia.

My personal and social life, faith, knowledge, behaviors and choices have been largely defined by the pesantren education system of Indonesia, Sufism and Fiqh of Syria, the thinking developed at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. They were further developed by my experiences of social activism within the lived realities of the community with my colleagues in the pesantren. According to the 2016 data from our Ministry of Religion, there are 29,200 pesantrens in Indonesia, educating 4,290,000 santri (students of pesantren). All pesantrens are private and many have not been recorded by the Ministry.

The pesantren is the oldest system of education in Indonesia. It existed before the western education system arrived in our country. People of the pesantren not only took part in the anti-colonial movement for independence, they have also been part of the shaping of our nation-state based on Pancasila, the shared values that brings us together across diverse religions, ethnicities, and languages in Indonesia. Of course, there has also been dynamics and resistance among the pesantren community which challenged the idea of our nation throughout the history of modern Indonesia. However, today, the pesantrens are the principal foundation of moderate Islam in Indonesia, an Islam that respects difference and promotes peace and tolerance.

As they are autonomous and private, the systems and curricula found in pesantrens are very diverse. In general, however, in all pesantrens, the students study the Qur'an, Hadits, Fiqh, Tafsir, Tasawuf, the Arab language, English, values of the nation, and life skills. These santri learn about self-

reliance, equality, living frugally and simply. Particularly for the pesantrens affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama – the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia – they are very friendly and receptive of local cultures from the various ethnicities of Indonesia.

Because of such close ties with culture, the values of Islam, nation and gender justice are also found in some pesantrens, in the practices of social interaction and also in the form of songs. We use literature and the arts, such as poetry, music and song, to teach the values of Islam, to share the noble examples of the Prophet, and to engage with the ideals of our nation and humanity. For example, there is a song *Hubbul Wathon* about love of our motherland, and the *Sholawat Musawah* about gender justice. Among the pesantrens, there are also competitions, such as one on reading the Qur'an and Islamic teachings, and debates, including those conducted in English and Arabic, on the Constitution and current issues. The santris also have a football league.

The early 80s was the moment when the pesantren community began to become connected and engaged with civil society groups fighting against the hegemony of the Soeharto regime. Through these encounters, the pesantren community learned about social analysis, including gender analysis, and community empowerment. They became directly involved in community empowerment initiatives. Although the pesantrens are not free from patriarchal values and cultures, many from the pesantren community became the backbone of the women's empowerment movement in Indonesia, working shoulder-to-shoulder with the activists. The pesantrens not only accepted women as santri, they also opened access for them to sit as managers, board members and teachers. Some women have even rose to become the main leader of the pesantren, taking responsibility over the whole education community and its participants, male and female.

On the basis of such values and culture, the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (or KUPI) was born and commenced at a pesantren in Cirebon, West Java, that is led by a woman ulama. This is the Pesantren Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy under the leadership of Nyai Hj. Masriyah Amva. This pesantren, with its 1200 santri – male and female – has opened its doors to diverse religious groups, activists, and even international visitors, and invited them to stay overnight with its santris. Cirebon was chosen as the site for the first KUPI because of its openness to diversity, on the one hand, and, on the other, because of the prevalence within the pesantren community there – among both female and male ulamas – who have worked tirelessly for women's empowerment. It is in Cirebon that the Fahmina Foundation, in which the phenomenal feminst ulama KH Husein Muhammad is based, has carried out its work in this respect for 17-long years.

Nyai Masriyah Amva, as she herself defines it in her book, is a preacher of moderate Islam, pluralism and women's empowerment. Currently, Pesantren Kebon Jambu has just opened a formal institute of higher education which receives support from the Government. There, women ulama will learn about gender justice and the principle of reciprocity in the relations between men and women. This promises to transform the hegemonic and authoritarian nature of relations to that based on partnership and collaboration.

This does not mean that Indonesia and its pesantrens are free of patriarchy. They are also not untouched by radicalism and intolerance. With the globalization of technology and information, and the free movement of people across nations, the pesantren community is also vulnerable to the infiltration of radicalist and terrorist ideologies. Sidney Jones has documented 40 pesantren which are connected to extremist networks, and about 200 that disseminate radical wahabi ideologies. The

numbers are disheartening and may grow further if not addressed through state policy and through the cultural work of the community at large.

In general, however, there are still thousands of pesantrens that instill Islamic values and local cultures which challenge extremism, radicalism and terrorism. Indonesia's Islam, with the strength of local cultures, has been integral to the success of development, democracy and social justice in the country. KUPI's gathering in the pesantren has created a particular cultural and social momentum in this long journey of transformation towards peace and gender justice based on Islam. This momentum builds confidence that the transformation is both possible and inevitable.

In full consciousness and true to my Muslim faith, I consider myself an integral part of this inevitable journey towards an Islam that enhances peace, tolerance, unity and social justice, particularly in the relation between men and women.

## Badriyah Fayumi Munji – FULL SPEECH

Steering Committee Chair of the 2017 Indonesian Women Scholars Congress, Chair of the Alimat equality movement and Islamic school Co-Director



I, Badriyah Fayumi, currently spend my days as steward to our pesantren, Mahasina Darul Qur'an wal Hadits, which is located in the outskirts of Jakarta. Our pesantren aims to educate future ulama and leaders of high morals and a way of thinking that respects our nation. In our pesantren, the santri follow the official state curricula for secondary education which we combine with our specific pesantren programs over six years. We integrate the teachings of Islam with the ideals of our nation, aligning knowledge-morality-service, rationality and spirituality, tradition and modernity, global perspectives and local wisdom.

My life journey and the spaces to which I have given service have allowed me to be directly engaged with policy makers, religious dignitaries, community leaders, political figures, women's rights activists, while at the same time being in touch with community at the grassroots and victims of violence. From these interactions I saw the multiple layers of barriers for women and vulnerable groups in accessing justice, from the structural and cultural barriers to the religious mindsets and behaviors that deny substantive justice for women. It is for this reason that the need arises for a space that could bring together women victims of violence and the activists with the ulama and the state in order to find effective structural and cultural solutions built on solid theological legitimacy.

My pesantren, KUPI and the other spaces of struggle that Allah has destined for me are part of my strive (ikhtiar) to manifest an Islam that is rahmatan lil alamin – meaning, Islam that is a blessing for all universe – which is an Islam that is gender just, peaceful, open, moderate, tolerant and cosmopolitan. Such idealism is alive in each field of service that I have undertaken, in the past and today, from the areas of education, social movement (Islamic and non-governmental organizations), religious preaching, journalism to that of the government bureaucracy, national parliament and state institutions.

This idealism about Islam is something that comes natural to me as the environment in which I was born, educated and raised is one that is imbued with the values of Islam and struggle for the people, nation and humanity. My primary and secondary education was a combination of the official curriculum of the state, Islamic schools and the pesantren in a compound of santri, in Kajen, Central Java. For my higher education, I attended the Islamic State University in Jakarta and the al-Azhar in Cairo. I have also engaged with women's rights NGOs and the Nahdlatul Ulama, which is the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. Nahdlatul Ulama holds strong the tradition of Islamic scholarship while committed to the ideals of nationhood. It stands for the middle way (tawassuth), tolerant

(tasamuh) in its character, gives priority to balance (tawazun) and justice (i'tidal), and is open to the new.

In this context, the idea of KUPI became an oasis and an answer. KUPI was a meeting space for women ulama and the activists, for victims as well as the state. This space also validated the existence and role of women ulama which had so far been marginalized by history and a historiography unenlightened by gender justice. This meeting space also provided the opportunity to address real and massive problems faced by women whose resolution cannot be separated from the roles of religion and the state. In Indonesia, we are fortunate to have a large number of women who have the capacity to become ulama. Their numbers have increased in line with gender mainstreaming policies. They are spread out in pesantren, institutions of higher education, community prayer groups, and a multitude of Islamic organizations across the country. However, the views of Indonesia's religious communities on issues related to women, such as child marriage, domestic violence, sexual violence, migrant workers and environmental degradation, commonly are not conducive to substantive justice for women. The authorities who produce fatwa – and the process and methodology they apply – have not placed women as subjects. The fatwa-producing organizations are mainly dominated by male ulama. This is a challenge. Thank be to God, Indonesia's influential male ulamas have not questioned the authority of the fatwas produced by women ulama and, in fact, embraced KUPI with open arms. This is an opportunity.

In the midst of these challenges and opportunities, KUPI stands to provide the space and authority for women ulama to produce fatwa. KUPI places women as subject. KUPI applies a grounded methodology and a participatory process. As similarly applied in the Muslim world, the references we use for our fatwa are the Qur'an, Hadits and the opinions of ulama. Additionally, however, we also refer to our national constitution and to women's lived realities. In KUPI's view, the two latter references are necessary because, as human beings, women have specific life experiences and, as citizens, women's equality is guaranteed by law. KUPI is thus under the umbrella of Islamic teachings and values as well as values for the nation, humanity and the universe. KUPI has applied these values in its three fatwas, namely on child marriage, sexual violence and environmental destruction, and in its recommendations. It is our methodology and values that distinguish KUPI's fatwas from those by Islamic organizations in Indonesia. KUPI's fatwas have no contradiction with Islamic scholarship and provide distinctiveness in terms of perspective, process and references.

KUPI is an intellectual, cultural, social and spiritual movement – one that stands on collective actions based on solidarity, self-reliance, sincerity and volunteerism. All of us involved in KUPI contribute with no expectations of self-gain. This is because we see KUPI as our call of faith and an historical inevitability. A call of faith because the prophetic mission is to be carried out by both male and female ulama. An historical inevitability because the history of civilization is built by men and women, even though the existence and role of women ulama have so far been distorted due to the biased historiographies of Indonesia and the Muslim world. Through KUPI – the first of such an event in Indonesia and the world – which was attended by 649 participants and observers from 13 countries, the role of women ulama is finally acknowledged and women's crucial issues addressed.

KUPI's fatwas have now become theological references used by women ulama in teaching Islam, by activists in supporting victims and in carrying out policy advocacy, as well as by policy makers at national and local levels who need theological references to ensure that gender just policies would

be acceptable to religious communities. KUPI's fatwas have also become a source of moral and spiritual strength for women victims in their struggle to survive and access justice. Also among academics, KUPI has been made into a subject matter for research and analysis.

Alhamdulillah, KUPI has elevated the term 'women ulama' into academic and public discourse, nationally, internationally and locally. This is possible because KUPI's participants are influential figures in their respective communities. Of course, it is also because KUPI offers a specific methodology and perspective in its religious fatwa. Many have offered their collaboration and support, including this distinguished forum.

And now, the network originating from KUPI continues to move forward using their own resources in order to disseminate the outcomes of KUPI and to realize the aspiration of KUPI, which is to enhance the existence and role of women ulama in achieving substantive justice for women in accordance to the Islam that is rahmatan lil alamin and to values for our nation, humanity and the universe.

## Kamala Chandrakirana – FULL SPEECH

**Founder of Indonesia’s National Commission on Violence Against Women and of the Musawah global movement for equality and justice**



My name is Kamala Chandrakirana. I was brought up in a multicultural extended family in which inter-religious marriage and cross-cultural friendship were the norm. It was a time when Indonesia’s multicultural character was a source of confidence and pride rather than distrust and insecurity, the way it is now. My education brought me to three continents: Indonesia, USA and Japan, and I continued on to build my family and work life in the global community.

I grew up with stories of struggle from my father, my aunts and uncles, each of whom had contributed in unique ways to the birth of Indonesia as a sovereign nation. After independence, when the promise of Indonesia was betrayed, I saw how firmly they stood defending the ideals even at the cost of marginalization from power and, in some instances, imprisonment. These are the values instilled in me throughout my life. Eventually, I found my home in the women’s movement which has kept me grounded in local, national and international struggles for peace, justice and human rights for all. It is through this movement that I have been invited into and engaged deeply in activist spaces within progressive Muslim communities in Indonesia and beyond.

Indonesia today is not the same as the Indonesia of my childhood. The intricate weaves that had bound us together across our diverse ethnicities, races and religions have weakened and frayed and may not hold against the relentless onslaught from today’s politics of fear and hate. By now, families are divided, schools are teaching intolerance, neighborhoods are drawing lines of separation from ‘the other’, communities act misguidedly on the basis of stereotypes for problem solving, and, when outbreaks of violence occur, peacemaking is equated with that easier path of segregation as the ultimate solution. Indonesia today also has the highest rate of inequality in Asia, second only to that of China’s.

It is in this moment of deep polarization and gaping inequalities that we, in Indonesia and the progressive Muslim world, appreciate the leadership of our women ulama. They have carved a unique space, through the convening of KUPI in April last year, in which they contributed their collective voice to address the nation’s rising intolerance and persistent injustices. Allow me to repeat Badriyah Fayumi’s point that this contribution is made based on a fundamental claim that the public role of women ulama is an historical inevitability – a role integral to their faith and merely the logical consequence of being scholars of Islam who stand on equal footing with their male counterparts. With this, Indonesia’s women ulama publically asserted their legitimacy as a source of juristic authority within Islam.

Through the national congress, Indonesian women ulama created a unique and unprecedented space for the production of religious opinions (fatwa), one based on deep conversations with women victims of violence and with their advocates in civil society, such as myself. For those of us whose efforts to attain equality and dignity for women have too often been dismissed as inconsistent with our religion, we found new haven among the women ulama who hold the conviction is that religious scripture must be interpreted in dialogue with the lived realities of women. We gained new strength from being accepted as sources of valid knowledge in the development of fatwa for the common good. We attained new optimism in knowing that this space is not a one-time project, but rather, a long-term commitment to regularly convene such a forum for consensus building within Islam in which women's equality and rights are treated as central to the dignity of humankind. We are encouraged by the promise of achieving a new social contract within Islam towards peace and justice for all. We take pride knowing that this is made possible through the bold leadership by women ulama in democratizing the production of fatwa.

The three fatwas produced during the KUPI congress demonstrated the women ulama's grounding in the average woman's lived realities. They reflect the priority issues of the day: sexual violence, child marriage, and social injustice in connection with environmental degradation. While these issues are specific to women's lives, they occur constantly in the various contexts of daily life across the country, including within the divided families, neighborhoods and communities where intolerance and extremism breed. The women ulama are thereby addressing the deeply gendered dimensions of our nation's ills today. They have set the stage for overcoming them from within communities of faith, while securing women's dignity at the core. To me, this looks like faith as critical engagement.

In the intense deliberations for each of the fatwa, the women ulama chose to give recognition of women as persons of faith in Islam as well as citizens of the nation. With this, they have further distinguished themselves by the conscious will to locate Islam within the context of nation, which consequently meant interpreting religious scripture in dialogue with the legal guarantees provided in the national constitution and the lived realities of women on the ground.

As a women's rights activist who is engaged in national and global settings, I am proud to stand beside Indonesia's women ulama. Their unique positions in the community – being teachers of Islam in community prayer groups; heads of religious schools, small and large; scholars and lecturers in Islamic universities across the country – make them leaders with distinct potential and impact. As someone who has walked along this journey with them, I am witness to their efforts of awareness-raising, knowledge building and community-organizing that have been conducted over two decades. I consider it a unique privilege to have been part of this, including in making deep connections with global networks and conversations on women's rights within Islam, such as those initiated by Musawah, the global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. I remain in awe at both the boldness and perseverance of dialogue within our traditional pesantrens on difficult issues. It is exciting to see how whole pesantrens transform themselves, along with the emergence of a new generation of leaders. Indeed, the women ulama, along with their enlightened male counterparts, are part of nothing less than a significant social movement that connects multiple struggles at the local, national and global arenas.

Many have dismissed Indonesia's Islam as being merely an interesting anomaly within the Islamic world. But, as long as we are not in the business of imposing blueprints across diverse contexts, this

is not a particularly useful way of thinking about the Indonesian experience. Through KUPI, Indonesia has shown what is possible within Islam. While the face of Islam remains diverse and even contradictory, we would do well by keeping vigilance over what is good and working in Muslim communities. The reality of Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation in the world today, is crucial evidence of diversity in the Muslim world. Continual interest from among the progressive Muslims – many but not all of whom are feminist Muslims – in the Indonesian experience is simply part of a long tradition of mutual exchange and learning across the Muslim world. There are no signs of this ending even in this volatile era of ours. As our civilization today continues to seek new sources of ideas and inspiration, we in Indonesia are proud to declare our contribution through the leadership of our women ulama: the democratization of the fatwa for the common good.

On a last note, given the theme of today's RISING forum, I am reminded that the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security calls for states to support local women's peace initiatives. I would argue that KUPI is one such initiative. By understanding KUPI's intent, frame of thinking, methods of work, and diverse engagements, we learn of the unique ways in which women lead in society. We witness, as today in this forum, how women's leadership is an inclusive one, in which enlightened and open-minded men struggle alongside them.

For those of us who are committed to peace, justice and dignity for all, we must ask the question: how do we support women's leadership that grows deep within religious communities in distant corners of the globe? What kind of support is effective knowing that these women operate through organic and indigenous social movements, not necessarily through formal organizations? International support that requires local groups to become implementers of rigid projects and defined agendas set out elsewhere would undermine their capacity to adapt in complex environments. What would it take to further enable women such as these – women who have carved out their own unique and context-specific spaces and ways of leadership? In a time of heightened institutional crisis and policy debates on international aid and philanthropy, we would do well in dealing with these practical and yet critical questions.

## Professor Nishi Mitra vom Berg – FULL SPEECH

Professor and Chair of the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India



I first thank Professor Mike Hardy and Dr Sariya Cheruvallil Contractor and other colleagues of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University for giving me this opportunity to represent views from India in this august gathering.

India is a multi-cultural and a diverse nation. It has an inspiring history of pluralism that has been thriving for thousands of years even though we had also our black periods of communal unrest and violence. Among the many faiths represented in India are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism besides many tribal religions.

As the world's largest democracy, India presents a unique opportunity to understand a long and multifaceted heritage of religious diversity that is today threatened in the context of right wing politics, widening gaps in wealth and extreme poverty, dispossession and marginalization of large sections of populations, lack of access of large masses to gains of modernity and development, increased violent resistance and some loss of faith in electoral politics.

These factors have made many fragments of our pluralistic society and cause conflict and unrest. Muslims are India's largest religious minority, making up more than 13 percent of the 1.2 billion population. They are among the most excluded and marginalised communities, with social indicators such as education and employment lower than the national average.

However one needs to point out at the outset, the diversity and plurality of Muslims in India and that Muslims are not a homogeneous community. There is remarkable distinctiveness amongst Muslims in culture and development status across geographies, sects and class which have remained unrecognized in the homogenizing discourse on Muslims. In general economic and educational deprivation has contributed to their backwardness and poor representation in government services and politics. Moreover, there is isolation and ghettoization among Muslims leading to social stagnation. There is a growing sense among Muslims that the democratic process in post independent India has not made for peace and development for their community. The religious violence in 1992 following the destruction of Babri Masjid, Gujarat riots in 2002, other communal riots leading to enormous loss of life and property and continuing State violence in Kashmir have demoralized Muslims and alienated some sections. The most harmful impact of this has been the restriction of women's rights in the context of fear of the community. In the name of protection, the community stronghold on women has increased and has led to further ghettoization, isolating

women in particular from the mainstream.

Muslim women suffer triple marginalisation: as women, as members of a religious minority and as individuals living in abject poverty. As per 2011 Census, Muslim women number more than 71 million, 60 percent of women are married before the legal age of 18, over 50 per cent are illiterate. The 2005 Government of India Sachar Report commenting on the social, economic and educational backwardness of the community said that both the civil society and government blame the religious community for the position of Muslim women but we need to rethink societal discrimination of Muslims and faulty development policies. The committee noted that a reasonable representation of various communities in government employment is necessary to enhance participatory governance required in a pluralistic society.

Muslim women's backwardness not only depresses the communities' development but because a significant portion of the community is marginalized, it becomes vulnerable to anti-national and extremist ideologies and may nurture violence.

In this background, I would like to draw on a few heartening initiatives by Muslim women in furthering their communities development and restoring and promoting peace.

### **Self Help and Income Generation Projects**

I first draw on Muslim Women's Initiatives launched by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) along with its civil society partners in villages and urban slums in Karnataka and Rajasthan for 7 years between 2004-2011. Here multiple layers of intervention were implemented in phases to empower Muslim women within the community. The initiative drew the support and knowledge of predominantly male community leaders such as Maulvis (Muslim clergymen), Ulemas (religious scholars) academicians, activists and lawyers in the community. Awareness workshops for Muslim men and women on rights of women enshrined in the Quran and rights of women protected by Indian law were conducted.

The basic goal was to demonstrate the progressive elements of Quran in terms of personal law in matters of consent to marriage, payment of mehr, dowry, dissolution of marriage, rights of property ownership and inheritance. In these workshops women articulated their vulnerabilities, lack of decision making and violence in marriages and the ground work for their voluntary engagement in their own empowerment was made. Counseling cells were formed and women volunteered to network and support needy women in police stations, courts, banks, shelter homes etc. Thrift and credit activities came up next with women joining courses for vocational skills to address their economic vulnerabilities. Women got basic leadership skills in the Program and in time more and more engaged themselves in solving local problems such as reform of local schools, improving facilities in local hospitals, applying for welfare schemes etc to initiate community activities. Orientation programs for teachers in community madrassas were organized as a next step to address school curriculum towards a continuing empowerment of women.

There was some resistance but with sensitivity and tact and persuasion the scholars and teachers in madaras took these orientations. They collaborated with religious scholars and civil society members to develop and teach new course materials on gender equality for class 9 and 11 grades.

Boys were targeted and this was very successful as several boys understood their own criticality in leading change. Monthly mentoring meetings were held to consolidate and strengthen grassroots leadership among women and men, girls and boys.

It is heartening that this experiment led to visible results as later 8 of the mentored women from these grassroots groups were elected in local governance bodies in Bijapur ( Karnataka) .This example illustrates a model of peace work successfully implemented for Muslim women's integration in mainstream democratic processes through involvement of critical men in religious offices and civil society.

### **The Fight against Instantaneous Divorce**

India does not have a common civil code in matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance guardianship and succession as the constitution allows people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to follow their religious personal laws that derive from religious norms, scriptural injunctions, culture, customs and values. Personal laws in general do not guarantee women equal status or rights. Women have subordinate position in the patriarchal family system and are discriminated in matters of inheritance, adoption, marriage, divorce, right to dwelling, maintenance etc.

In August 2017 after a prolonged struggle for more than three decades by Muslim women's groups , the Supreme court of India struck down “triple talaq”, a practice where a Muslim man can get instantaneous divorce from his wife by saying “ I divorce” three times. This practice had been outlawed in much of the Muslim world but continued to exist in India. This form of divorce practiced unilaterally had a very negative impact on Muslim women who lost their homes and rights in marital property and child custody instantaneously and went through extreme dispossession and trauma. The banning of the so called 'Islamic' divorce as unconstitutional is said to be a victory for 90 million women. Though the self-directed reforms in the community would have been the best option, they were stifled by the patriarchal interpretation of religious law by the Muslim clergy. The religious organizations in the community also denied Muslim women to seek legal remedies and in recent times Muslim women were emboldened through their own associations to rebel against the patriarchal interpretations of religious law. They sought legal intervention to offset Muslim clergy.

There was resistance by All India Muslim clerics on grounds of interference in religion. The right wing government's pronouncements on the issue were perceived as an attack on Muslim religion, culture and values especially as Muslim marriage arrangements are held to be more respectful and empowering for women's individual identity than that of the Hindus. Yet the Supreme Court's decision to hold the practice of instantaneous divorce as unconstitutional and undemocratic was upheld by Muslim women from across the board as they welcomed the verdict.

This campaign and its successful end demonstrates how Muslim women could stand together and demand in unison in spite and despite of patriarchy of communities and state institutions. The women's movement in India stood strong behind the Muslim women and their claim to India's constitutional values of equality, pluralism and secularism. Muslim women's coming of age and confidence is reflected in the fact that they withstood intense community pressure in the wake of a right wing majority government's propaganda. The Government was spearheading the change in

personal law with the idea of 8 per cent of Indian Muslim women suffering under religious patriarchy and bigotry while overlooking similar practices in other religions that make for women's general dispossession and vulnerabilities.

This debate has again demonstrated that women are important symbols of communities yet women's rights are marginal and contested in their own communities. In India other communities have colluded in denying women their citizenship rights in terms of their equal representation in parliament or equal inheritance rights through adopting complicated identity politics and dividing women along religion, caste and ethnic lines. For the women's movement it has meant that they are challenged to constitute a strong pressure group in the face of religious and caste identities. Group identities and group rights have special significance in post-colonial democracies where individual rights and individual citizenship is an idea that has still not taken roots and women themselves cannot be treated as a self-evident category by either feminists or by other political groups. There is gender inequality both within and between communities that should define our peace agenda. The question of gender justice needs to be attended and not made a casualty the way it has been done till now in terms of contesting patriarchies of caste and religion. We need to focus on overall democratization of society which remains a challenge. Gender rights are a non-negotiable part of this democratization and inclusion of women's perspectives and participation is a not only invaluable but a must. Now the task before the State and Muslim women in India is to ensure that the change in law is accepted as a need and not trivialized as a measure of upstaging a religious community. It would be a big disaster if the law fails to resonate in particular families and communities on grounds of oppositional religious solidarity. Implementation of laws in India is a continuing problem. In that case it may exacerbate tensions in families, and between communities and remain meaningless for most women despite existing in law books.

### **Right to Pray**

Since late 2015 and early 2016 there have been several protests by women (especially media campaigns ) that have raised the call for the Right to Pray .Women protesters on social media have opposed being barred from entering prominent temples and shrines on grounds of women being impure. Three sites have been important in this debate: Sabrimala Temple in Kerala, Shri Shani Shingnapur temple in Maharashtra, and Haji Ali, a Sufi Shrine in Mumbai. Both Hindu and Muslim religious orthodoxy opposed women's entry into these sacred places and claimed the freedom to practice religion as a basic constitutional right, as per tradition and faith. In case of Haji Al, the restrictions on women to enter the sanctum sanctorum were made only in 2012 when women devotees were told by the Haji Ali Dargah Trust that Sharia law (as interpreted through a fatwa) demanded them to be excluded from the shrine. The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan led a spirited campaign against this restriction.

In August 2016 the High Court of Bombay gave a verdict removing restrictions on the entry of women into the sanctum sanctorum of the Haji Ali Dargah. This led to women reclaiming what was earlier the right of women devotees of the dargah.

It is noteworthy that in the protests to reclaim their rights of access, women of different religions have come together to oppose the Hindu and Muslim religious leaders. The movement drew its

strength from this unified approach. The Supreme Court argued for and upheld the constitutional right of women to enter these places, countering traditionalists that denying women the right to worship/ pray could amount to a violation of their constitutional right to equality. Also the court was compelled to hold that personal choice of women needs to be defended. Forbidding women entry could be seen as a violation of their constitutional Right to Freedom of Religion and Right to Equality. The court recognized that the issue was in fact more than merely the right to pray, as it entailed also the right to access all public spaces of educational, historical, cultural value as well as spaces of natural beauty.

Women's movements were divided about taking a youth driven and media focused confrontation seriously. There were vitriolic exchanges between women's groups. Some distanced themselves from these protests calling feminists as trouble makers and non-believers, and wondered what was the purpose of staking the right to enter sacred temples and shrines. Some held other issues -- like political representation, pervasive violence against women including rape, female foeticide, and dowry deaths; caste and religious intolerance; and lack of economic options available to women -- to be more important than the temple and shrine entry.

Although it may be true that the Right to Pray protests were sporadic and may not lead to a fundamental change in patriarchal attitudes ( rather they polarized people without any real change), the women's groups protesting upheld the victory as a concrete manifestation of their fight against religious and symbolic subordination.

## **Conclusion**

In discussing women's contribution to peace in pluralist societies I have taken a more expansive feminist definition of peace, influenced by the acclaimed peace scholar Johan Galtung and feminist peace activists such as Birgit Brock Utne and Betty Reardon. All three have conceptualized peace work within a framework that integrates personal, structural and cultural violence. Peace in this sense is not just absence of conflict but rather a positive condition where people are not differentiated in terms of their life chances due to differential power and can realize their potentialities maximally.

In terms of women, this definition focuses on the linkage of the macro and the micro, the society and the family and the different forms of violence that inhibit women's full contribution to development and peace in society. This definition highlights women's diverse roles in their families, communities and society and recognizes their agency. It complicates our understanding of violence and peace even as it foregrounds gender in terms of power relations, making it an important axis implicating peace in society. A transformative approach to peace in society needs to recognize that women play critical role in their homes, communities and society and that everyday violence against women is an important agenda for peace in national and international context.

Muslim women are often represented in an essentialist way as oppressed, backward and passive victims of religion and patriarchy and are invisible in the grand historical narratives. However the fact is that Muslim women are quietly involved in rewriting this narrative and redefining their rights. They are not submissive, or fragile or too weak to fight for their rights. Rather they are engaged in

processes of economic and cultural change, nation building and secularization. They have explored new ways to engage with religious and political discourse and to seek simultaneously legitimacy within the Islamic discourse. Muslim women in India are engaged in setting up their own Jamaat ( assemblies ), questioning the exclusive authority of patriarchal religious male authorities in interpreting Muslim law; they are building mosques for women as alternative public spaces; they are training themselves to be Qauzis. They are engaged in fighting State repression in Kashmir not only as mothers, daughters and sisters but also as individuals with political agency and voice resisting the invasion of their space while at the same time urging stop to senseless violence that tears families and communities in strife.

Muslim women in India have an increasingly audible voice that is leading the community to accept gender equality as the way to Peace and Development.

## Professor Azyumardi Azra CBE - KEYNOTES

Senior Professor of Islamic History and Culture and Director of the Graduate School at Sharif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia



Distinct from the segregation, domestication and discrimination experienced by women in other Muslim countries where place is rarely given for the emergence of women ulama, Indonesian Muslim women instead have an important position and role in the growth of Muslim community in country. There is no other reason for this except for the fact that Indonesian Islam embraces the Wasatiyah Islam, a middle path Islam that is inclusive, accommodating and tolerant, providing much more space for freedom and independence of women. Since the beginning of the spread of Islam in Indonesia until today, Indonesian Muslim women have always been present in a wide range of sectors of public life from religion, socio-cultural, education, economy to politics.

The emergence of Indonesian women ulama is related closely to many Islamic educational institutions from surau (prayer house -functioning also as an educational institutions in West Sumatra), pondok or pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding schools in Java and other islands), madrasah (modern Islamic schools primary and secondary), sekolah Islam (Dutch-based Islamic education) until higher education level, consisting of public State Islamic Universities (PTKIN), public 'general' if not 'secular universities (PTUN) and Islamic-based and non Islamic-based private universities (PTS) . Throughout their past history until now, these Islamic educational institutions are inclusive to both their students (called santri), and female students. However, it is worth emphasising, from the wide range of those Indonesian educational institutions it is the pesantren that has proven to play more outstanding role in the formation of cadres and regeneration of Indonesian women ulama.

To understand the position of women in the pesantren system, once again we need to first understand the historical, sociological and cultural context of Indonesian Muslim women in their overall community. Clearly, Indonesian Muslim women are an integral part of the Muslim community, who cannot be separated from the condition and the reality of their broader environment. Without the true knowledge and understanding of the historical, social-cultural, and the reality, this will only result into misperception and distortion which is misleading regarding the position of Indonesian Muslim women in the field of education, particularly in pesantren and other Indonesian Islamic educational institutions.

In my understanding and according to my own research from an historical, sociological and cultural point of view, there is very little evidence of discrimination—let alone repression—or of the segregation of women in Indonesia, simply because they are Muslims. If there is any subordination

of women to men, this is primarily due to the social and local indigenous culture, not because this is inherent in the tradition of Indonesian Islamic social and culture since the beginning of the development of Islam in this area. On the contrary, ever since the early days of Islam in Indonesia, Muslim women have been involved in the social, political and religious domain without any restriction and discrimination. A concrete example is the existence of four successive women rulers or Queen (Sultanah) in the Sultanate of Aceh in the 17th century post-Sultan Iskandar Thani's era.

In those early days, there is also little evidence of discrimination of girls to access education through traditional Islamic educational institutions, like the mosque, Acehese traditional Islamic institutions (dayah and rangkang), surau, pesantren and others. Thus, it is fair enough to assume that those girls and Muslim women were also involved in those kinds of educational institutions as mentioned above. This is because, family and community in general are aware that girls—like their counterpart boys—needed to be equipped with the knowledge about Islam so that they could fulfill their religious duties well. Nonetheless, at the same time we can also assume that the girls and women were not educated in the same intensity as boys and men. Because, until today I have not found women pursuing further studies in Haramayn (Mecca and Medina) or at any other traditional centres of Islamic knowledge in the Arab world or at any other places so that they can later get involved in the cosmopolitan networks of 'ulama' that gained momentum from the 17th century onwards.

The slight weakening of the position of Muslim women socially speaking in many places in Indonesia, in my view, started to happen when the so-called Islamic 'orthodoxy' found its momentum, since the 19th century. However, I have not come across the works of ulama in the 17th and 18th century which put women in an unfavourable position vis-à-vis their male counterpart. Even a prominent ulama of Abd al-Rauf al-Singkili calibre in the 17th century religiously, socially and politically accepted the rule of the Sultanah over Muslim society in the Sultanate of Aceh; while this is rejected in other Muslim societies in the Arab world, South Asia and beyond simply because only men are allowed to lead.

The social consequences of putting women aside in doctrinal terms, however, could be observed starting the times of Nawawi Al-Bantani in the 19th century primarily through his work Syarh 'Uqud Al-Lujayn fi Bayan Huquq Al-Zawjayn. This work has become the primary reference among the kiyai (respected title for teachers in pesantren) and in pesantren. As we can see, this orthodoxy crystallisation came from ulama from the Middle East, which indeed positioned women in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men. The same also happened to the dethroning of the Sultanah in Aceh in the 17th century; they were deposed because of the fatwa issued by the ulama from Makkah who stated that it was forbidden for women be the leader or the ruler of the Muslim community.

Despite the tendency of doctrinal orthodoxy which continued trying to place women in a subordinate and marginal role socially, culturally and religiously speaking, yet there has not been concrete evidence that since the emergence of the work of Nawawi Al-Bantani as mentioned before, women were forbidden to learn in Islamic educational institutions, especially in pesantren. Traditional Islamic educational institutions, principally pesantren and surau still tried in many ways to accommodate, children, students or female santri; once again so that at least they had the basic knowledge of Islam to enable them to practice their religious Islamic obligations.

When madrasah and Islamic schools —as a new form of Islamic education in Indonesia —emerged and developed rapidly since the first decade of the 20th century thanks to the efforts of ‘modern’ organisations like the Jami'at Khair, Adabiyah, Muhammadiyah and so forth, girls got the same position as boys. In the next development even, Islamic-based educational institutions which were originally madrasah started to emerge. In this case, the most outstanding one is the Madrasah Diniyyah Li al-Banat (madrasah for female students, founded on 1 November 1923) in Padangpanjang, West Sumatra, by Rahmah El-Yunusiyah, a modernist Muslim woman activist. This madrasah which later was more known as Diniyah Putri Padangpanjang played a significant role in the education of Indonesian Muslim women as well of those who came from other parts of Southeast Asia, and became later the prototype of madrasah and pesantren especially for female students which were set up in later years.

Despite the emergence of modern madrasah specifically for women, pesantren continued to be instrumental in educational institutions in Java. This can be seen from the biographies of many women ulama and other religious figures, either in the pesantren community or in the movement of Islamic organisations. One example is Nyai Sholihah Wahid Hasyim who studied in a madrasah located in a pesantren complex. Daughters of kiyai got normally their formal education in pesantren, in addition to informal tutoring from other kiyai in the pesantren complex. I think the same applies to other pesantren in other places.

Women empowerment in pursuing education cannot be separated from the awakening of women wing organisations of big mainstream Islamic organisations like the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, founded in 1926), Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912) and many other smaller organisation across the archipelago. As a rule, these organisations founded their women wing organisations not long after their respective parent organisations. Some of these women wing organisations in addition to providing formal education either in the pesantren, madrasah and other Islamic school environment, also ran religious learning groups, which later became more known as Majelis Taklim Perempuan. With its good progress in the provision of formal, non-formal and informal education, these women wing organisations have a key role in the strengthening of education for girls and women as well as in strengthening women position overall.

Without any doubt, education for girls developed very rapidly since the 1970s when the Islamic educational institutions from primary level up to higher education expanded significantly. In the recent or contemporary development I observe, that education for girls in pesantren can take one of these two forms: first, co-ed, where girls study together with boys, without segregation. In here, both genders compete freely, whereby the tendency shows that generally girls perform better than boys. Secondly, separate education, especially for girls, or strictly speaking female students in a special pesantren for girls. The second option is also good, mainly to avoid concerns about relationships between girls and boys. Yet the latter can be relatively counter-productive for the empowerment and the actual equality between men and women. We cannot fight against discrimination with segregation and exclusivity. Women can really be empowered and equal if they are to be involved in the real world which is not exclusive and not separate from that of men.

The emergence of contemporary women ulama who are active in many educational institutions (public or private), Islamic organisations, and through da'wah (religious propagation either face-to-face or through electronic media) become more observable today. By so doing, they are also playing

a greater role in the dynamics of Indonesian Islam, especially in the strengthening of middle path Islam (Wasatiyah Islam).