

# MUSLIM MILLENNIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EXISTENCE AND CO-EXISTENCE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract**---The practice of tolerance in a pluralistic society in terms of religion holds the potential for the birth of a mutually accepting relationship on the one hand, and an attitude of mutual negation on the other. This paper specifically discusses the practice of tolerance among millennial Muslims in Indonesia by looking at the reasons underlying their attitude towards the existence of religious minority groups. Data analyzed are obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and literature studies. Questionnaires distributed to millennial Muslims contain requests to choose choices and write opinions about the existence of minority religious groups. This paper shows two responses to the existence of minority religious groups. First, respondents accept the existence of non-Islamic religious groups (out of 412 respondents, as many as 280 or 67, 96%) for various reasons. Second, most respondents reject the existence of Islamic religious groups, especially Shiites and Ahmadis. In this case, 383 respondents (93%) state their rejection. Both forms of response have their respective reasons. This study recommends the importance of cultivating an attitude of respect for differences so that conflicts based on religion can be avoided in the future.

**Keywords** --- tolerance, Islam, millennial Muslims, religious groups, minorities.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of religious tolerance in Indonesia always shows multiple faces. On the one hand, there are practices that show acceptance of the existence of other religious groups which can be a capital for the realization of a more inclusive-harmonious social-religious order of life. However, in the complex dynamics of community life, the potential for the growth of exclusive understanding also continues to occur on the other side which has the potential to damage the life structure of Indonesian society at large. In some cases, minority-majority relations show mutual acceptance (Jubba et al., 2019; Makmur et al., 2018; Sapriillah, 2016). While, other cases show a dark face in which the majority tends to judge minority religious groups (Munifah, 2018; Risdiarto, 2017; Wahyudi & Wahid, 2015). Among millennial Muslims in higher education, there are also two currents regarding this practice of tolerance. There is a tendency, where they openly accept non-Islamic religious minority groups. In a survey conducted November 2019-February 2020, 280 or 67.96% of respondents stated "giving freedom to minority religious groups to carry out their wishes"; 85 (20.63%) stated "making partners"; and as many as 47 (11.40%) respondents said they invited minority religious groups to join the majority group. It's just that, when they are confronted with the existence of Islamic religious groups, they have a changing attitude and tend to refuse for various reasons. Of the 412 students, only 29 (7.0%) accepted the existence of religious minorities affiliated with Islam, especially Shia and Ahmadiyah.

The study of tolerance (Arabic: *tasamuh*) has been widely carried out by experts. Broadly speaking, there are three features of studies on tolerance among these experts. First, tolerance is placed as an attitude of openness and recognition of other groups that function as a medium to create a more harmonious order of community life (Atabik, 2016; Setiarsa, 2018; Setyabudi, 2019). Second, a study that sees tolerance as an attitude that gives space to the free growth and development of other groups (El Yadari, 2012; Suryana, 2011). The existence of groups including religion is a sign of a flowing social culture. Third, the style of study that sees tolerance as a social institution for the birth of an advanced life order (Supriyanto, 2018; Jubba et.al 2019). Through this tolerance anyone will realize that he cannot live without the presence of other social groups. The three features of the study have provided a strong framework for tolerant practices among multicultural societies that will guarantee a harmonious life. The style of the study has not specifically discussed the reasons underlying the practice of tolerance in the community so that it still leaves a free space. The free space is the focus of this paper.

This paper aims to complement existing studies with a focus on tolerance practices among millennial Muslims. The main issue to be discussed is why millennial Muslims have different attitudes responding to the existence of minority religious groups in Indonesia. In this case, how they position these religious groups amidst the reality of a pluralistic society. This issue is also very closely related to the question of how they conceptualize minority religious groups. Those issues will be answered and discussed in the discussion section of this paper. This paper assumes that millennial Muslims have a good attitude of tolerance towards non-Islamic minority religious groups, which is marked by their desire to continue to "let" to continue to carry out their wishes (teachings). Meanwhile, they have a stance that rejects the existence of minority religious groups affiliated to Islam. Both attitudes are motivated by several factors such as theological, juridical, and cultural.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Religious Minority

Khorsand & Parvin (2016) refer to minorities as small groups in each place that has ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics. The existence of minority groups has an important contribution in history but has not been documented so that it is almost invisible and soundless (Emadi, 2016). Minority groups experience stereotypes and stigma. In fact, non-inclusive policies and practices at the country level have created an environment that justifies public rejection of minority religious communities (Syed & Ali,

2020). According to Sahu et al., (2012), insecurity among minorities can be overcome by increasing inter-community accommodation, strengthening space, and shared interests. In this case, social organizations play an important role in demystifying unbelief and stereotypes inherent in minority groups. Related to this, Gada (2017) recommends that the community be sensitive in terms of economic improvement and the progress of education critically and increase communal awareness as the main steps to reduce the backwardness of religious minority communities.

Zabad's (2017) study of 10 groups: Shiites in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon and Egypt, Druze, Alawites, Christians and Kurds in Syria, Copts in Egypt, and Zaydis in Yemen show that in the post-spring Middle East in Arab, minority communities are vulnerable to various shocks. The majority group tends to suffer only physical violence and economic losses. However, different conditions are experienced by minority groups where they can be acquired and potentially lost / destroyed. In Iran, human rights violations occur against members of the Baha community as the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority (Moinipour, 2018). These violations have been designed so that they do not attract the attention of the international community. It is designed to remove slowly, not to eradicate suddenly. The policy also leads to persecution that is manifested by religious intolerance and Shiite supremacy. In fact, Khorsand & Parvin (2016) reveal the special attention of the Iranian government to religious minority communities that manifested in the granting of the privilege of legal independence to take civil action from minority members.

## 2. Tolerance

Tolerance is one of many responses to diversity and difference (Besch & Lee, 2018). Kühler (2019) defines tolerance as follows: a person (A), for some reason, objects to the actions or practices of another person (B), but has exceeded other reasons for accepting this action or practice and, as such, refrains from interfering or prevent B from acting accordingly, even though A has the power to interfere. In this case, tolerance is characterized by deep ambivalence (Drerup, 2019). Basically, tolerance is nothing but an expression of uncertainty by recognizing the existence of social reality; as well as recognizing the uncertainty of social reality to tolerate the existence of others and then to tolerate something that is contradictory because they think everything is true (Gorman, 2019). There are three different sources of tolerance: individual, culture, and institution (Kaul, 2019). The objection and acceptance component of tolerance involves at least the assessment of people, beliefs, and practices (Lee & Besch, 2020). V. and B. Seiler classifies tolerance into three types, namely disjunctive, conjunctive, and synergistic (Lalíková, 2016).

Furthermore, Lee & Besch (2020) reveal two forms of tolerance, namely the expression of respect and recognition. Meanwhile, Said Agil Al Munawar divides tolerance into two kinds, namely static tolerance and dynamic tolerance (Yohandi, 2018; Kamarauddin and Sabannur, 2018). Another expert, Mafrukha (2019) reveals forms of tolerance based on fiqh perspective: internal tolerance, tolerance between schools, and external tolerance. Internal tolerance includes; tolerance in terms of faith, worship, muamalah and criminal law. Meanwhile, tolerance between schools means tolerance of the four Imams of the school which are the basis of Muslims worldwide, especially Indonesia. Finally, external tolerance is tolerance between religions. According to Mafrukha (2019), it is this last type of tolerance that needs the attention of Muslims in the world for the sake of creating a *rahmatan lil 'alamin* life.

## III. RESEARCH METHODS

This article is the result of research conducted in December 2019-February 2020 in three universities in Yogyakarta; Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta (UMY), Yogyakarta University of Technology (UTY), and Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN). These three tertiary institutions are chosen based on the consideration that the three have very diverse elements of students who come from various

regions in Indonesia. UMY is a university that uses the identity of Muhammadiyah, one of the largest religious organizations in Indonesia. However, not all UMY students have Muhammadiyah backgrounds. This tertiary institution is considered to represent an institution affiliated with a particular community organization. UTY is a college that does not use religious affiliation at all and is open. These universities are also considered to represent non-religious elements. The UIN Sunan Kalijaga is a state Islamic university representing universities that carry Islam as its main jargon. This research focuses on the opinions and actions of millennial Muslim students towards the existence of minority groups in Indonesia, especially religious minority groups. This study is a mix-method study with a distribution of questionnaires to 450 students as respondents and 412 respondents answer the questionnaires.

#### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

##### **1. Opinions regarding Tolerance**

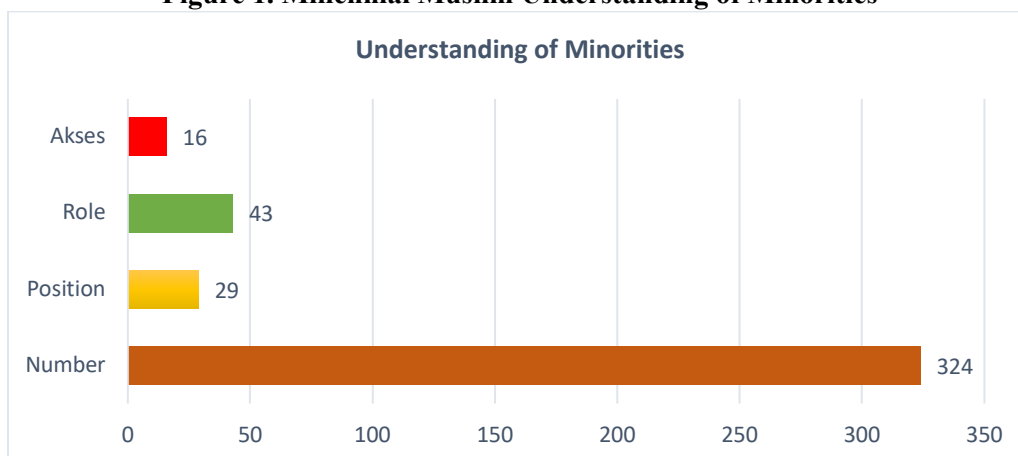
Simply stated, tolerance can be interpreted as an attitude of acceptance and respect for the existence of other people or groups that are different. In Arabic terms, tolerance is known as *tasamuh* which is equally good, gentle and forgiving. In relation to the teachings of Islam, *tasamuh* is a commendable moral attitude in association, where there is mutual respect between human beings based on the boundaries outlined by religious teachings. When the respondent is asked the question: what is tolerance? They answer with a few words, such as answered with respect (238 or 57.76%), receive (86 or 20.87%), understand (41 or 9.9%), and diversity (12 or 2.9%) and wise (35 or 8.49%). There are various choices of words that represent their understanding of tolerance. If you look at the words chosen, you basically still have a link between one word and another. These words are still very close to the word "acceptance".

The description shows that in general, millennial see tolerance as a form of giving space to groups outside of themselves (the majority), especially minority groups. Tolerance is very close to "respecting", which means respecting other groups for expression including practicing the beliefs and teachings that they believe. Granting freedom to minority groups is a form of action that can build more flexible relations between religious groups. Minority religious groups such as Towani Tolotang, Aluk Todolo, Kaharingan, and others are accepted based on the argument that they are also the same as "us", who have the same rights and obligations. However, what often matters is the practice in the community. Because, there are still many rejections of the existence of minority groups, especially if it is associated with the practice of teachings or beliefs. If it is only limited to the existence of minority groups, millennial Muslims tend to "obey" the existing state policy.

##### **2. Minorities are not just numbers**

Minorities are generally understood to be something related to "numbers", that is small or insignificant. Data collected through a questionnaire shows that respondents generally understand "minorities" as being strongly related to "numbers", i.e. small numbers. However, there are answers other than "numbers" to explain this minority. Some of them understand that minorities are also related to "position", "role" and "access". In summary, some of these answers can be seen in the following Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Millennial Muslim Understanding of Minorities**



**Source: Processed from the questionnaires**

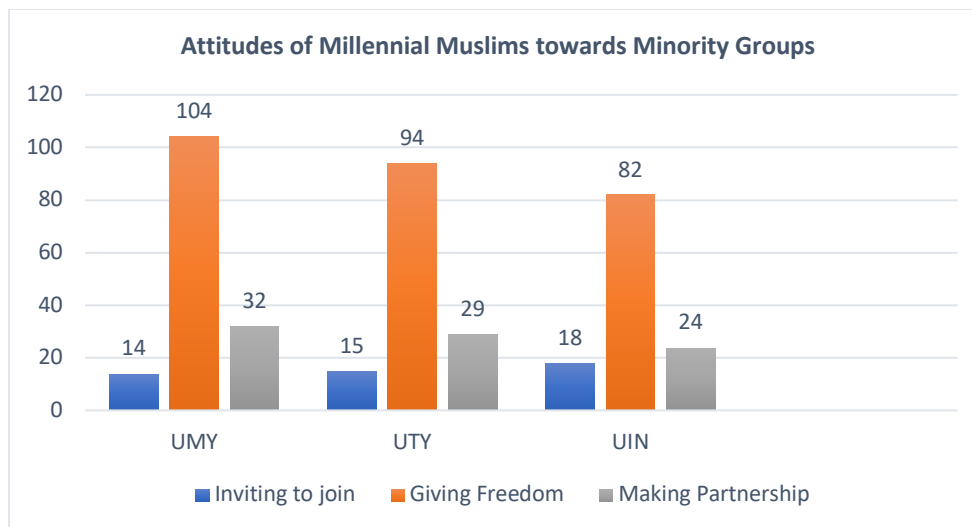
In Figure 1, it is clearly shown that most respondents state that the minority is very closely related to the issue of number (324 or 79%). Meanwhile, there are other answers besides the number, namely position (29 or 7%), role (43 or 10%), and access (16 or 4%). It can be understood that the problem of minority-majority has other implications besides the problem of number. Likewise, the various answers about the minority show that students' knowledge of minority issues is not narrow.

Minority groups include many things that not only relate to religion, but also include other aspects including gender, ethnicity, profession, and others. Minority groups very commonly get unfavorable treatment. The treatment that is often experienced by them is discriminatory treatment in the form of marginalization of position, reduction of rights, limitation of role, and blocking of access. For example, adherents of the faith / giver of trust are very difficult to obtain the rights of citizenship such as practicing worship freely according to the teachings that a person believes. Restrictions on rights can be seen in "coercion" to choose an "official" religion. They cannot be autonomous because they must be under one of the religions in Indonesia. During this time, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity are religions that are often used as a shelter. Adherents to Towani Tolotang in Sidenreng Rappang, for example, chose Hinduism; Aluk Todolo in Toraja chose Christianity, Tengger in East Java chose Hinduism, Ammatoa in Kajang chose Islam as his religious affiliation. Not infrequently, they are placed as non-mainstream religious groups (Pabbajah et al., 2019) who base their religious practices not on mainstream religion.

### **3. Attitudes towards Minority Groups**

There are three attitudes taken by millennial Muslims towards minority groups. This attitude is based on various reasons, which are basically a form of their openness to the facts of the diversity of Indonesian society. The three attitudes are (1) inviting to join the majority group; (2) giving freedom to minority groups; and (3) making partnership. Of the three attitudes, generally students "give freedom" to minority groups to do activities, especially religious activities as they wish. This means that minority groups are given space to express the teachings or beliefs they hold so far. In brief, the percentage of these three attitudes can be seen in the following Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Attitudes of Millennial Muslims towards Minority Groups**



Source: Processed from the questionnaires

Figure 2 illustrates clearly the attitude of acceptance from millennial Muslims in three tertiary institutions. Most of them give freedom to minority religious groups to practice what they believe (280 respondents). In addition, there is an attitude that wants to make these minority groups their partners (85 respondents), and the rest (47 respondents) state that they invite minority groups to join the majority group. This illustrates that in general, millennial Muslims give preference to minority groups to exist and provide space for them to remain in their status.

Acceptance of these non-Islamic minority religious groups is in fact based on three reasons. *First*, theological. In the Qur'an, there are expressly several verses that state that differences (including beliefs) are not new. Difference is a part of natural law (*sunnatullah*) which must be recognized (Q.S Al Hujurat; 49). Among the information about the differences (worship) contained in the Qur'an as described briefly in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Theological Information/Reference

| Qur'an Surah     | Translation   | Substance   |
|------------------|---|---|
| Al An'am; 108    | Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance...  | Prohibition of insulting / insulting adherents of other religions |
| Hud; 118         | And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing.   | God wants difference  |
| Yusuf; 99        | And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers?   | God wants difference  |
| Al Kafiruun; 2-6 | I worship not that which ye worship; Nor worship ye that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion. | Prohibition of interfering in matters of other religions          |

Source: Taken and interpreted from Quran

Islam is a religion of mercy for all nature, not only for Muslims. The root word of Islam is *salama* (congratulations, peace) so that Islam is a religion of salvation for all beings. In some traditions it is found that Muhammad (PBUH) strongly emphasized every Muslim to spread peace to anyone. This is a concrete manifestation of Islam as a religion of grace. In the history of the spread of Islam, Muslims were able to live in harmony with minority groups. Because, indeed in Islam the dignity and dignity of a person as the caliph of Allah on earth (planet) should not be defamed, just because he is part of a minority group or groups who have different beliefs from Muslims.

*Second*, juridical. The 1945 Constitution also expressly states that there is an obligation for every citizen to provide space for different groups (especially religion) to practice their beliefs. The basis for accepting minority groups is regulation. It is in the following Table 2.

**Table 2. Legal Basic of Minority Rights**

| Source   | Content of Article   | Substance   |
|--|--|---|
| UUD 1945   | Article 28 E (1): Every person is free to embrace religion and worship according to his religion, choose education and teaching, choose work, choose citizenship, choose a place to live in the territory of the country and leave it, and has the right to return | Every citizen is a citizen who is free to choose.   |
|  | Article 29 (2): The State guarantees the independence of each resident to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religion and belief   | Every citizen has the right and freedom to choose and embrace the religion that is believed.                              |
| UU No 12/ 2005, International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights | Article 18 (2): No one can be forced so that his freedom is disrupted to embrace or establish his religion or belief in accordance with his choice.  | Every person chooses the burden of choosing belief and there should not be coercion over the choice of belief (religion). |
|  | Article 18 (3): Freedom to exercise and determine one's religion or beliefs can only be limited by provisions based on the law, and are needed to protect the security, order, health, or morals of the people, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.  | Restrictions of citizens in choosing religion can only be done according to statutory regulations.                        |

**Source: Processed from Indonesian Constitutions**

Some of the mentioned laws and regulations provide an affirmation that minority groups have the same space as other groups, especially in practicing their religious beliefs. This confirms that legally, there is no difference in the treatment of every citizen and group, especially religious groups in Indonesia. In this case, there is a clear and firm guarantee from the state for the existence of minority religious groups to express their teachings through religious practices that they believe without any intervention and even pressure from other groups including the state.

*Third*, cultural. Indonesian culture has its own uniqueness. This can be seen from the dynamics of daily life that are never devoid of colorful differences, whether in terms of ethnic, language, tradition, or religion. The condition of a pluralistic nation makes difference no longer a barrier to not respecting each other. The tradition of meeting Islam with Indonesian culture has a long history that illustrates the existence

of ups and downs (Jubba et al., 2018). In a family even, it is not uncommon to be inhabited by people who have different religious beliefs (Suhadi, 2014). This view is very common in families of various ethnic groups in Indonesia. In Javanese society, religion is understood as *ageman* (clothing or clothing). Clothing is a body protector and is located on the outside so that differences in clothing do not prevent a person from accepting each other because it is very formal, not substantive. Even in Bugis societies, for example, religious differences are often placed under ethnic equality, meaning that any religion is held, but it has cultural similarities as a Bugis. Then the cultural similarity takes precedence so that conflict can be avoided. Local wisdom such as *padaidi* (fellow) has a meaning that goes far beyond differences in belief. This wisdom is based on the spirit of civil society, which is to humanize humans. In this case, respect for human dignity and dignity is above all. Of course, this spirit is very relevant to Islamic teachings that do not discriminate against the degree of humanity of a person or group.

#### 4. Response to Islamic Minority Groups

Internal upheaval of Islamic groups in Indonesia experiences ups and downs that are laden with social, cultural and political dynamics. This can be found in some cases showing the rejection of minority Islamic groups through various social and political pressures. Respondents have different responses when faced with the presence of Islamic religious minority groups such as Shiites and Ahmadis. In general, respondents reject the existence of these two groups, although only a few people accept the conditions. With their reasons, those who refuse and who receive are in the following Table 3.

**Table 3. Opinions about Islamic Religious Groups**

| Statement of Respondent                |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Accept                                 | Refuse                              |
| Citizens' rights are guaranteed by law | Disturbing public order             |
| Part of diversity                      | Contradictory to Indonesian culture |
| Religious freedom                      | Dividing unity                      |
| Part of Islam                          | Distorted Islamic teachings         |

**Source: Processed from Questionnaires**

In Table 3, there are two forms of opinion towards Shiite and Ahmadiyah groups in Indonesia. Existing statements assert that these two groups receive diverse treatment in the Muslim community, especially millennial groups. Likewise, millennial Muslims have an argument in making their choice regarding to whether accept minority religious groups in Indonesia or not. They have enough knowledge, especially regarding the legal basis related to the existence of religious groups in Indonesia which is very diverse until now.

The existence of these two minority groups always faces trauma of violence and injustice as experienced by Shiite groups who experience rejection by citizens such as the case in Sampang, Madura (Nurish, 2015). Likewise, the discrimination experienced by verbal Ahmadis is by mentioning 'heresy' and 'outside of Islam', as well as non-verbal which leads to a ban on the construction of places of worship in Tangerang (Simamora et al., 2020). Then the incident in the East Lombok Regency of NTB which destroyed the houses belonging to Ahmadiyah followers by a group of mobs and was accompanied by eviction from their village on the grounds of the local people's rejection of the existence of Ahmadiyah congregation (Wahab & Fakhruddin, 2019). This condition is contrary to the understanding of pluralism and diversity as



divine reality (Vahid, 2018). This rejection also shows the potential for internal Islamic conflict (Alfandi, 2013). In many ways, Islam as a mainstream religion in Indonesia is an understanding that is supported by the authorities, while an understanding that is not approved is labeled heretical; splinter movement with other terms of non-mainstream Islam (Pabbajah et al., 2019). As experienced by Shiites and Ahmadis who often get rejection from the dominant understanding or adherents of mainstream religion in Indonesia. There are two forms of response to the existence of non-mainstream Islamic groups. First, the rejection represented by puritan groups such as DDII, Persis, Al-Irsyad, and FUUI which expressly refused in the name of purifying Islamic traditions. Second, they tend to accept the existence represented by moderate Islamic groups such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in the hope of promoting tolerant understanding (Muhtarom, 2017).

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

Acceptance of minority groups among millennial Muslims is divided into two. *First*, millennials accept the existence of minority religious groups that have different teachings from them. In this case, non-Islamic religious groups can be accepted even there is a desire to become partners. *Second*, there is a very high attitude of rejection from millennial Muslims towards religious groups that are part of Islam. They strongly reject the existence of Islamic religious groups which he considers to be deviant teachings. The argument used by the first group is that they are citizens who constitutionally have the same rights as other citizens to live in Indonesia and are free to practice their beliefs. Likewise, the proposition of religion is used as a reference, especially regarding the issue of religious freedom. However, the second group sees the other side of the existence of religious minority groups (Islam). The existence of these minority groups is considered to damage Islam so that its existence is denied.

The existence of differences in attitudes related to the existence of religious minority groups in Indonesia shows that there are still problems in social relations at this time. There are inconsistent attitudes especially positioning other groups despite having a good justification of religion and constitutionally. This study recommends the need for a variety of efforts to build mutual awareness, especially among millennial Muslims. One of the biggest challenges internally in the Indonesian nation is the management of diversity, both ethnic and religious. The existence of minority groups so far has had an impact on social relations. Because, on the one hand the existence of minority religious groups can provide an increasingly open space for dialogue by involving all groups in a joint forum. However, this fact of diversity can be both a trigger and a threat to the occurrence of social dis-orders when each emerges by maintaining their differences. Therefore, Islam as the majority religion in Indonesia should be an umbrella with all citizens for the realization of a more harmonious-humanist social-religious order.

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