

## OUR COMMON OBLIGATION: PROMOTING SHARED SECURITY

Tuesday, 15 January 2008

Din Syamsuddin - Chairman of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia The First Alliance of Civilizations Annual Forum Madrid, 15-16 January 2008 Introduction It has been more than one year since the launching of the Report of the High Level Group on The Alliance of Civilizations in November 2006. While scepticisms regarding such an initiative remain, we need to acknowledge that we now have a more solid ground to address the problem of "civilisation divide" that has strained not only the relationship among the states but also among the people of the world. This First Annual Forum serves as evidence that efforts to create a better world would never cease.

The Alliance of Civilization initiative, as stated by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the launching of the Report, "is intended to respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community—both at the institutional and civil society levels—to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace." And, one way of achieving such objective is to work together not only to eradicate violence, but also to promote and advance the vision of "shared security." The attainment of the vision of "shared security," adopted at the Religions for Peace Eight World Assembly in Kyoto in August 2006, is not an easy task. However, it is a common obligation of all sectors in the society—the governments, civil societies, business community, and religious communities—to strive for the attainment of "shared security" at all levels: within a community, between communities, among the community of nation-states, and more importantly, among different civilizations and people of different faiths. Indeed, such work should start by understanding the challenges to promoting "shared security" and the role of religion and religious leaders in overcoming those challenges.

Challenges to Shared Security: Power Politics and the Quest for Global Justice The notion of "shared security" implies that security is a collective public good. The Kyoto Declaration highlights "the collective responsibility of all people to meet our common need for security." The notion of "shared security" emphasises that the security of the people, of human being, should be at the centre of attention. Similar to the notion of human security, "shared security" also requires a comprehensive understanding of security in terms of the matrix of human rights and needs. More importantly, "shared security" requires the involvement of all stake-holders to defend and advance human dignity. In this regard, religious traditions clearly provide the foundation for such undertaking. However, the challenges to promoting such noble understanding of security remain formidable. First, the notion of security remains dominated by traditional discourse of peace and war, in which military security continues to overshadow the more human dimension of security. The prevailing habits among governments to emphasises the primacy of national security continues to render other security concerns more relevance to the people. Within the tradition of national security, state security becomes the locus of attention and priority. In fact, state security does not guarantee that the security of the people who live within a state are also ensured. Second, due to the primacy of national security discourse, states—especially major powers—are locked in the habit of exercising power politics. Domination by one state over others, and the quest to reach the top position in the hierarchy of power, become the norms rather than exception. Consequently, security becomes a zero-sum-game: security of one state or community can only be achieved at the expense of others' security. Security, then, becomes an exclusive property of the powerful and not to be shared. Indeed, as noted in the Kyoto Declaration, national security "often promotes violence and foments insecurity." Third, "shared security" can be achieved only if we agree on the importance of understanding security as an attempt to "acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and our shared responsibility to address them." Shared security cannot be achieved unless we understand each other's (in) security concerns. Most dialogues among civilizations, or between different faiths, often ignore or avoid the importance of this point. Focusing such dialogues on issues of commonalities is certainly useful to promote greater mutual understanding. However, it does not provide a complete understanding on the sources of tension between communities or between civilizations. It is equally importance to understand each other's insecurity. This should be an agenda in inter-faith dialogues, both at local, national, and global levels.

Within the current context of global divides, especially between the Muslim World and the West, an understanding of common vulnerabilities and sources of insecurity is imperative. Here, it is important to acknowledge that the root causes of the tension between the Muslim world and the West—in addition to power politics and the politics of hegemony exercised by some major powers in the West, especially the United States under President George W. Bush—can be found, among others, within the persistent global injustice. We should work to eliminate this global injustice, which serves as a structural cause to the global tension. The West is in a better position to address this problem. However, it is important to acknowledge that the elimination of global injustice alone cannot guarantee the birth of a world free from any tension and conflict between the Muslim world and the West. The Muslim world has its own predicament also, and this predicament also constitutes a challenge for attaining "shared security." Many Muslims, in fact the majority of Muslims, continue to live under the control of despotic regimes and authoritarian states. This characteristic of most of the Muslim world needs to be addressed by both Muslim population and Muslim rulers. Respects for human rights, and a democratic political order based on social justice and religious morality, is the path that all of us should take. Freedom is an essence of Islamic teaching. Islam teaches and preaches that human beings should be liberated from exploitation by other human beings. The creation of a political order that ensures and respects human dignity should be made a priority by Muslim rulers. Genuine tolerance, and a sense of self-confidence among the population, can only prevail in a truly democratic order. It is within such a democratic order that the notion of "shared security" can become a reality. Indeed, a better world requires changes both in the West and in the Muslim world. These changes do not have to be come in a separate process. Both the Muslim world and the West should, and can, work together in addressing and removing the impediments to progress within both civilisations. It only requires an open mind and a genuine effort. The problem is, open mind and genuine effort is still hard to come by. However, we are all

forbidden from losing hope. It is this hope that will ensure the utility of every single step that we are all taking in order to bridge the West and the Muslim world. It is through the preservation of hope that life continues to be meaningful. The Role of Religious Leaders: Interfaith Dialogues in Context

What can religious leaders do in order to promote and realise the notion of "shared security"? Do religious leaders have a role to play in addressing both human security problems and the problem of global tension caused by power politics and the quest for power supremacy? Can religious leaders become the effective voice of peace in the current turbulent world characterised by violence and selfish quest for exclusive security? These questions have been raised again and again in the post-September 11 world. The answer to those questions is of course "yes". Religious leaders can derive from their moral authority to work together in promoting shared security. Religious leaders can be at the forefront in confronting violence. Religious leaders can play important role in promoting mutual understanding among civilizations and among people of different faiths. Religious leaders have taken very active role in promoting inter-faith dialogues as a means to advocate peace. Indeed, the proliferation of both state-driven and society-driven inter-faith dialogues at regional and global level over the last six years signifies the growing involvement and participation of religious leaders and communities to avert the nightmare scenario of Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations". However, one should not overlook the limits within which such role can be exercised by the religious leaders. Problems remain abundant with regard to the ongoing inter-faith dialogues and dialogue of civilisations, and need to be improved by looking at three important contexts. First, the key obstacle in using inter-faith dialogues as an instrument to address the problem between the Muslim world and the West is the gap between the ideal world of religious actors on the one hand, and the cruel world of political players. Inter-faith dialogues have often been constrained by the gap between society and the state. When religious actors work hard to create a better world based on mutual understanding and mutual respect among different faiths, the results of the works by political actors tend to undermine it, intentionally or not. When religious actors advocate the method of peace, political actors continue to value the utility of force and even war. When religious actors emphasise national and global spirituality, political actors exaggerate the importance of national and global security. Second, the conversation between Islam and the West tends to be one-sided. It is important to acknowledge that the attention and the focus more on how to understand Islam. Implicit in this reality is the assumption that Islam needs to be understood because the problem is to be found within this community of ummah. Bernard Lewis, for example, has asked: "what's wrong with Islam? Others have questioned whether Islam will ever accept the reality of the West and therefore co-exist with it in a peaceful and productive way. Worse, there have also been questions raised in the West on how to deal with the so-called "Islamic threat". Constructed in this way, it would be difficult for any dialogue to produce fruitful results. The Muslim community is then cornered to a defensive position, trying hard to explain that their religion is indeed a religion of peace and poses no threat to any other religion. Third, the transformation of the United States into a national security state since September 11, and its corollary War on Terror, has exacerbated the problem of inter-civilisation relations. The US' use of force as an instrument of conflict resolution and the primacy of prejudices in dealing with the Muslim world have created an impression that the West is using the War on Terror as a disguise for an anti-Islam attitude. The combination between unfair treatment of Muslims and the Muslim world by the West and the disillusionment of Muslims in many Arab/Muslim despotic states has served as a recipe for civilisational calamity. When the perceived arrogance of the West meets with the predicament of Muslim world, the future of harmonious relations between Islam and the West has been put in jeopardy. In other words, the war on terror as practiced by the US has posed a serious barrier to a genuine dialogue among civilisations and undermined the relationship between Islam and the West. Indeed, within such three contexts, there is a need to reform our mindset and our way of thinking. Here, a paradigmatic shift has begun to emerge. Instead of looking at the problem through the framework of "clash of civilisation", the framework of "Alliance of Civilisation" needs to be supported and advanced. Within this paradigm, a way of thinking that juxtaposes Islam and the West becomes an irrelevant exercise. Islam and the West should not be seen as a binary opposition. Islam and the West should be seen as the pillars of a common global civilisation. Islam and the West should be treated as two forces that compliment each other in ensuring and preserving the future of mankind. Islam and the West should be seen as partners in a common struggle to preserve the sanctity of religion as a source of values for mankind. Islam and the West should work together to prevent the use of religion as a political tool in the quest for supremacy among nations. In fact, the quest for supremacy among nations should be removed from any nation's agenda. If we can achieve this, then the notion of "shared security" will not be an empty dream.