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# The Democratic Response

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On 15 November 2001, addressing the United Nations General Assembly for the first time as Foreign Minister, I deliberately used “The Democratic Response” as the title of my speech<sup>1</sup>. I argued that all the problems we have today, both global and national, could be traced to a single common root—a deficiency in human relationships. For wherever there is inequality unacceptable to the weaker party, there can only be tension and conflict. Wherever the powerful can get away with exploiting the weak, a sense of outrage smolders and there can be neither stability nor peace. Wherever there is injustice and it is not redressed, there arises a culture of vengeance.

If the problem is basically an imbalance in human relationships, then the solution lies in the rectification of that imbalance—in the recognition that all human beings are of equal worth and have basically equal rights before the law of God and human law. As equals, as children of the same Providence, human groups and individuals are more likely to have compassion for one another, to care for one another. As equals, each is accountable for what he does to any other and everyone’s common sense of justice is satisfied. This solution is not something I discovered recently. It is something that we all have known for a very long time now and we have been calling it “democracy.”

Against the expectations of many outside and within our own nation, over the past several years, and in the midst of financial crisis, Indonesia has relentlessly pursued the difficult process of reform and democratization. We uphold the rule of law in a democratic, peaceful and constitutional manner.

Thus, Indonesia today stands proud as the third largest democracy in the world. As a nation with an overwhelmingly Muslim population, Indonesia is a living refutation of the erroneous notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Islam has always stood for the equality and fraternity of all human beings, for the free exercise of the human will—and if only for that—we Indonesians have a natural affinity for democracy. The challenge for all of us is to ensure that democracy works and actually delivers a better life for the people.

### **Understanding the Problem**

In the midst of the long and gradual—sometimes even painful—process of democratization, Indonesia has also been struggling with the recurrence of internal conflicts stemming from separatist aspirations (in Aceh and Papua) as well as horizontal conflict involving religious, ethnic and social tensions (such as in the Maluku Islands, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan). At this point, it is important to bear in mind that both the process of democratization and the recurrence of internal conflicts are neither exclusive nor new to Indonesia.

At the global level, as Sakuntala Kadirgamar-Rajasingham has rightly pointed out, we have witnessed the rise of democracy as both a universal value and an acceptable form of governance. Absolute monarchies have been dispensed with and have been replaced by parliaments, republics, and constitutional monarchies. Decolonization introduced many new states into the “democracy club” from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Authoritarian and military regimes in Europe were replaced in the 1970s by democratically elected governments, as were military regimes in Central America and Latin America. Many of the authoritarian regimes in Asia have been replaced by democratically elected governments. The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by the fall of the Berlin wall, which discredited communism as a competing ideology and marked a further rush for democratic governance.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, some studies point out that since 1945 about 80 percent of violent conflict has occurred within individual states and has been internally oriented; while 80 percent of the wars between 1900 and 1941 were of the traditional sort, waged by the armed forces of two or more states. Many conflicts in contemporary international politics arise from threats (or perceived threats) to group identification and loyalty. One problem is that states and nations may not coincide. Although we commonly refer to entities in the international system as nation-states, there are in fact many multinational states and multistate nations. Hence, as Bruce Russett, Harvey Starr, and David Kinsella conclude, the mismatch of states and nations has been the cause of many conflicts in world politics.<sup>3</sup>

At the national level, the Indonesian experience (and experiment) with democracy is as young as its existence as an independent state. By any standards, Indonesia is undisputedly a developing country. Its creation was the product of the wave of decolonization at the end of the Second World War. As boundaries, our founding fathers claimed the vast territory of the Dutch East Indies to be part of Indonesia. Those who inhabited the territory were considered people of Indonesia. However, it encompassed people diverse in many respects. Therefore, to keep the vast territory and diverse population intact, Indonesia's founding fathers agreed to adopt an integralistic state.

The idea of the state is grounded firmly in an organizing ideology and the concept of a nation. Although the interpretation of ideology is concerned with a set of assumptions and ideas about social behavior and social systems, its application to the political field has been far reaching. Indeed, our first President, Sukarno, was able to organize *Pancasila* (the five principles) as the basic ideology of the state. He expressed the idea of *Pancasila* to provide an ideology all Indonesians

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could accept and depend upon, to cultivate consensus and harmony among the diverse peoples. Unfortunately, Sukarno's effort to implement *Pancasila* was overtaken by the sequence of political events, particularly during the implementation of the "guided democracy."

On the contrary, under the New Order regime of our second President, Suharto, *Pancasila* was further elaborated and operationalized in almost every sense. Unfortunately, it became a national ideology and political platform for just about everything. Hence, the process of nation building was stalled while all energy was concentrated into state building.

In short, Indonesia is a multiethnic state-nation, which means that the state plays an instrumental role in creating the nation—rather than the other way around. It has led to many of the difficulties Indonesia encountered in the effort to integrate various ethnic and religious divisions into one single entity of nation by encouraging people to show their loyalty to the newly created state—or the "nation building" process.

Indeed, separatist movements and horizontal conflicts are among the greatest difficulties that Indonesia has encountered since its independence. Further studies on Indonesian history would show that different measures had been taken to address different internal conflicts, within both the internal and international political structures. During the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the

Government could have militarily suppressed separatist aspirations and horizontal conflict without encountering much international pressure.

### **What's Next ?**

The process of reform (*Reformasi*), which started to roll in 1998, basically stands on three pillars: democratization and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights, and the rule of law. Inherent in such a process of wide-ranging reform is a period of transition that, at least in part, brings new challenges—including the recurrence of horizontal conflict in several regions and additional tension in the regions with separatist elements.

Under President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the Indonesian Government is firmly committed to addressing those challenges comprehensively and democratically. Indeed, there is a wide consensus among the Indonesian people that democracy must serve as the platform for reform. In many public discussions that I personally have attended and in private conversations that I have had with many public figures from different societies across the archipelago, that consensus is always clear and firm.

Within the framework of reform, Indonesia has introduced bold and far-reaching measures on the relationship between the central government and regional authorities in order to address the legitimate aspirations of the societies in the regions. Likewise, the Government has made a democratic response to the challenge of separatism in Aceh and Papua. We will sincerely bring redress to their peoples' grievances and assure them against any more deliberate injustice in the future. We will meet their legitimate demands by introducing special autonomy and a greater sharing of resources, and guarantee respect for their culture and ethnic identities—so long as these are within the framework of the Republic.

In this regard, it is important to note that there is full support from the international community for the territorial integrity and national unity of the Republic of Indonesia. In his meeting with President Megawati Sukarnoputri on 24 September 2001, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, "I can say that all members of the United Nations support the territorial integrity and national unity of Indonesia." Moreover, many countries have even extended their full support for special autonomy as the modality for any solution, while dismissing any separatist aspirations in Indonesia. For example, in a Joint Statement dated 19 September 2001 issued during President Megawati Sukarnoputri's visit to Washington, the United States clearly rejected separatist aspirations in Aceh and Papua.

As to the horizontal conflicts in the Maluku Islands, Poso (Sulawesi) and a few areas in Kalimantan, sincere dialogues between the communities in

conflict—facilitated by the Government—have led to satisfactory conclusions. So far, two dialogues for the communities in Poso and in the Maluku Islands (held in Malino, Sulawesi) have been able to provide some breakthroughs toward peaceful solutions to the conflicts.

The government relentlessly pursues those comprehensive measures in addressing internal conflicts, and at the same time engages itself in reforming the various sectors of governance. Through strict and impartial enforcement of recently passed anti-graft laws, we are cleansing our bureaucracy and corporate sector of the taint of graft and corruption. Through strict and equal application of laws on economic reform, we assure every entrepreneur an equal chance to do profitable business. We are reforming the legal system and the judiciary so that every individual stands equal before the law. Both the police and the military have undergone reform and have proven themselves to be faithful to the Constitution and to the democratic process.

These are the main components of our democratic response to the many and formidable challenges that Indonesia must contend with. I have no illusions that they will be accomplished without difficulty and occasional setbacks. But I believe strongly that working for human relationships based on the equality of individual human worth is the right thing to do. It is the decent, enlightened policy path. I therefore have no doubt that ultimately these measures will yield sufficiently positive results to move us forward on the road of development. Therefore, it is only logical that instead of simply criticizing and exerting pressure, the international community should lend its full support and be part of the democratic solution in Indonesia.

### **Postscript: A Brief Note on Islam in Indonesia**

The international media has recently focused on Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population, within the context of the war against terrorism. It has somehow distorted, at least, the image of Indonesia. Hence, I need to make three points—just to refresh our memory.

First, Islam is embraced by around 90 percent of the 210 million Indonesian people. It is indeed the highest Muslim population in one country. However, Islam is not the state religion nor is it the constitution of the state. Our founding fathers had a lengthy debate on this issue and made the decision for the better of the country. There are five religions equally recognized by the state—namely Islam, Roman Catholic, Christianity (Protestant), Hinduism, and Buddhism. Since its independence, Indonesia is among the few countries that have a ministry dealing specifically with religious affairs, with the task of promoting religious life and ensuring the right of its citizens to practice their respective religions.

Secondly, the vast majority of Muslims in Indonesia are moderate. The fact that we have been living in the existing arrangements—where Islam is not a state religion—is proof in itself. The two biggest Muslim organizations, the Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah, reflect the face of true Islamic traditions of peace, tolerance and harmony. The few “extremist” organizations—which have received much media coverage recently—have only a small number of followers and do not have the support of the majority of the population.

It is important to point out that extremism is not something new, to the world or Indonesia. It is not exclusive to Islam but can be found within other religions and communal identities. In fact, Indonesia had been combating terrorist activities—stemming from extremism as well as separatism—long before the

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11 September tragedy. These terrorist activities were initially focused domestically and—along with “the process of globalization”—their orientation became regional or international only since the 1990s. It is worth

mentioning that, in her visits to ASEAN member countries in August 2001, President Megawati Sukarnoputri already raised the issue of international terrorism and the need to strengthen regional cooperation to combat terror.

Thirdly, Indonesia was among the first countries to strongly condemn the terrorist activities on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington D.C. It urged the international community to form a global coalition, involving all civilizations and all religions, through the United Nations to combat international terrorism. President Megawati Sukarnoputri in her discussion with President George W. Bush in Washington D.C. on 19 September 2001 reiterated those Indonesian positions. However, in the aftermath of the military operation in Afghanistan and the terrorist-related arrests in our neighboring countries, Indonesia suddenly emerges in the spotlight of the international media for not taking the same actions.

There are at least two misconceptions in the media reports. One is that because there are some Indonesians among the arrested, there must be a network of international terrorist organizations in Indonesia. This is simply a biased pre-judgment, as there is no evidence available. The other is that because Indonesia has not arrested anyone, it is not doing enough. This is an oversimplification. It overlooks the various efforts that have already been made by Indonesia—before and after the 11 September tragedy—at the global, regional and national levels. The Indonesian Government has acknowledged it needs to strengthen its institutional capacity and legal infrastructure to be able to effectively combat international terrorism. This is the very reason why we need to strengthen regional and international cooperation in this matter, and not point fingers at each other.

Indeed, the democratic spirit is what we need in order to wage an effective struggle against the dark forces of international terrorism. The best course, therefore, would be a collective action on the basis of the UN Charter. It calls for concerted and comprehensive efforts in both combating terrorism and addressing the root causes. For this war against evil to be able to cover all fronts—for it to be sustainable and imbued with long-term legitimacy—it is imperative that the United Nations play an effective and primary role. The global campaign should be complemented at the regional level with coordinated efforts such as those launched by ASEAN. In this way we can make sure our response to terrorism is a democratic response. ❖

## Notes

1. For the full text of the speech, please access <http://www.dfa-deplu.go.id>
2. Thakur and Newman, *New Millenium, New Perspective: The United Nations, Security and Governance*, 2000.
3. Russet, Starr and Kinsella, *World Politics: The Menu for Choice*, 2000.