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Greg Barton and Andrée Feillard

Nahdlatul Ulama, Abdurrahman Wahid and Reformation: What Does NU's November 1997 National Gathering Tell Us?

Abstraksi: *Pada bulan November 1997 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) mengadakan musyawarah nasional alim ulama (munas) disusul konperensi besar (konbes) di Pondok Pesantren Qamarul Huda, Bagu, Lombok Tengah. Munas NU merupakan pertemuan ulama NU yang membicarakan berbagai persoalan sosial-keagamaan dan diadakan lima tahun sekali. Konbes memutuskan berbagai persoalan keorganisasian dan politik. Kedua penulis, yang menghadiri pertemuan Lombok, menganalisis maknanya sebagai titik akhir perkembangan NU sejak Abdurrahman Wahid menjadi pemimpin utamanya, 13 tahun sebelumnya, dan sekaligus sebagai titik tolak periode penuh perubahan yang dilalui Republik Indonesia setelahnya.*

Inti kesimpulan penulis adalah bahwa pertemuan NU di Lombok merupakan kemenangan gagasan reformis. Lebih spesifik, mereka menyebutkan empat aspek utama dari kemenangan tersebut. Pertama, munas dan konbes November 1997 mendukung pemikiran keagamaan progresif. Hal itu tercermin dalam sikap luwes serta terbuka dalam penafsiran hukum Islam yang menguasai perdebatan, misalnya menyangkut persoalan hak dan peranan perempuan. Lebih jelas lagi, sikap yang sama tampak dalam diskusi mengenai keadilan sosial, yang mengandung kri-

tik tegas terhadap kebijakan pembangunan rezim Soeharto, tetapi menghindari konfrontasi langsung dengan penguasa. Kedua, pertemuan Lombok menerima pimpinan para ulama angkatan relatif muda, yang menjadi penerus dan perinci gagasan Abdurrahman Wahid. Di antara tokoh muda yang banyak mewarnai perdebatan dengan prakarsa cendekia mereka terdapat Said Aqil Siradj dan Masdar Farid Mas'udi. Ketiga, pertemuan membenarkan sikap ketua umum Tanfidziah, Abdurrahman Wahid, terhadap rezim Soeharto. Walaupun sejumlah peserta mempersoalkan langkah tertentu, para hadirin umumnya mendukung usaha Abdurrahman untuk menciptakan kembali hubungan yang baik tetapi kritis dengan penguasa, sebagai syarat dasar kelestarian dan kegiatan organisasi. Keempat, dan sebagai lanjutan ketiga aspek terdahulu, pertemuan Lombok merupakan penegasan muktamar NU di Cipasung, 1994 karena bukan hanya mengungkapkan kepercayaan terhadap kepemimpinan Abdurrahman Wahid, melainkan juga terhadap masa depan politis NU secara umum.

Sebagai akibat, demikian kedua penulis menutup, NU, yang sekitar 15 tahun yang lalu seolah-olah akan terkungkung dalam konservatisme pemikiran dan sosial serta terlempar dari percaturan politik, seusai Munas dan Konbes Lombok, yang dianggap mereka sebagai hasil akhir pimpinan Abdurrahman Wahid, telah siap untuk memainkan salah satu peran utama dalam proses reformasi. Peran itu, ditambahkan, tidak terbatas pada bidang keagamaan, melainkan menyangkut wilayah politik serta masyarakat madani. Tinggal mengamati, penulis mengakhiri, bagaimana NU akan memain peran tersebut.

Penulis mencapai kesimpulan tersebut melalui analisis berbagai diskusi. Pertama, mereka mengulas jalannya Konbes. Salah satu ciri baru Konbes Lombok, dibandingkan dengan konbes terdahulu, adalah sedikitnya jumlah wakil pemerintah yang hadir, sedangkan jumlah ahli ekonomi dan lain sebagainya justru besar. Kenyataan itu mencerminkan sikap lebih mandiri terhadap penguasa yang telah dicapai NU, sekaligus perkembanganya sebagai organisasi yang berusaha menjawab tantangan masyarakat modern berdasarkan pemahaman Islam yang progresif. Penulis kemudian mengulas diskusi dan hasil diskusi Munas. Salah satu bagian paling menarik dan rinci dari artikel ini adalah analisis diskusi mengenai perempuan, yang menunjukkan dengan baik bagaimana kecenderungan konservatif akhirnya dapat dikalahkan secara halus, melalui perdebatan agak unik antara berbagai ulama tua dan muda serta dua perempuan muda tetapi cerdas serta bersemangat tinggi.

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خلاصة: عقـدت نهضـة العلمـاء فـى شـهر نوفمـبر ١٩٩٧م ملتقـى قوميـا للمشاورة بين العلماء أتبعتها بالمؤتمر الكبير لنهضة العلماء بمعهد قمرالهـدى، باغو(Bagu)، لومبوك الوسطى. لقـد جـرت العـادة أن ينعقـد الملتقـى القومـي للمشاورة مرة فى كل خمس سنوات، خصيصا للبحث فـى المسـائل الدينيـة الاجتماعية. وأما المؤتمر الكبير فمخصـوص لإقـرار مختلـف القضايـا المتعلقـة بالأمور التنظيمية والسياسية. وقد قام المؤلفان اللذان حضرا المؤتمر بلومبـوك بتحليل ماذا كـان وراء المؤتمر باعتبـاره آخـر مرحلـة وصلـت إليهـا نهضـة العلماء فى تطورها منذ أن تولى عبـد الرحمـن واحـد رئاستها خـلال ثلاثـة عشر سنة مضـت، وإيذانـا فـى نفـس الوقـت ببدايـة مرحلـة شـهدت فيهـا الجمهورية الاندونيسية الكثير من التغيرات.

والنتيجة التى وصل إليها المؤلفان فى تحليلهما تنحصر فى أن الملتقى المعقود بلومبوك كان انتصارا للاتجاه الاصلاحي مشـيرين بصفـة خاصـة إلى أربعة مظاهر لهذا الانتصار: أولها قيام المؤتمـر الكبـير والملتقـى القومـي لسـنة ١٩٩٧م بالتأييد للاتجاهات التقدمية، ويتمثل ذلك فـى اتخـاذ الموقـف المـرن

والمتفتح إزاء المسائل المتعلقة بحقوق المرأة ودورها. والأوضح من ذلك ما كان يظهر فى المناقشات حول العدالة الاجتماعية إذ تحمل فى طيها نقدا لاذعا للسياسة التنموية التى اتخذها نظام الرئيس سوهارتو (Soeharto) دون أن تؤدى إلى مواجهة مباشرة مع الحكومة. وثانيها الترحيب الذى أبداه المؤتمر لظهور الجيل الصاعد من العلماء الشبان الذين يمثلون امتدادا لأفكار عبد الرحمن واحد وشراحها. ومن أبرز من أصبغ منهم فىالمناقشات بأفكاره الابتكارية هم سعيد عقيل سراج (Said Aqil Siraj) ومصدر فريد مسعودي (Masdar Farid Mas'udi). وثالثها التصديق على الموقف الذى اتخذه رئيس التنفيذية وهو عبد الرحمن واحد من نظام سوهارتو. ولئن كان هناك عدد من المشاركين فى تلك المناسبة من يعارض بعض الخطوات إلا أن الحضور عموما يؤيدون محاولة عبد الرحمن واحد أن يقيم علاقة جيدة مع السلطة ولكن بموقف نقدي كشرط لا بد منه لضمان استمرار الجمعية ونشاطها. ورابعها وهو امتداد للمظاهر الثلاثة السابقة أن المؤتمر يؤكد ما كان مقررا فى مؤتمر شيباسونج ١٩٩٤م لأنه لم يعبر فحسب عن الثقة برئاسة عبد الرحمن واحد إنما أيضا عن مستقبل نهضة العلماء السياسي بصفة عامة.

والنتيجة كما انتهى إليها المؤلفان أن نهضةالعلماء- بعد أن طال بها العهد منذ خمسة عشر سنة مضت فى حصار وكأنها مقيدة بأغلال التقليدية فكريا واجتماعيا وقد سارت فى طريق بعيدة عن الدور السياسي كما تقتضيه قرارات الملتقى والمؤتمر الكبير المنعقد فى لومبوك باعتبارهما آخر تطور وصلت إليه تحت رئاسة عبد الرحمن واحد- قد أصبحت فى أتم استعدادها للقيام بأحد الأدوار الحاسمة فى الحركة الإصلاحية. ويضيف

المؤلفان أن هذا الدور لم يكن قاصرا على المجال الديني إنما اتسع ليشمل المجالات السياسية من أجل إقامة مجتمع مدني. وفى النهاية لم يبق إلا المتابعة كيف تلعب النهضة هذا الدور.

وقد توصل المؤلفان إلى هذه النتائج من خلال تحليلهما لمختلف المناقشات، إذ وجه نظرهما أولا إلى طبيعة المؤتمر الكبير بلومبوك حيث امتاز عن المؤتمرات السابقة بقلة من يحضره من ممثلى الحكومة فى الوقت الذى يكثر فيه عدد المشاركين من رجال الاقتصاد وغيرهم. وهي حقيقة تعكس الاستقلالية التى تمتعت بها الجمعية وتكشف النقاب فى نفس الوقت عن التطور الذى وصلت إليه استجابة للتحديات العصرية بناء على فهم الاسلام بمنهج تقدمي. وبعد ذلك تعرض المؤلفان لملاحظة ما كان يجرى فى المناقشات ونتائجها. ومن أبرز الجوانب المثيرة والأكثر تفصيلا فى هذه المقالة تحليلها للمناقشات التى جرت حول المرأة إذ تشير إلى أي مدى كان الانتصار على الموقف التقليدي المحافظ يتم فى هدوء من خلال مجادلة عجيبة بعض الشئ بين عدد من العلماء الشيوخ والعلماء الشبان مع بروز شخصيتين من الشابات كانتا تتمتعان بالذكاء والحماسة.

Introduction - NU's Changing Fortunes

A year in politics almost anywhere is a long time, in Indonesia the twelve-month period from November 1997 to November 1998 was a very long time. Not since the mid 1960s had so much taken place in one year. For Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's thirty to forty million strong traditionalist Islamic organization, as for almost every other organization in Indonesia, the year was an extraordinary one.

In November 1997 NU was in the best position that it had been in for many years. However, by early 1998 Nahdlatul Ulama appeared to have become less relevant to political developments in Indonesia, in no small measure because its leader, Abdurrahman Wahid, suffered a severe stroke in late January 1998. Fortunately he went on to make a good recovery, but for many months he remained in a weakened condition and was unable to continue playing the sort of high profile public intellectual role he had played for many years. Where once he had regularly crisscrossed the nation several times in the course of a week, speaking at gatherings large and small, now he was confined to one or two rooms in his house on the outer edge of Southern Jakarta.

Whether because of the direct effects of his stroke, the drugs his doctors prescribed, frustration with his position, or his increasingly bad sight, Abdurrahman was perceived to have been out of touch with what was happening in Indonesian politics. Similarly, NU appeared less and less relevant, particularly in the face of the burgeoning movement for political reform in Indonesia. Where both NU and its chairman had once seemed at the forefront of the push for political reform, in early 1998 they appeared to have been left by the wayside.

By the end of a year, however, the situation was very different. With Soeharto out of the way, the focus of attention shifted to two other pressing matters. The first was the need for those active in the civil sphere to work hard at holding Indonesian society together, wracked as it was by both the stresses of political turmoil and severe economic crisis. They had to maintain the momentum for reform achieved earlier in the year whilst avoiding the sort of social explosions that would see Indonesia descend into anarchy. The second matter occupying the attentions of activists, bureaucrats and politicians alike, was the preparation for general elections in mid-1999.

By the end of 1998 there was no doubting the importance of NU and its chairman in both these areas. NU's nationwide network, its sheer size, and the charismatic authority of many of its leaders, not least Abdurrahman Wahid, meant that its potential to contribute to strengthening civil society and maintaining social order was considerable. Moreover, with steadily improving health, Abdurrahman Wahid, although still effectively housebound, was once again able to play a significant role in public life. And by November, the long hoped for cooperation between the three leading opposition figures, Amien Rais of the Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN – National Mandate Party), Megawati Sukarnoputri of the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI – Indonesian Democratic Party) and Abdurrahman seemed finally to be a possibility. A meeting of the three leaders, together with Hamengku Buwono X, the Sultan of Yogyakarta, at Abdurrahman's house in Ciganjur on the Southern outskirts of Jakarta on the 11th of November greatly encouraged the student activists who had organized it. Others, however, mindful of the long-standing antipathy between Abdurrahman and Amien, were much more sanguine, pointing out that the meeting lasted only for a short moment, that there was no immediate follow-up, relatively little impact and that the prospects of cooperation in the longer term were meager at best.

On the political front, the successful formation of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB – People's Awakening Party) and its emergence as the single political party "officially" linked with Nahdlatul Ulama, meant that NU was now very much center stage in Indonesian politics. The likelihood of NU's PKB becoming a major coalition partner, probably with PDI, in the formation of Indonesia's next government means that now, perhaps more than ever, it is important to understand NU.

In order to understand NU's contribution to reforming Indonesian political life in 1999 and beyond, it is important first to try to understand the process of reform that occurred within NU between 1984 and 1997 (Van Bruinessen, 1994, 1996). For this reason, the national meeting of NU *ulama* held on the island of Lombok in November 1997 acquires a new importance. Not because the meeting itself was particularly eventful, but rather because of what it tells us about the success of the process of reform within NU that was led by Abdurrahman Wahid and his colleagues.

The November 1997 NU Konbes and Munas in Lombok

The November 1997 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) congress of *ulama* in Lombok was remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least being the absence of major government figures and of significant political manipulation.[1] It had been many years since NU had been able to convene a national meeting with so little "outside" interference, be it from the government or from rival factions. Sharply contrasting with the tension that filled the *muktamar* (national congress) three years earlier in Cipasung, West Java, in Lombok activists, "friends and foes", were more or less united again as they met to decide on religious and organizational issues, including a number of pressing political questions (Fealy, 1996). The location of the meeting was Pondok Pesantren Qamarul Huda, in the village of Bagu, Pringgarata, Central Lombok. The occasion was not one but two meetings, the first being the Musyawarah Nasional Alim Ulama, better known as the Munas, a regular five-yearly meeting of NU *ulama* convened to discuss socio-religious issues, while the Konperensi Besar (Grand Conference), or Konbes as it was generally known, that followed immediately afterwards took up a series of organizational and political questions.

Three discrete but related currents flowed through the meetings, each one reflecting one aspect of the difficult challenges confronting the organization. First and foremost, the Lombok gathering represented a continuation of the Cipasung congress (meaning, in other words, the final victory of Abdurrahman Wahid over Abu Hassan). Secondly, it was marked by a heightened sense of concern for the "weak and unfortunate". This line of discussion represented a veiled criticism of the failure of the Soeharto regime to achieve the sort of equitable distribution of wealth that it had for so long been promising to deliver. The third stream of discussion in Lombok related to the certainty of Soeharto's success in the upcoming MPR session. Though no direct reference was made to the President, much less an endorsement of his candidacy, the tone of the discussion was nevertheless conciliatory. In effect, this aspect of the gathering served to endorse the pragmatic strategy undertaken by Abdurrahman Wahid over the previous years of working towards rapprochement with the Soeharto regime without abandoning some nuanced but consequent criticism of its policies (Feillard, 1996 and 1997a).[2]

Indeed, the reason for this relatively peaceful atmosphere, which over the course of the decade had become increasingly rare in NU gatherings, was the improved relations between NU and the govern-

ment. The improvement in relations was warmly welcomed in a succession of speeches and papers. In the formal report of the National Executive (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama – PBNU) to the Konbes, relations with the government were described as "satisfying", and the now famous handshake between Abdurrahman Wahid and President Soeharto at the National Working Conference (Musyawarah Kerja Nasional – Mukernas) of the Rabithah Ma'ahid al-Islamiyah (RMI – League of Islamic [educational] Institutes), held in November 1996 in Probolinggo, was described as having a "rather positive impact on the life" of the organization and its adherents.[3] For the first time in many years NU's future seemed clear – the black and threatening storm clouds that had dominated the heavens in 1996 had finally cleared and, for the time being at least, the sky was a friendly blue.

In the first part of this report on the Lombok meetings we will analyze the political content of the meeting, and in the second part, the socio-religious decisions taken by the *ulama*. The discussion investigates the essential themes that dominated the meetings, which as alluded to above, reflect a moderate but critical stance within NU on political matters and a strong concern for social justice. In addition to these matters, particular attention will be given to a new line of discussion within NU, namely the rights and roles of women within the organization and the nation. Though individual liberal-minded figures in NU, most notably Abdurrahman Wahid, Said Aqil Siradj and Masdar Farid Mas'udi, had earlier championed women's rights, the national-level Lombok gathering was the first occasion on which these issues were discussed so directly and at such length (Feillard, 1997b).

The General Mood in Lombok

The mood in NU following the general elections in May 1997 was characterized by a sense of unease among certain activists who had been accused by outside pro-democracy circles of having "been bought out by Golkar". Interestingly, there was much support for the neutral stance adopted in the elections. Nevertheless, a wide variety of opinions prevailed, with some otherwise loyal assistants privately questioning the necessity of reconciliation with the regime given the widespread criticism it provoked, whilst others openly expressed their relief and gratitude over the improvement in relations.

Amongst certain groups, at least, considerable frustration, if not anger, was evident as a result of Megawati's push for a "Mega-Bintang"

alliance during the election campaign, i.e. a coalition of Megawati's officially excluded faction of the PDI and the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP – United Development Party), whose symbol was a star (*bintang*). One young *kiai*[4] from West-Java at the Lombok gathering, for example, commented that Megawati's acceptance of the "Mega-Bintang" slogan meant that the two PDI seats in his sub-district (*kecamatan*), went to the PPP (which polled almost 60% of the votes, whereas Golkar received only 40% and the PDI but a handful of the votes).

Another *kiai* who favored the NU chairman's stance on the elections said it was "a good way to rebalance the electoral forces", which would otherwise have been very favorable to the PPP. An NU activist from Cilegon, less sympathetic to Golkar, was still pleased to see that Abdurrahman's new rapprochement policy had eased relations with the government and the army at the grassroots level. He said: "Abu Hassan wanted to be elected at Cipasung, and for that we suffered great pressure from the military command (Kodim), we were told we had to vote for Abu Hassan. Abu Hassan used the army against us activists in the *kecamatan*. Gus Dur [Abdurrahman Wahid's nickname] has never done anything like this, he always protects us". The rural population's great dependence on the local administration means that it has a very different perspective from the urban middle class.

This general satisfaction with Abdurrahman's leadership was reflected in a mood of apparent unity, which contrasted sharply with all other NU gatherings held since the early 1990s. The visible tension evident at the Cipasung *muktamar* between the Tanfidziah (Executive Board of NU) chairman, Abdurrahman Wahid and the Rois Aam (president) of the Syuriah (Supreme Religious Council of NU), K.H. Ilyas Ruchiat had vanished. Reflecting this, K.H. Ilyas delivered a surprisingly sophisticated speech, which had been written for him by Abdurrahman Wahid's right hand man, Arifin Junaidi.

However, even within NU's Golkar-sympathizing group, there remained differences between those who really played the game and got thoroughly involved with political machinations and those who tried to keep the administration at arm's length. The new RMI secretary-general, Ali Haidar, was said to have been willingly courted by not only Habibie, ICMI's sponsor, but also by certain other ICMI-activists well known to be opponents of Abdurrahman.[5]

In sharp contrast to the stance of the more politically engaged

within NU, Abdurrahman's policy has been to maintain a reasonable distance from the regime, a difficult thing to do at any time but especially so during elections periods. In practice NU's relationship with the Soeharto regime was in a state of constant flux. Over the decades a long-term cycle can be identified, with good relations in the early New Order period cooling in the 1970 and through the 1980s before improving again with the election of Abdurrahman as executive chairman at the end of 1984 (Nakamura, 1996). NU then enjoyed "warm" relations until the beginning of the 1990s, when Abdurrahman's opposition to ICMI, and what he saw as an attempt to manipulate religious sentiment, led to a decisive chilling of relations.[6] Things appeared to have reached a low point in late 1994 when Soeharto moved to engineer a defeat for Abdurrahman at the 1994 *muktamar,* ultimately backing Abu Hassan's push for the chairmanship. In fact through 1995 and 1996 the relationship continued to deteriorate. So much so that in the second half of 1996 Abdurrahman clearly felt that desperate measures were called for. The violent assault on Megawati loyalists occupying the PDI building in Jakarta in July that year, and the rioting that followed, no doubt added to a sense that Soeharto and ABRI might be prepared to take extraordinary measures against NU and its "recalcitrant" chairman. By early 1997, however, Abdurrahman had successfully negotiated a rapprochement with the regime and NU was once again enjoying a season of peace. Nevertheless, the cost of peace was not insignificant, though much of it was borne by the chairman himself, who in the short to medium term paid dearly in terms of personal credibility. Whilst few objected to his handshake with the President, many were shocked by his move to officially "introduce" the President's daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana or Tutut, to the NU masses at several large regional rallies. Whilst even eighteen months later many were still questioning the wisdom of his tactics, Abdurrahman himself regarded the maneuver to have been a great success. The price, he said, was "a bargain".[7] After all, NU, he argued, had actually not conceded anything, Tutut may have accompanied Abdurrahman on tour and been welcomed to the official podium, he argued, but she was only ever introduced, never endorsed (and indeed the normally voluble Abdurrahman had been unusually careful in choosing his words when speaking about Tutut).[8] In any case, with relations with the regime once again restored and conflict averted, Abdurrahman turned to establishing his, and NU's, inde-

pendence from political manipulation. As a result, relations were once again allowed to cool.

Consequently, the only minister invited to the Munas in November was Tarmizi Taher, Minister of Religious Affairs. The absence of other high officials was diplomatically handled by the Rois Aam who explained that NU "did not want to disturb the busy schedules of high officials occupied in preparations for the upcoming MPR session".[9]

Instead of the government ministers came the professional experts, whose discourse was generally critical of current policies and who offered alternatives to government development policies. They included well-known economic commentators such as Anwar Nasution, Sartono, and Ramli. The detailed contributions by these and other experts meant that the Konbes became something of a two-day intensive course on economic reform. This contrasted sharply with previous Konbeses, which had generally served as forums for high officials to parade their achievements and promote their policies.

Whilst it is doubtful that all of the participants were able to follow every detail of the presentations, there was no doubting the sense of pride that NU had come of age and was now a sophisticated, modern organization able to host serious intellectual discussions. Adding to this sense was the presence of a significant number of foreign observers such as Dr. William Vendley, International President of the New York based international NGO, World Conference for Religion and Peace (WCRP). The fact that Abdurrahman Wahid had been made a President of WCRP (the focus of some criticism at the time, particularly from certain vocal opponents outside NU) and that the International President of WCRP was now addressing a NU Konbes, was viewed as further evidence that NU was no longer seen as a backwards, rural-based traditionalist organization out of touch with the modern world.[10]

As the only minister who was given an opportunity to address the gathering, Tarmizi Taher spoke mostly of Indonesia's new role in the Muslim world, as a new "*kiblat*", or focal point for Muslims around the world, an idea which had become increasingly popular amongst government officials over the past several years. Interestingly, this was also a concept that had become popular amongst NU activists, who saw it as being only natural that Indonesia should become a model for other Muslim nations to follow. At the Konbes it was clear that the distinctive attributes of Indonesian Islam were understood

by minister and activists alike as being a supportive approach to sound economic development, creative adaptation to modernity, profound religious tolerance, a strong commitment to promoting inter-communal harmony, contextualized *ijtihâd*, or hermeneutics, and a progressive understanding of the roles and rights of women.

One of the few points of dispute at the Konbes concerned the choice of the venue for the next congress. The low-key manner in which the matter was handled belied its importance. As a new executive chairman would be elected at the 1999 *muktamar*, anything significantly effecting the dynamics of the meeting might well determine the leadership. A venue in Java, where most NU members live, would give the upper hand to the Javanese *kiai*, whereas the choice of South Sulawesi, Lampung or South Kalimantan, the three "outside" regions mentioned as possible choices, would mean that the majority was disadvantaged. Moreover, the outer island branches, where many of the leaders were government employees, had tended to be much less supportive of Abdurrahman than had the branches in Java, where most of the *pesantren* were located. In the end the decision was left to the PBNU.[11]

Of much greater concern than the developing economic crisis, or even the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama, however, was the issue of political succession. By late 1997 the issue, which had seemed to be forever hanging over all other issues in national affairs, was firmly center stage. The burgeoning economic crisis only reinforced the sense that political reform was not only desirable but also necessary, indeed essential. Succession, it was hoped, would bring reform, and reform, if it meant anything at all, would mean a better deal for Indonesia's little people, the struggling peasant farmers and factory workers who made up the bulk of the population. Given that NU, more than any other single organization in Indonesia, represents the little people, it was hardly surprising that the issue of succession hung heavy in the air at the Konbes. In particular, attention focused on the question of the vice-presidency, and much of the talk outside the formal meetings revolved around the choice of the next vice-president. Up until this time the vice-presidency had largely been a ceremonial office, and in the normal course of events the Vice-President had little real power. It was assumed, however, that Soeharto would very likely step down sometime during his coming seventh term, either through ill health or through political pressure, and that power would be transferred, at least in the interim, to the Vice-President.

There was considerable discussion, and much concern, about the figure shaping up to be the most likely candidate, B.J. Habibie. Compared to the situation a few years earlier, a noticeably increased distrust was evident about the candidate's capacities to handle Indonesia's economic problems.

"Recommendations" from the Konbes

A general political declaration was issued (*taushiyah*), which was marked by coherence, moderation and well-targeted criticism. Concern was expressed about recent outbreaks of violence. The "riots" were said to result from both a diminished level of "national discipline" and from specific outside "provocations". The Konbes concluded that the "root" of the problem lay with deep frustration over economic hardship, and pointed out that preventive measures were needed and that this required the cooperation of local communities.

At the level of concrete operational matters, the policy of political "neutrality" was reiterated with the continuation of the ban on serving NU officials holding formal posts in political parties. With respect to the national elections in May of that year, NU took the cautious line of calling them "controversial", but nevertheless congratulated "all MPs elected into the DPR/MPR".

Concern was also expressed over the impact of the El Nino drought which had resulted in severe food shortages, including a famine in Irian Jaya in which hundreds died, and uncontrollable bush fires which destroyed vast tracks of rain forest and blanketed large areas of the archipelago with acrid smoke.

In the Konbes recommendations, NU members also commented on the increased level of religiosity in Indonesia. But whilst they expressed satisfaction at the increasing number of people praying, they also voiced their disappointment at neglect of Islamic values, evident in increased immorality and decadence. The Abdurrahman line here clearly dominated the discussions with young Abdurrahman supporters arguing in favor of a substantialist approach to Islamic teachings and rejecting the formalistic responses of other groups.[12] Moreover, for the first time ever, there was open criticism of certain unnamed groups and condemnation of people who "commercialized" their religious training, chasing "purely material gains". In its recommendations NU also argued for *hajj* arrangements to be managed in a more transparent fashion.

On education, the Konbes stated its dissatisfaction that the Department of Education had emphasized the acquisition of scientific and technical knowledge whilst neglecting the importance of moral instruction. The lack of moral leadership (*keteladanan*), it was argued, was partly responsible for the increased level of violence among school students. NU called for a balanced educational system with a greater emphasis on character formation and moral development and a reduced emphasis on rote learning. Moreover, it called on parents to recognize their responsibilities as the primary educators of their children, encouraging them to make use of opportunities such as the annual Ramadan month of fasting to encourage their children to reflect on their moral development. NU also called upon the government to reduce its level of intervention in private schools.

Not surprisingly, given the focus of the specialist presentations to the Konbes and the growing sense of crisis, the recommendations also made reference to the need for economic reform. They emphasized the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth and the ending of monopolistic practices. Significantly, unlike certain sections of the *ummat*, in particular those supportive of a more Islamist position, which had been critical of George Soros or the Chinese, the NU Konbes was not looking for scapegoats. It attributed no blame either to Chinese Indonesians or to outside forces for the fall of the rupiah, on the contrary it argued that the crisis was a lesson to the nation teaching it that it needed a more healthy and open economy with greater levels of accountability and a better system of checks and balances.

The Konbes avoided endorsing Soeharto's candidacy for a new presidential mandate and instead stated that the president chosen for the next term should have the qualities required to meet the needs of the people, in accordance with "Islamic teachings". Given the preceding discussion about the need for economic reform this hardly amounted to an endorsement of Soeharto. Indeed, the link between economic reform and political reform was clear to all. Neither could the Konbes be said to be opposing Soeharto, however, for the NU leaders were extremely careful to avoid direct confrontation with the regime. Nevertheless, clear criticism was directed at the bureaucracy of the regime with a call to refrain from "corruption, nepotism, arrogance, and misuse of official position [*penyalahgunaan jabatan dan wewenang*] for personal, familial or communitarian purposes".[13] Concern for environment and human rights were again expressed,

with recommendations made that the government work together with human rights groups to ensure greater respect of these rights, including women rights (with the significant note: "as required by the Shari'ah"), and the rights of workers.

The declaration was signed on the 21st of November 1997 by 39 members of the delegation. It was a model of moderate but thorough criticism, pushing the limits of government tolerance, but not pushing too hard. The image of NU conveyed in these documents is of a modern, progressive organization seeking to apply the substantial principles of Islam for the betterment of society along liberal lines. It makes few direct references to Abdurrahman Wahid but is nevertheless stamped all over with his liberal vision (Barton, 1996a, 1997a, 1997b, Ramage, 1996, Wahid, 1978, 1981). Seen in the context of what was a remarkably harmonious meeting, free from the criticism of Abdurrahman evident at the 1994 *muktamar*, it serves as clear evidence that his line of thought has a strong backing within the organization.

"Recommendations" from the Munas Commissions: *Human Rights and the Rights of Women*

If the Konbes was marked by an understated confidence in the liberal direction being taken by Abdurrahman Wahid, the Munas, a national level meeting intended primarily for *ulama* rather than activists, was more the reflection of divergent voices within the ranks of NU *ulama*. As a group, the *ulama* are torn between a solid conservatism that is naturally resistant to change and a new wave of progressive thought which, whilst increasingly influential, still meets with difficulties in being fully accepted in a community long ruled by traditional jurisprudence.

For the purpose of the discussions the *ulama* were separated into two groups or commissions (*komisi*). Komisi A, headed by K.H. Azis Masyhuri, was given the responsibility of dealing with diverse range of practical issues, ranging from Friday Prayers (*salat Jumat*) to copyright (*hak cipta*) and Aids. On the other hand, Komisi B, headed by K.H. Cholil Bisri, was assigned the responsibility of discussing broader themes such as human rights and the rights of women. Significantly, these religious issues (*masâ'il dîniyyah*) sessions were marked by the predominance of *ulama* of the new generation and the new emphasis on socially sensitive issues.

General Religious Issues (Masâ'il Dîniyyah Mawdlû'iyyah)

In Komisi B, one of the better known younger *'ulamâ'*, Said Aqil, played a prominent role as the secretary of the commission. The chairman of the commission was K.H. Cholil Bisri, a moderate political leader from a well-known *ulama* family. Four issues were taken up by this commission: democracy, human rights, women's rights and economic issues. Given the groundbreaking nature of this discussion, the proceedings and recommendations of each sub-working group are well worth examining here in detail.

A draft paper entitled 'Democracy' in Islam was read aloud by Dr. K.H. Noer [Nur] Iskandar al-Barsany, an impressive young *ulama*. The draft examined in some length the theories of state put forward by Mawlana Mawdudi and Ali Abdul Raziq, with citations from Sayyid Muhammad Iqbal and Nelson Polsby. This was the first time that this sort of academic reflection on foreign theories of state had taken place in a national NU conference. The central question being posited was essentially: "What is the best system to guarantee democracy?" The various sub-questions were cleverly formulated, but the response remained unclear except for an emphasis on the need for political actors to have "a sense of religion". On elections, the draft said that "participation is obligatory if implementation of democracy means, as the ultimate goal, the application of Islamic teachings." No further explanation was given for this formulation.

Noer Iskandar's draft paper was reworded significantly by the sub-commission: it described the limits of the power of a head of state as being that he "support the position of those who give him his mandate". A state (*negara/imamah*) has to be built on values of justice, honesty and equality (*kebersamaan*). No really new way to better implement democracy emerges from the final recommendation, except for the call for the leader to accept his accountability to those who elect him. The result was a sophisticated review of various theories of state, followed by some rather unclear proposals about possible alternatives.

Said Aqil's contribution to the Munas took the form of a draft recommendation on human rights as seen from an Islamic perspective. In this document, Aqil shows his firm intention to bypass "western" paradigms, but the paper is worded quite generally without any specific rejection of western values. The final recommendation made by Komisi B to the Munas assembly differed from Aqil's initial formulation on a number of points, in that it was developed into a de-

tailed list of rights, obligations and interdictions. Interestingly, it speaks of the rights of "ethnic religions" and in effect legitimizes local religions. This stands in sharp contradiction to the purification trends found in certain expressions of reformist Islam.

The essential differences between NU's statement of human rights, as formulated at this Munas, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are not profound. The only real point of divergence, or a least emphasis, is that the NU formulation stresses the importance of developing good morals. The NU statement touches on several problems of increasing concern in Indonesia: the drug ecstasy and alcohol are prohibited to Muslims on the grounds that they "are injurious to mental health" (*perusakan akal*). Prohibited too are free sex, adultery and homosexuality. Furthermore, theft, corruption, monopolies, oligopolies are decried for "taking away the rights and property of others".[14] This declaration on human rights is the first ever offered within NU that delves into such details, which are usually dealt with by *fatwâs*. It is not clear, however, whether such an official declaration has the same strength as a *fatwâ*.

Other aspects of human rights were discussed in the sessions, but not mentioned in the final paper, probably on the grounds that they were felt to be still too controversial. For example, one issue discussed but not recorded was whether or not a woman has the right to refuse her husband's sexual advances. One leading figure argued that she had no such right, while another, Masdar Mas'udi, said in private that he disagreed and that the consent of the wife was necessary for sexual relations. Another controversial question was the right to change religion. Some argued that people should not be allowed to change religion. Outside the session, Masdar argued that right should be given, but if it were refused, then, to be fair, the ban against changing religion should also apply to Christians converting to Islam. Another question was the right of homosexuals to marry. The majority opinion seemed very much against this and considered allowing this to be going too far.

Komisi B also dealt with a variety of economic concerns, in particular investment in the stock market. It was decided that investment in stocks and shares was permissible so long as it avoided investing in gambling, prostitution, pornography, the manufacturing of proscribed food and drinks, and in financial institutions accepting usury (*ribâ*) though, significantly, usury was not defined. While speculation which involved taking a deliberate gamble was proscribed, the

commission recognized the urgent need to create stock market investment opportunities specifically suited to Islamic values.[15]

Women's Issues

For the first time ever at an NU national meeting, a substantial draft paper was offered for debate on the role of women in public life. The author of the draft was a Jakarta *ulama*, K.H. Zidny. The paper was surprisingly conservative in tone for an Islamic organization which has for so long staged prominent political women activists, though the final recommendations represented something of a triumph for progressive elements in the organization.

K.H. Zidny's draft paper essentially questioned women's right to participate in public and political life on the grounds that such participation had the potential to result in the neglect of family duties. The initial response to the paper was subdued, possibly because the potential respondents were each waiting for somebody else to make the first move. From previous comments over many years by a number of NU leaders, particularly from amongst the younger *ulama*, it was clear that K.H. Zidny was by no means speaking for all *ulama*. Indeed, from the vantage point of those influenced by the liberal thought of Abdurrahman Wahid, at least, K.H. Zidny's views represented the conservative end of the spectrum of opinion within NU. Needless to say, this debate was not occurring in vacuum. By the time of the November 1997 meeting, the push for Megawati Sukarnoputri to become president, then felt in all likelihood to be backed by an alliance between Megawati's PDI and NU, was gathering momentum. Moreover, the high profile taken by Tutut during the elections made her another possible candidate if Soeharto was to step down. The question then, of the appropriateness of women occupying public office, was not an abstract one.

It was not surprising that K.H. Zidny's paper drew a strong reaction from two Fatayat activists from Central Java, the only women present at this session - the only surprise was that none of the men present had moved to speak first.[16] The two younger women, politely but confidently, asked for, and were given, permission to respond to the paper. Fatayat Central-Java chairwoman, Nadjihah Muhtarom, forcefully told the *kiai* her indignation at the proposals. She took issue with the proposed draft, submitting a long list of carefully prepared points aimed at critically addressing the assumptions and conservative interpretations supporting K.H. Zidny's position.

The main point of her argument was that Islam had always, right from the start of the revelation from God to the Prophet Muhammad, given an equal status to men and women, but time and local cultures had distorted understanding and practice of this intrinsically egalitarian religion. If the Qur'ân continued to be interpreted wrongly, she concluded, then one should not be surprised if "Muslim feminists" sometimes felt like breaking away from the Muslim *ummat*. The audience was clearly stunned by the frank and bold nature of her address, but it was just as clearly won over by the obvious sincerity behind Nadjihah's ardent expression of indignation and by the dignified manner of her delivery.

In the following sessions, much support for the women came from a number of older *kiai*. One Javanese *kiai* took the microphone to say women did indeed have the right to participate in the management of state affairs. At this point K.H. Muchith Muzadi, a respected intellectual *kiai*, and former pupil of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, spoke up:

> "men and women differ in many ways, but their quality is equal (*bobotnya sama*).[17] If there have been inequalities at certain times, I think they were due to culture or to different readings of the Qur'ân. However, between a man and a woman, it is not at all clear who is the best. They act according to their basic character (*fitrah*). There are indeed many remaining inequalities (*ketimpangan*), and I admit that women have often been put down (*banyak dikalahkan*). The best way to cope with this is through the education of young girls."

At this point several other older *kiai* also joined in to speak up in support of the two women, whilst the senior *kiai* present such as K.H. Sahal Mahfudh and K.H. Ilyas, the Rois Aam, did not contradict the statements supporting the rights of women.

By now visibly eager to reconcile with the two young women and clearly embarrassed, the author of the draft, K.H. Zidny spoke again. He revised the views presented in the paper, heavily reducing his restrictions on women in public life and ultimately concluding that the only thing a woman could not do was to become the president of an Islamic state. In a "secular" nation such as Indonesia, however, he added, everything was possible. Tension dissolved and the mood turned from serious to jovial when K.H. Yusuf Muhammad, a charismatic young *kiai* from Madura, politely poked fun at K.H. Zidny and called on him to change his text, which he found backwards (*mundur*), and he jokingly called him with the honorific title for great religious scholars and founders of legal traditions as "Imam Zidny".

This small incident is revealing of the sort of soul-searching currently occurring in NU. Afraid of "too much feminism", NU had not trusted the most distinguished NU intellectual known to be working for the rights of women, Masdar Mas'udi, to produce the draft. But evidently, K.H. Zidny had gone overboard in the other direction, foolishly so when it is remembered that NU women activists had been active in politics for years already. In the discussions that followed, K.H. Cholil Bisri invited Masdar Mas'udi to explain to the *kiai* how Islam looked at women. For about one hour, Masdar explained to the assembly how, over time, Muslim societies had tended to depart from the basic principle in Islam of sexual equality because of the influence of local cultures and historical circumstances. Masdar's presentation was generally well received but, for whatever reason, when the sub-commissions were formed to produce a new draft on women issues, Masdar was not included.

Later on Wednesday, the Komisi B working groups met at the Lombok Raya Hotel, with the task of preparing a final draft to be read at the plenary session on Thursday. The drafting of the new declaration was a masterpiece of compromise between four people: two *kiai* of about 50 years old, one of them being K.H. Zidny, the other one K.H. Mahfudz Thoha, and the two young Fatayat delegates in their thirties. Machrusah Taufiq from Yogyakarta, 30, is married, and Nadjihah Muhtarom from Semarang, 32, is single. The first was dressed in a *jilbab*, or tight veil, the other in a *kerudung*, or traditional headscarf. They sat on the floor, facing the *kiai*, a situation that had perhaps never happened before at any previous NU Munas. As the other commission members withdrew to another subworking group, leaving the four alone, chairman K.H. Cholil Bisri asked Masdar Mas'udi to stay and help with the draft, "to compensate for the conservatism" expressed so far. Two observers were present, silently witnessing the proceedings.[18] Masdar, in his 40s, sat beside the two older *kiai*, but was reserved in his contribution to the ensuing discussion.

The following are some notes on the discussion, which deserve detailed reporting because of the nature of the key moment that they represent.

After an uncomfortable minute or so of silence in which everyone is clearly embarrassed, the discussions starts. K.H. Zidny begins by saying somewhat hesitantly to the women: *"Don't you think that the problem lies with the fact that women do not understand much about*

Islam?" The girls seem to disapprove. K.H. Zidny, unsure of his impact, continues: *"In fact, in Islam, women have more rights than men."* Nadjihah, very spirited answers firmly: *"Actually the teachings are clear, women are equal to men, but the problem is that there was a long period between the time when they were revealed up until they came here to us, and there was plenty of time for deviations. For example, it was said that a single woman could not go out without a male parent (*muhrim*), this is in fact based on a weak hadîth."* K.H. Zidny, lean and delicate, responds approvingly: *"Yes, the difficulty is that the ummat does not practice the real teachings (*ajaran yang sesungguhnya*). Indeed, a woman can go around without her* muhrim, *as this hadîth is not an absolute (*mutlak*) hadîth.* He continues: *"people say that Islam is not favorable to women, and they cite the fact that the testimony of a woman is worth half that of a man."* K.H. Zidny answers himself: *"But it is the non-Muslims who say this."* Nadjihah answers back, simultaneously bold and politely restrained: *"No, Kiai, it is not only the non-Muslims. Look at the Indian Muslim Ali Asghar Engineer, he says that the woman is reduced to a position of second class citizen for example through polygamy. But the Qur'ân also says that the paradise is under the feet of the mother. We want people to know,* continues Nadjihah, *that Islam does not place women in an inferior position, that the Qur'ân makes no discrimination."* Both *kiai* approve with a nod of their head*: It is true, the Qur'ân does not discriminate.* The other *kiai* adds: *"The woman and the man have both the same rights to enter into paradise, it is their deeds which count."* Machrusah pursues the matter: *"The mother counts even more, as the Prophet said that the mother is worth three times more than the father, he says she should be revered in priority, this he said three times!"*

Then comes the sensitive theme of the discussion: what about a woman becoming head of state? The *jilbab*-wearing Fatayat delegate, Rosa [Machrusah], admits that there is no precedent of any Indonesian woman being a head of state in history. Masdar, who has remained totally silent so far, finally speaks up: *"What about the sultanate of Aceh? There were three women who became heads of state!"* Machrusah, who appeared not to know this, turns to the *kiai*: *Do you want this, to make it* haram *for a woman to be head of state?* The two *kiai* keep silent, visibly unsure. Machrusah continues*: "After all, the Nahdlatul Ulama has 'always chosen the middle way',"* meaning that extremist solutions are uncommon among NU *kiai*. Masdar intervenes a second time: *"If a woman is really capable, why not? Moreover, she won't be alone in this decision-making function; she will be assisted*

by a college of decision-makers and counselors. Why could a woman not be a head of state?" No one seems to have the answer.

It is time to write the draft declaration. Machrusah takes her notebook. She starts writing. Nobody really knows how to formulate the gist of the discussion and draw out some suitable conclusions. Finally, K.H. Zidny says, *"okay, whatever it is that you want, you write it, up to you*!", accompanying his words with a gesture implying "we trust your moderation!"

Masdar comes to the rescue. Machrusah writes: *"There is a tendency to subordinate women. But to fight this, we have to come back to the original scriptures."*

The issue of sexual relations comes up in the conversation. Does a woman have a right to refuse her husband, for example if she does not feel well? Masdar argues that to have sex without the woman's consent amounts to rape. Nadjihah comments she could not sleep the previous night thinking that her future husband would have the right to have sex with her without her consent. The two *kiai* seem to feel sympathy for her. She could be their daughter. Nadjihah continues: *"If, so, then we human beings behave like animals! This is totally contrary to the Qur'ân which says that a wife has to be respected!"*

Rosa continues to write her draft, adding: *"Let us ask for equal rights, according to the capacities of each."* The *kiai* and the two women agree: "*Islam*, they say, *is (was and should be) in favor of women*." Nadjihah adds: *"After all, we do not ask much, for example, we are not asking for equal rights in inheritance!"* Nadjihah turns her head in the direction of the two observers: *"I do not mind, I have the double share of my future husband,"* she says. One observer objects: *"But what if your husband's family is poorer than yours?" " Never mind, we marry in the same milieus!"* Masdar intervenes pointing out that donation, or *hibah*, is, in any case, a way out.

"Today, it is the legitimate role in public life, without limitation, which women are fighting for. Anything else is marginal." Without any animosity, the two Fatayat delegates have made their point, never forcing anything, and ready to concede respectfully if the *kiai* did not accept their argument.

The sub-commission has found a compromise, the text was written up. After the other members of Komisi B came back to the room, Machrusah read aloud from her draft on women rights in Islam.[19] As the last line is being read, Said Aqil interjects with a prompt and energetic *"very good*!" It is clear, however, that, Yusuf Muhammad

does not agree: the draft brings "nothing new", he interjects, as women already enjoy a public role, and he cites the example of the late Ibu Wahid Hasyim (i.e. Wife of Wahid Hasyim, and mother of Abdurrahman Wahid). The text remains too vague for him on the very question of the day: can a woman hold the top position as head of state? *"Indeed"*, replies a candid Machrusah, *the text purposely remains vague to avoid conflicts of opinions."* Masdar, on the other hand, finds the draft innovative and welcomes the fact that it implicitly does not forbid a woman from holding the top post. However, Yusuf Muhammad holds to his disapproval. Machrusah, now clearly shaken, tries to explain to the *kiai* the simple reasons why women should be given the right to play a public role, but precisely because they are so self-evident the explanations sound a little awkward. Everyone listens, with visible sympathy. But Yusuf Muhammad does not budge from his position. While Nadjihah remains silent, Machrusah is arguing with less and less conviction. She seems close to giving up, knowing that nothing is possible should the men disagree. Tension in the room is high.

Masdar asks: *"Yes, we think that women should have the same rights to play a role in public life, why not? There have been Benazir Bhutto and others, so why not us [Indonesians?]"*. Yusuf Muhammad, dressed in a green sarong, sits back in his chair, looking all the more imposing on account of the fact that most of the rest of the group are sitting on the floor: *"Exactly that, I disagree with the very idea!"* Silence. Said Aqil, sitting close to Yusuf, responds vehemently with more arguments: *"Why should we not give this public role to women? Why are you so opposed to it? For me, it is fine, we give it to them but we keep polygamy! Why not have a woman in high public office if she is up to it?"* Aqil cites a number of hadîths. Yusuf Muhammad stops him short, tense, close to becoming angry: *"If you want to start citing hadîths, I can do the same!"* Said Aqil's masterful command of hadîth literature is well known. Yusuf Muhammad's words sound like an invitation to a duel. The two women remain silent; the men appear to be taking up their fight, with hadîths as the swords.

"Enough!" The commission chairman, K.H. Cholil Bisri, takes back the lead, choosing to exercise his authority as chair of Komisi B: *"After all, I am the one who presides over the commission, and I think the best outcome is that the draft be left rather vague. There is no need to argue over hadîths, as we all know that no one has ever been able to give a final decision on the* khilâf *[controvers(ial)] questions that separate the*

four schools of law. So, leave it as it is. Take the draft as it has been written, let us remain vague."

The chairman has spoken. There is a sense of relief in the room. However, Yusuf Muhammad starts grumbling again. Quickly K.H. Zidny intervenes, murmuring the Fâtihah prayer, which officially closes all sessions without recourse. Everyone joins the short prayer for a few minutes, quickly followed by protests from Yusuf that Zidny had "no right" to call the prayer! K.H. Zidny answers Yusuf bluntly: *"Sometimes it is necessary [to take these rights]"*. General laughter follows this remark. Everyone stands up. Zidny, the conservative imam, whom Yusuf Muhammad himself had called ironically "Imam Zidny", had over one day become the champion of women's rights, and this with a sense of humor and a warmth widely unexpected.

The text was adopted at the working committee level, with only one delegate asking to have the text made pending, requiring more time to examine it. Both K.H. Cholil Bisri and K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, Wakil Rois Aam (Vice-President) of the Syuriah, asked that the text be maintained, as it had been agreed upon in the committee *ad hoc*. One objection came from the floor that the text should be more precise and make it clear that it is the men who are the head of the household ("as some women go to work keeping their smiles for the outside world and come home with a grim face"). K.H. Zidny answered that, if all such issues were to be mentioned, they would need to write a whole book rather than just one brief statement. At the plenary session that same night, the text was approved unanimously without a single question.

Miscellaneous Practical Religious Questions
*(*Masâ'il Dîniyyah Wâqi'iyyah*)*

In Komisi A, one of the hottest issues discussed was once again concerned with the rights of women. The *kiai* had to decide whether the Shi`ah institution of *kawin mut'ah*, or temporary marriage, was permissible. In practice, *kawin mut'ah* has, in recent years, become increasingly widely used as a device for legitimating freer sexual practice, particularly amongst students. Not surprisingly, it has been roundly condemned by many intellectuals as being unjustifiable and exploitative of women. Whilst for the men involved it can serve as a convenient justification for indulging their desires without the restrictions of commitment to a long-term relationship, it seldom serves the interest of women so well. Indeed, considering that, by defini-

tion, it takes place in the context of a strongly pious community, the woman, at the very least, stands to suffer serious damage to her reputation and her long-term chances for permanent marriage having, in the eyes of broader society, lost her virginity outside of marriage. Moreover, she faces a not insignificant risk of being infected with sexual disease and of having an unwanted pregnancy. Further exacerbating the potential for exploitation is the fact that very often the man enjoys a much more "powerful" position in the community, for example as a teacher, popular preacher or well-regarded activist, than his temporary partner, who is often a junior student with few social connections. Finally, the fact that sometimes the man is already married means that the institution can serve to exploit not just unmarried women but also married women in much the same way as the taking of mistresses does.

Unlike Komisi B, Komisi A was well attended by Muslimat delegates. Evidently the *kawin mut'ah* issue was one they felt very strongly about. During the discussion, for example, one RMI woman delegate, in an effort to indicate her abhorrence of *kawin mut'ah*, said she was ready to be made a second wife (*dipoligami*) "if she proved unable to give her husband what he expected". Meaning that even this was preferable to having him philander under the guise of *kawin mut'ah*. Her statement was met with loud applause from the men. Later, a Fatayat delegate who was also present in the Komisi B discussion said she was unhappy that women should have to resort to choosing the lesser evil, as she herself was strongly opposed not just to *kawin mut'ah* but also to polygamy.

Among the women delegates, there was no clear agreement as to where women's tolerance of male weaknesses should stop. Interestingly, the fact that *kawin mut'ah*, with the possible exception of the first generation of Muslims, has only been accepted in Shi`ah circles (and even there only in particular circumstances), did not in itself provoke a major outcry at this national gathering of the world's largest traditionalist Sunni organization. That is to say, the Shi`ah origin of the institution did not seem to represent automatic grounds for its rejection. Rather, the focus was upon whether or not it could be justified according to Sunni jurisprudence, reflecting the flexible and accommodating stance of NU traditionalism. Finally, however, the opponents of *kawin mut'ah* won the day when the commission decided that "according to the *ulama ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah*, especially the four madhhab, the institution of temporary marriage, *kawin*

mut'ah, is forbidden, is unauthentic and is to be rejected (*tidak sah dan harus dibatal*)."

A somewhat less important, but interesting, question discussed in Komisi A was whether or not trading in letters of credit (*jual beli piutang*) was permissible according to Islamic law. What was interesting about this issue was the way in which it was handled. The scholarly discourse in the commission drew from all four main *madhhab*s, or schools, of Sunni jurisprudence, without giving primacy to the Shâfi'î *madhhab*, even though NU has traditionally been very much a Shâfi'î organization. Whilst NU has always taken a somewhat flexible approach to Islamic scholarship, in recent years NU *ulama* have become significantly more open to a diverse range of scholarly sources and opinions. Not only are many *ulama*, especially younger *ulama*, looking for inspiration from the other three orthodox *madhhab*, they have also been profoundly influenced by the ideas of Islamic Modernism and neo-Modernism. The official scholarly formulation set forth in Komisi B on this occasion, however, functions as an important milestone. The event is reminiscent of K.H. Achmad Siddiq's introduction a decade earlier of the concept of *tajdîd* into the formal discourse of NU *ulama* which supplied a new high-water mark.[20]

It is very likely that many outside of NU will see these innovations as nothing more than minor points of debate in an arcane, inhouse, theological discourse. In some respects they may have a point, but the ramifications of these changes are considerable. Culturally, NU is quintessentially a *jam'iah diniyah*, a religious organization. Its backbone is its network of autonomous *pesantren* and *ulama*, and for them such theological discussions are neither arcane nor esoteric. Changes in approaches to theological questions are accompanied by changes in attitude and have important consequences in determining social and political behavior.

There were a number of decisions made at the Lombok Munas that illustrate the flexible adaptation to the demands of modernity now shown by NU *ulama*. Although only a couple of these have direct application to political issues, it is interesting to see the way in which these traditionalist *ulama* grappled with the practical challenges of modernity. For example, Komisi B decided that intellectual copyright must be fully recognized, that it is permissible, although not recommended, for somebody to marry an AIDS patient, that the use of insulin is allowable, but that euthanasia is not

allowable. The first issue may not appear terribly consequential but at least it demonstrates an appreciation of contemporary issues. Indeed, given that an increasing number of NU people are writing articles and publishing books, the issue of copyright does have some relevance to the organization. The issue of marrying an AIDS patient even more graphically illustrates the fact that these *ulama* have an appreciation of the practical issues facing people in the modern world. Another example of this is the question of euthanasia. The rejection of euthanasia as a permissible option for believers is hardly surprising as the sanctity of life and the sovereign authority of God over it are core values within Islam. On the other hand, the decision regarding the permissibility of using insulin indicates a willingness to put human needs ahead of narrow legalism wherever possible. Medical insulin supplies for diabetics are made using pig kidneys, as this has proven to be the only commercially viable way of producing medical insulin. Nevertheless, the *ulama* decided that since it was not possible to produce insulin from pure material (*dari bahan yang suci*), it was permissible to use insulin derived from pigs even though, of course, this would otherwise be considered *haram*. Another decision indicating a surprising degree of awareness of modern issues by the *ulama* was the decision to accept animal cloning. Curiously, a proviso was added, namely that the animals concerned must be clean, or *halal*. Evidently, the reasoning was that cloning should be allowed where it has the potential to increase food production.

As has been mentioned above, the Lombok meetings, both the Konbes and the Munas, were marked by a keen sense of concern about the economic and political difficulties facing the nation. Having just recently re-established working relations with the government, it is understandable that the participants were cautious about pushing the limits of political dissent. Nevertheless, both the expert presentations and related discussion, and the official "recommendations" implied significant criticism of current government policy. As was the case in the Konbes, in the Munas, some of the most vigorously discussed issues were those relating to social justice. For example, one of the recommendations was that the expropriation of land was not allowable without the consent of the person owning the land and the payment of a fair price. Land wrongly expropriated, the *ulama* ruled, was *haram*, even if used for religious purposes, such as for constructing a mosque. Given the track record of the Soeharto

government for expropriating land for a variety of frequently indulgent purposes in an unjust and exploitative fashion, this decision had considerable political repercussions.

Perhaps the most remarkable of all the recommendations from Komisi B however, was the decision that political demonstrations were allowable where they represented the only realistic means of addressing a problem and where they were peaceful and non-violent. In isolation, this is an interesting decision, but what makes it really significant is its political context. When the *ulama* came to their decision to accept political demonstrations as a means of last resort they were mindful that the coming months would see many NU members caught up in political demonstrations as the *reformasi* movement gathered pace. In a straightforward sense then, the decision had the effect of endorsing the practical participation of NU members in the *reformasi* movement.

Summary - Achievements of the Lombok Gathering

Whilst both the Munas and the Konbes were relatively subdued affairs, they were anything but insignificant events. They were important for several reasons, not least being the way in which they served to measure the level of support for the liberal reformist ideas being promoted by NU Executive Chairman Abdurrahman Wahid and other progressives over the previous thirteen years. In a general way, the Lombok gathering can be considered as a meeting that endorsed reformist ideas. More specifically, one can distinguish four main aspects of this attitude.

Firstly, the two meetings clearly subscribed to progressive religious thought. This was evident in the flexible and open approach that was shown in interpreting Islamic law, regarding the rights and role of women. Whilst the discussion in Komisi B appeared to have got off to a bad start it certainly ended well, though it also served as a reminder that many of the NU *ulama* remain reasonably conservative in their views. In any case, what was most significant was the final outcome of that commission, its formulation of recommendations which very clearly endorsed a liberal understanding of the role of women. The fact, however, that it could not decide on whether a woman could be head of state, but only a "leader" in general terms, may be an indication of conservatism, but probably just as much it represents the key role of political interests in decisions about what is "allowed" and what is not.

With regard to matters of social justice, the findings of the Munas and of Konbes were even clearer. The general discussion in the Konbes about the need for reform to achieve an equitable economic system, for example, implied a significant critique of the developmentalist policies of the Soeharto regime. Even clearer, however, were the findings of the Munas about the wrongful appropriation of land, and the endorsement of demonstrations to achieve political change.

Secondly, it was clear that the Lombok gathering supported the leadership of younger *ulama*, particularly in intellectual initiatives. Abdurrahman Wahid's reformist ideas were being operationalized and further developed by the generation of young *ulama* and activists. It was people such as Said Aqil and Masdar Mas'udi who led the way in these discussions, where Wahid's only contribution was now his blessing to their reforms. Thus, Wahid clearly stated to the press his approval that women could become presidents.

Thirdly, the meetings evidenced a clear support, if not complete understanding of, Abdurrahman's strategy in securing rapprochement with the Soeharto regime. Whilst there was still a sense of some underlying unease amongst activists about the measures taken, particularly their involvement of Tutut. The necessity of these actions, nevertheless, was generally well understood, particular by those in rural areas who had to deal with often difficult local administrations.

Finally, the Lombok gathering can be seen as representing a follow-up meeting to the *muktamar* in Cipasung three years earlier. And where in Cipasung Abdurrahman had won a narrow but significant victory, by the time of the Lombok gathering it was clear that his victory had been made complete. Not only had the earlier underlying criticism of the Chairman vanished, but it was replaced with a quiet sense of confidence about both Abdurrahman's leadership and about the organization's political future.

All in all then, the Lombok meetings made it clear that the thirteen years of leadership by Abdurrahman Wahid and his reform-minded colleagues had contributed to a remarkable transformation within NU. The liberal, progressive ideas pioneered by Abdurrahman had been adopted by many within the organization to the point where it had broadly permeated the organization's culture and thinking. This was true not only of younger activists, but was also generally true of the ulama, although, of course, it was generally the younger ulama who led way. And whilst it was clear that a conservative old-guard element remained within the organization, by the time of the

Lombok gathering they appeared well and truly outnumbered. All this meant that NU was better equipped than any time in its history to engage in the process of reform, not just in the religious sphere but also in politics and civil society more broadly. Whereas only fifteen years earlier NU had seemed locked into a slow decline as a conservative organization of increasingly less and less relevance, not just to broader society but even to its own youth, by the end of 1997 this tendency had been clearly reversed. Even though there has been evidence of a new conservatism in outer NU circles, which is best expressed in the popular appeal of *kawin mut'ah* and polygamy, the Lombok gathering revealed that NU has the substance to make a major contribution to liberal reform in Indonesia. In 1999 and beyond that substance will be put to the test.

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Endnotes

1. For consistency's sake, Indonesian spelling and usage is followed for Arabic derived terms commonly used in Indonesian. Unlike in Arabic, for example, in Indonesian the term *ulama* is both a singular and a plural noun.
2. *Panduan dan Pedoman Munas dan Konbes*, NU, 17-21 November 1997, NU papers p. 8.
3. *Laporan Pengurus Besar NU pada Konbes NU*, 17-21 November 1997, Lombok Tengah, Nusa Tenggara Barat, NU publication, p 18.
4. A Javanese honorary title for Islamic religious scholars, abbreviated "K." (the combined abbreviation "K.H." means "Kiai Haji").
5. For example, Habibie, as a senior government minister, was invited to the previous RMI national gathering, and he, in turn, invited ICMI-activists critical of Abdurrahman such as Adi Sasono, much to the bewilderment of Abdurahman's supporters. ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia – All-Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals) was founded in December 1990 and placed under the auspices of Dr B.J. Habibie (Hefner, 1993). Amien Rais, as Chairman of ICMI's Council of Experts, enjoyed a high profile and often acted as the organization's *de facto* spokesman
6. Critics of ICMI, such as Abdurrahman Wahid, argued that it was essentially a vehicle for Soeharto to coopt support from *santri*, or practicing, Muslims. More importantly, he also argued that ICMI was a potentially divisive organization that may have the effect of giving opportunity to fundamentalistic elements and encouraging sectarian sentiment. Many Modernists but relatively few traditionalist Muslims were persuaded to join ICMI. Abdurrahman's obstinate refusal to join ICMI, even in a nominal fashion, and his criticism of it contributed to the souring of relations between himself and Soeharto.
7. This comment was made in a conversation with Greg Barton at the PBNU office, Jakarta, in May 1997.
8. Abdurrahman introduced Tutut as being 'somebody who was likely to play an important role in the future and, therefore, someone whom it was appropriate that NU should get to know'.
9. "Kita tidak ingin menganggu kesibukan para pejabat tinggi pemerintah dalam mempersiapkan kesuksesan Sidang Umum MPR", in *Hasil-hasil Musyawarah Nasional alim Ulama dan Konperensi Besar Nahdlatul Ulama*, published by Sekretariat Jendral PBNU dan Lajnah Ta'lif Wan Nasir Nahdlatul Ulama, Jakarta, January 1998, p. 114.
10. More than once the rhetorical question was posed: "Does this sort of thing ever happen at a Muhammadiyah gathering?!" The Muhammadiyah is the main Muslim reformist organization of the country, often contrasted with the "traditionalist" NU.
11. A new NU headquarters was also to be built but there were no details regarding the source of the funding.
12. The term 'substantialist' was coined by Bahtiar Effendy and also adopted by William Liddle. It denotes the attitude that considers the substance or fundamental values of a religion more important than its formal aspects (Effendy, 1995 and Liddle, 1994).
13. *Hasil-hasil*, p. 101.
14. "mengambil hak dan harta orang lain".

15. "gamble 'yang mengandung gharar atau ikhtisar'".
16. Fatayat is one of three women's organizations within NU, each aimed at different age groups. Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama is the organization of young women, until 40 years of age, Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama is for the older generation of women and the Ikatan Putri-Putri Nahdlatul Ulama (IPPNU) is an organization of female students.
17. K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari [Hasjim Asj'ari] was one of the founders and early leaders of NU and was the grandfather of Abdurrahman Wahid.
18. The two observers were Andrée Feillard, one of the authors of this article, and a young student who introduced himself as a Muhammadiyah activist.
19. The complete text of this draft is given as an appendix at the end of this article.
20. At the Munas of Cilacap, in November 1987 (see Feillard, 1995, p. 278-81). Ten years earlier, Kiai Siddiq cautiously introduced the practice of *ijtihâd* in his brief, but influential monograph, *Khittah Nahdliyah* (The NU Charter), published in 1979 (see Barton, 1996b, pp. 118-20, 22.).
21. The original text is in Indonesian with Qur'ân and Hadîth quotations and şome other phrases in Arabic. In this annex the Indonesian text is given in English translation, the Arabic one in the original Arabic followed by the English translation in square brackets. Small mistakes and inconsistencies in punctuation etc. in this partly handwritten draft document have been corrected.
22. This is the correct version of the well-known hadîth. The original document mentions a fourth time "He asked: 'Who next?' He said: 'Your mother.'", but this seems to be a simple mistake due to hasty drafting.

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Appendix

Draft Recommendation on the Position of Women in Islam

Decision of the National Ulama Conference
Number: ... MN-NU/11/1997

on

The Position of Women in Islam
مكانت المرءة فى الاسلامى

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
[In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful]

FOREWORD:

Women in Islam have been given a noble place, contrary to the allegation of some people that Islam has placed women in a subordinate position in the order of social life. The worthy position of women has been confirmed by many hadith, including:

1. Paradise is under the feet of the mothers.

الجنة تحت أقدام الامهات (الحديث)

2. And a man came to the Prophet –God's blessing and peace be upon him– and said [asked]: "Who is the most entitled of all people to my companionship?" He [the Prophet] said: "Your mother." He asked: "Who next?" He said: "Your mother." He asked: "Who next?" He said: "Your mother." He asked: "Who next?" He said: "Your father." (report of al-Bukhârî and Muslim).

وجاء رجل الى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال: (من أحق الناس بصحبتي؟ قال: أمك قال ثم من؟ قال: أمك قال: ثم من ؟ قال أمك قال : ثم من ؟ قال: أمك قال ثم من ؟ قال : أبوك. رواه البخاري ومسلم)

Islam gives women the same rights as men to serve religion, the country, the people and the nation. This is confirmed by the Qur'an and the Hadith, including as follows:

1. And he that works a righteous deed, whether man or woman, and is a believer, such will enter Paradise. (al-Ayah)

من عمل صالحا من ذكر وأنثى وهو مؤمن فأولئك يدخلون الجنة (الأية)

2. And their Lord has responded them: "I shall never be unmindful of the work of any of you, whether man or woman. You belong to each other." (Surah âli `Imrân: 195)

فاستجاب لهم ربهم أني لا أضيع عمل عامل منكم من ذكر وأنثى بعضكم من بعض – آل عمران: ١٩٥

3. And he that works a righteous deed, whether man or woman, and is a believer, such will we make live a good life. (Surah al-Nahl: 95)

من عمل صالحا من ذكر أو أنثى وهو مؤمن فلنحيينه حياة طيبة – النحل: ٩٧

4. For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for patient men and women, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who often remember God, for them God has prepared forgiveness and great reward.

إن المسلمين والمسلمات والمؤمنين والمؤمنات والقانتين والقانتات والصادقين والصادقات والصابرين والصابرات والخاضعين والخاشعين والمتصدقين والمتصدقات والصائمين والصائمات والحافظين فروجهم والحافظات والذاكرين الله كثيرا والذاكرات أعد الله لهم مغفرة وأجرا عظيما

5. Women are the other halves of men. (reported by Ahmad, Abû Dâwûd and al-Tirmidhî)

إنما النساء شقائف الرجال (رواه أحمد وأبو داود والترمذى)

6. People are equal like the teeth of a comb. (hadith)

الناس سواسة كأسنان المشط (الحديث)

The verses and the hadiths cited above represent the reality of Islam's recognition of women's rights in general and the noble blessings given to women by Allah.

The problems that have emerged over time have arisen because, although Islam is based on the recognition of equality of men and women on some points, in reality, the principles of Islam concerning women have experienced distortions. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that many people still try to avoid or circumvent the superior qualities bequeathed to women by Allah.

The influence of culture, which is still patrilineal, and the fact that men, (because of social and cultural conditions) have enjoyed a certain superiority compared to women, have all in turn belittled the principles of women's noble position which has been ignored. Because of this, in the midst of changes occurring all around the world, which demand a return of women's rights, Muslims need to reconsider and reexamine opinions concerning the inferiority of women because of cultural distortions, based on the principle of the worthy position given to women in Islam.

It must be recognized that some male functions are linked to natural physical differences, while with respect to the roles in society not affected by these physical difference, men and women alike have to bear common responsibilities and have to help one another. As God says:

والمؤمنون والمؤمنات بعضهم أولياء بعض يأمرون بالمعروف وينهون عن المنكر (التوبة ٧١)

And the believers, men and women, are protectors of each other. They enjoin what is just en forbid what is evil. (Surah al-Taubah: 71)

The domestic role of women: it is linked to the uniqueness of women's nature, such as her role as the main educator of her children, giving birth, breastfeeding, and other functions that cannot be taken over by men: God says:

يهب لمن يشاء إناثا ويهب لمن يشاء الذكور (سورة الشورى: ٤٩)

He offers to whom He wishes male {children} and He offers to whom He wishes female {children} (Surah al-Taubah: 49)

Islam has regulated the rights and obligations of women in family life, which have to be accepted and conformed to by both men and women.

But concerning the public role of women, women as members of society, women as citizens who have the right to take part in the nation and to participate in politics, this role demands that women take up a firmer, transparent and protected social role.

With respect to women's public role, according to Islamic principles, a woman has the right to play this role, as long as she is deemed capable of it, and as long as she possesses the abilities to take up this social and political role.

In other words, the position of women in the process of nation-building is wide open in this plural society, keeping in mind that quality, ability, capability and acceptability have to be prerequisites, without forgetting also the fact that a woman's unique natural physical attributes can not be overlooked.

The participation of women in the public sector is the realization of NU's responsibility in bringing about cultural transformation and equality, that in turn will become a dynamizing factor for economic development in an era of globalization, through the empowerment of women in the right proportion.

Praya, West Nusa Tenggara,
18 Rajab 1418/19 November 1997
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حقوق الطبع محفوظة .

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قيمة الاشتراك السنوى فى اندونيسيا :
لسنة واحدة (٤ أعداد) : ٤٠.٠٠٠ روبية (٢٠ دولارا امريكيا)
لسنتين (٨ أعداد) : ٧٠.٠٠٠ روبية (٣٥ دولارا امريكيا)
قيمة العدد الواحد : ١٠.٠٠٠ روبية (٥ دولارات امريكية)
وفى البلدان الاخرى يضاف الى قيمة العدد مبلغ ١٠.٠٠٠روبية (٥ دولارات) للارسال بالبريد الجوى . اما الارسال بوسائل خاصة فيرجى قبل ذلك الاتصال بالمجلة .

للاشتراكات وفى حالة تغيير العناوين يرجى الاتصال كتابيا بقسم التوزيع مجلة ستوديا اسلاميكا.

طباعة :
INIS, JAKARTA, INDONESIA

ستوديا إسلاميكا

مجلة إندونيسية للدراسات الإسلامية

السنة التاسع، العدد ١، ١٩٩٩

هيئة الإشراف على التحرير:

هارون ناسوتيون

مسطوحوه

قريش شهاب

عبد العزيز دحلان

محمد ساتريا أفندى

محمد يونان يوسف

مسلم ناسوتيون

قمر الدين هداية

دين شمس الدين

واهب معطى

نبيلة لوبيس

رئيس التحرير:

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المحررون:

سيف المزانى

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على منحنف

سكريتير التحرير:

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تصميم ومراجعة اللغة الإنجليزية:

دونل فوتير

تصميم ومراجعة اللغة العربية:

نورصمد

تصميم الغلاف:

س. برنكا

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