



Submission No 96

Inquiry into Australia's Relations with Indonesia

Organisation: Johns Hopkins University
Southeast Asian Studies Program\
School of Advanced International Studies

Contact Person: Dr Greg Fealy, Visiting Professor

Address: 1619 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington DC

Question from committee member Mr Snowden, taken on notice.

What sort of overriding influence do the leadership of Muhammadiyah and NU have over their membership and over, say, imams in mosques in regional communities where communications in terms of mass media may be questionable and where literacy levels may be questionable so that access to alternative sources of information is very difficult?

How do these structures of communication affect perceptions of what Australia might or might not do in relation to Iraq?

Response from Dr Greg Fealy to a modified version of this question.

There is quite a diverse range of opinion within both NU and Muhammadiyah, not surprising given that the claimed membership of both organisations exceeds 60 million. In general, NU has been the more moderate and tolerant of the two; Muhammadiyah members tend to be more puritanical in their approach to religion and historically, has been less interested in interfaith dialogue and cooperation. But each organisation has its hardliners (far more numerous in Muhammadiyah). Muhammadiyah happens to have an exemplary moderate as its chairman at the moment, Syafii Maarif, but his views don't always reflect the attitudes of the membership or his own board. His main rival is Din Syamsuddin, who is much more Islamist. NU's leader Hasyim Muzadi is a pragmatic moderate but his views reflect those of the majority of the NU leadership.

But none of these things can be put neatly into 'moderate' or 'radical' categories. Syafii described George Bush as a war criminal yesterday (17/3/03) and he also spoke in support of the accused JI leader, Abubakar Ba'asyir. Din Syamsuddin backs interfaith dialogue in between occasional sectarian remarks. Amien Rais, a former Muhammadiyah chairman and the current speaker of Indonesia's paramount People's Consultative Assembly has been both a eloquent champion of reform and religious tolerance as well as a bigot given to anti-Semitic, anti-Western and anti-Chinese remarks. The whole moderate versus radical dichotomy is very much overdrawn. People veer between positions.

As for the attitudes of ulama in rural pesantren, most are 'moderates' and usually have pretty good relations with other religious communities in their locality. Most would support the religiously neutral Pancasila as the state ideology, also. But of course, there are a small minority which espouse very harsh versions of the faith (such as promoting Salafi Wahhabism). The impression of some that centres of Islamic education are awash with firebrand Saudi preachers bearing funds and weapons is grossly exaggerated. Such doctrines have only very limited appeal in Indonesia.

Dr Greg Fealy
Visiting Professor
Southeast Asian Studies Program
School of Advanced International Studies
Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Ave NW

Washington DC 20036-2213

Ph: (202) 663 5721

Fax: (202) 663 7711

Email: gjfealy@aol.com