Examining the Potential of Local Interfaith Institution in Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Indonesia: The Case of Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama)* of Ambon

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Abstract: The local government of Ambon has been actively engaged with Ambon post-conflict reconstruction and immensely addressed the residual issues of the conflict. However, some issues still define the society of Ambon, particularly socio-spatial segregation and lack of trust. Unfortunately, the government has put excessively focus on economic development and access. Inter-religious cooperation and synergy are absolutely needed to cope with socio-spatial segregation and lack of trust in post-conflict Ambon. In this sense, organizations from different religious background can work together, build a collective platform, and produce more joint work. The Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama)* has been strongly identified as a particularly well positioned organization to play the role, given its formal links to the government and influential membership, while mandated to work with communities at large. Since the Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama)* is a multireligious organization, it has the ideal starting point for providing an example for other organizations and bringing groups together as well as working with all. However, it is also true that dialogue and conflict resolution capacity building will unquestionably help the Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama)* effectively plays its expected role of independently preventing and resolving conflict in Ambon.

1   INTRODUCTION

In January 1999, violent conflict broke out in Maluku and made Ambon the theatre of the most intense violence in Indonesia since the anti-communist pogroms of 1965/66 (Klinken, 2007). It received widespread international attention due to its scale, and came to be considered a concern for national security. The conflict claimed almost 5,000 lives and displaced a third of the population in Maluku and North Maluku. The outbreak of conflict can be attributed to a combination of underlying factors that coincided with specific triggers.

In February 2002, Jusuf Kalla, the coordinating minister of social welfare, succeeded in bringing The violence in Maluku decreased rapidly with the groups together over a peace agreement. He had asked the Maluku governor to pick one representative from each religious group, who again selected members for their negotiating teams. The two teams, which included 35 representatives from each side, were isolated in a secluded spot in Malino for three days, and produced an agreement to end the violence, known as the Malino II Peace Agreement. The Agreement marked the official end of the conflict. It comprised eleven points that called, among others, for the halting of every form of violence; return of internally displaced people (IDPs); the establishment of an investigation team; restriction on separatism; and the implementation of post-conflict rehabilitation measures.

The *Malino II* Agreement. The peace accord did not prevent outbreaks of violence, however. (Klinken, 2007) From 2002-2014, a total of 12 incidents took the death toll of 1600 down to less than 200. (NVMS) Small incidences of communal violence sporadically broke out such as between Hila and Waitomo, both considered Muslim villages, in February 2015. The latter initially started when a Waitomo resident stabbed a youth from Hila causing eight houses burnt down and a few other houses ruined. In most cases, the violence was quickly contained, but from time to time, larger incidences have taken place. Major

violent incidences occurred on 24 April 2004, 11 September 2011 and later on 15 May 2012(Ansori et al., 2014).
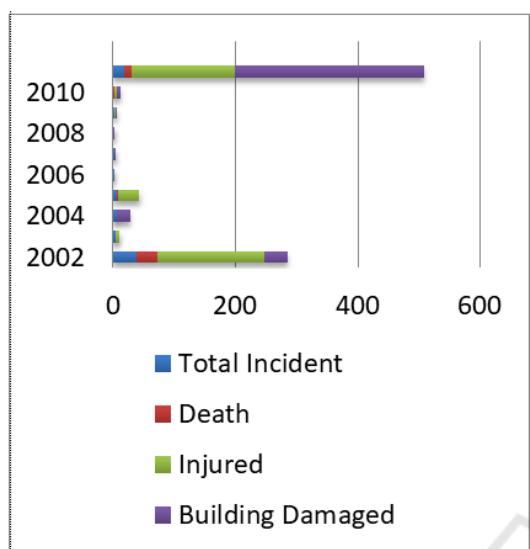

Figure 1: Incident of Violent Conflict between Religions in Ambon (2002-2011)

The new level of hostility and distrust is to a large extent attributed to the local government's approach to addressing the problems of the IDPs following the end of the conflict. Three options were offered to the IDPs: return to their place of origin; relocation; and continue to live in the IDPs resettled areas(Ansori et al., 2014). Relocation was the option preferred by most IDPs, fearing the status as a minority in the place of origin under conditions of existing resentment, being combined of an absence, real or perceived, of security guarantees upon their return. In choosing the relocation sites, the IDPs tended to choose areas near or around communities that share their religious identity, as this provided a sense of safety and security. All these factors further unintentionally make post-conflict segregation in Ambon.

Despite the many issues highlighted above, the situation in Ambon as regards religious tensions, stigmatization and conflict vulnerability has become a bit better over the last years. Both Ambon government officials, Members of Parliament and a LAIM representative, highlighted in interviews that the people of Maluku were increasingly less prone to be influenced by unfounded provocations attempting to appeal to religious tensions (Ansori et al., 2014). Over the course of the years, Ambon has managed to move in a somewhat positive direction when it comes to post-conflict social interaction. As mentioned by Ansori et al. (2014), although post conflict segregation is still a defining characteristic of Ambon

society, in certain areas, for example Batu Merah that is perceived as an Islamic area (*Salam*) and Karang Panjang as a Christian area (*Sarani*), segregation patterns do not necessarily menace the social interaction between groups. Despite some positive developments, the society and its unfinished business of trauma healing and the lack of trust is still a defining characteristic of the relationship between the Christians and Muslim, as underscored by the lack of interaction and communication between the two religious communities.

To prevent the risk of small incidences like youth fighting and traffic accidents to escalate into larger conflicts, some of the underlying problems, tensions and trauma must be addressed. Interventions should strive to contribute to develop engagement and harmonious relationships between local people from different groups and between indigenous groups and migrants, especially in urban areas; address the lack of trust and suspicion that exist between different community groups.

The religious leaders in Ambon are key peace drivers due to their affiliation not only to other government officials but also with various prayers groups within their own communities. These religious leaders are usually mobile and provide sermons to different groups. The participation of religious leaders in efforts to maintain harmony and prevent any further violence or conflict is a necessity given the above-illustrated strategic position in the society. The cooperation between these religious leaders of different religions is important to foster interfaith and inter-community communication and interaction. One of the strategic and influential organizations in particular represents an important opportunity in this regard is the FKUB.

A qualitative approach is selected for this research since the problem characteristic of the research requires a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative-extensive one. The data are primarily drawn from open-ended interviews with, local NGOs, academicians, local leaders, religious leaders, the elites of FKUB, and security officers. In addition to the primary sources, many secondary sources were also employed for this study, including academic publications, public records, governmental documents and local and national newspapers and magazines. The entire informants were purposively and snowball-based selected strategies of non-probability sampling strategy. Purposive qualitative sampling provides me with the expected informants for the study (e.g. Stener Kvale & Svend Brinkmann 2009, 179; Kathy Charmaz, 2006; Jhon Creswell, 1994, 148; Michael Patton, 2002).

In addition to the primary sources, I used many secondary sources, including academic publications, public records, governmental documents, and local and national newspapers and magazines. Combining secondary analysis of research data with primary one provides additional comparative or collateral evidence using different sources of data (Janet Heaton, 2004). Alternatively, it could be used for cross-validation in support of the analysis of other types of data. The mixed analysis of interviewing and document is particularly intended to hinder the vulnerability to errors linked to one particular method (e.g. Sally Thorne, 1994; Michael Patton, 2002).

2 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DYNAMIC OF CONFLICT IN MALUKU

In January 1999, violent conflict broke out in Maluku and made Ambon the theatre of the most intense violence in Indonesia since the anti-communist pogroms of 1965/66. It received widespread international attention due to its scale, and came to be considered a concern for national security. The conflict claimed almost 5,000 lives and displaced a third of the population in Maluku and North Maluku. The outbreak of conflict can be attributed to a combination of underlying factors that coincided with specific triggers.

As far as underlying causes are concerned, the relationship between Muslim and Christian communities had grown increasingly tense as a result of the advancement of the Muslim groups in education, influence and skills, relative to historical circumstances. The Christian groups who were used to having more representation in e.g. the bureaucracy, perceived it as slowly marginalizing them when in 1992, Jakarta appointed a Muslim, Akib Latuconsina. When former President Soeharto appointed another Muslim, Saleh Latuconsina, as governor in 1997, suspicion between the communities peaked. As the governor proceeded to chose Muslims as his deputy and provincial secretary, leaving the Christians unrepresented in the top leadership in the province, rumours emerged about possible open conflict between groups. Tensions escalated, and violence erupted during the Muslim Eid holiday in January 1999.

In February 2002, Jusuf Kalla, then coordinating minister of social welfare, succeeded in bringing the groups together over a peace agreement. He had asked the Maluku governor to pick one representative from each religious group, who again selected members for their negotiating teams. The two teams, which included 35 representatives from each side, were isolated in a secluded spot in Malino for three days, and produced an agreement to end the violence, known as the Malino II Peace Agreement. The Agreement marked the official end of the conflict. It comprised eleven points that called, among others, for the halting of every form of violence; return of internally displaced people (IDPs); the establishment of an investigation team; restriction on separatism; and the implementation of post-conflict rehabilitation measures.

It took the Government of Indonesia (GoI) some time to address the situation, and it only started doing so in June 2002, when Megawati formed the National Independent Investigation Team for the Maluku Conflict. The task of this team was to bring closure to the conflict through fact finding and investigation of violence and human rights violations. It was supposed to be a key step in conflict transformation. The Investigation Team submitted their findings to Megawati, but their findings were never made public.

The violence in Maluku decreased rapidly with the *Malino II* Agreement. The peace accord did not prevent outbreaks of violence, however. From 2002-2014, a total of 12 incidents took the death toll of 1600 down to less than 200. Small incidences of communal violence sporadically broke out such as between Hila and Waitomo, both considered Muslim villages, in February 2015. The latter initially started when a Waitomo resident stabbed a youth from Hila causing eight houses burnt down and a few other houses ruined. In most cases, the violence was quickly contained, but from time to time, larger incidences have taken place. Major violent incidences occurred on 24 April 2004, 11 September 2011 and 15 May 2012.

In Ambon itself, NVMS traced the reasons for violence and categorized this into three different types: the issue of separatism, identity based violence and others. In the period 2002 – 2004, identity-based violence was the highest in terms of incidents, death, injured and infrastructure damages. Religion, as one of many identities an individual can hold within a community, is included in this category. There has been many efforts of intervention in the post-conflict period, but there are still fundamental problem unresolved.

Segregation between Christian and Muslim communities is a defining characteristic of Ambon Municipality today. As noted above, segregation with the Christians and Muslims residents living separately dates back to the Dutch occupation. The

reality of the current segregation, however, is that the level of disengagement and distrust of the different faith of the community is a lot worse than before. It is widely held that this distrust has become strongly entrenched in the mind set of individuals due to the trauma from the 1999 conflict. In the university, for example, tensions between Poka and Rumah Tiga, are manifested through segregated rental room residences. There is also politicization of key position within the university (Pattimura University (UNPATTI).

The new level of hostility and distrust is to a large extent attributed to the local government's approach to addressing the problems of the IDPs following the end of the conflict. Three options were offered to the IDPs: return to their place of origin; relocation; and continue to live in the IDPs resettled areas. Relocation was the option preferred by most IDPs, fearing the status as a minority in the place of origin under conditions of existing resentment, being combined of an absence, real or perceived, of security guarantees upon their return. Several practical issues also contributed to making the return to the place of origin difficult, such as the lack of land certification to prove ownership of residence that could have enabled them to return to their homes.

In choosing the relocation sites, the IDPs tended to choose areas near or around communities that share their religious identity, as this provided a sense of safety and security. The government did not regulate these decisions. In the absence of consistent and focused efforts at recovery process to rebuild relationship, communication and create better atmosphere between the religious communities, the reinforced segregation gives rise to negative peace and provides potential for escalation of conflict.

One of the telling manifestations of the existing distrust between the communities is the occurrence of some particularly violent cases in the post Malino 2 period. Seemingly minor incidences quickly blew up and caused many deaths, injured people and damaged buildings. The cases include violence on 25 April 2004, 11 September 2011 and 15 May 2012. The most serious one is the September 11, 2011, incident.

With regards to the former, it is generally assumed that the incident was triggered by a misunderstanding by a Waihaong taxi motorcycle driver in a minor traffic- accident. It quickly turned into a major incident, involving both communities, causing 3 deaths and around 90 injured people. Similarly, on May 15, 2012, a small incident occurred at the celebration of national hero of Maluku, Pattimura, escalating to cause the destruction of 3 houses and 5

motorcycles, 34 people to be hospitalized and 44 people to receive treatment.

Although the major conflict that have occurred over the last years have sprung out of minor incidences, research has shown that they are by many in Ambon regarded as a result of provocation by particular parties. The handling of sensitive issues and use of religious symbols became triggers for conflict and for making the communities clash. As cited in Ansori et al., (2014, p. 88), some respondents affirmed that one of the conflict push factors was provocation, "Outside all the debates, provocations really become the trigger of the 1999 conflict, and in some accidents, of post-conflict violence." As for the case of September 11, 2011 incident, where a Muslim was killed by a Christian in a traffic accident, it caused suspicion and assumption among the community groups, leading the case to escalate into grave violence. Fortunately, measures to handle the conflict were taken right by relevant stakeholders both from city and provincial levels. However, the case remains unsolved until today, causing people to question law enforcement and the legal process, which later has triggered social unrest within Ambon society. Similarly, with the December 15 2011 case were there was a death of a public van's driver with destination to Kudamati, the investigation has been going on for years without results or identification of an assassin.

The lack of results in producing justice for the above-mentioned incidences nurture the existing distrust between local people and local government; in this case the police forces. At a practical level, it has affected the transportation routes, as drivers and owners of Kudamati-destination public vans prefer to avoid Waihaong street until the police succeed in resolving the case (Ansori, at al., 2014: 94 – 96). Another important evidence of the vividly existing distrust between the communities is the fact that some people feel uncomfortable and insecure to come to certain areas of different community, especially at night (Ansori, at al., 2014: 81-85). Violent conflict has also several times occurred in the border of the segregated communities, where Muslim and Christian are in relatively intense contact and communication (Ibid., 94-96).

The lack of trust leaves the communities in Maluku prone to provocation based on religious factors. This is especially a risk during election time. In the Ambon context, local election are important as not only for choosing regular political representation, but as they determine the distribution of religious representation and power. Elections thus become a crucial event, where people can easily get provoked

and mobilized by small triggers. During recent elections, there has been some provocative SMS circulated, based on religion issues. In addition to SMS provocations, during the local elections, especially the Governor elections, there was a mushrooming of forums based on family ties and ethnicity in particular areas. These forums were usually mobilized by governor candidates to voice their interests and to attack their political rivals, based on identify factors. A Muslim Chairperson of an NGO in Ambon, recounted the attempts of civil society and NGOs to remind each other to stay vigilant and to not be prone to any provocative attempts (Ansori et al., 2014).

In current Ambon society, research also showed that a fair amount of stigmatization of the other religious group exists. Muslim people are often stigmatized as *Laskar Jihad* or Jihadist and Christian people as South Maluku Republic (RMS-*Republik Maluku Selatan*) (Ansori, et al. 2015). One comes across naming of the other group, and some areas in Muslim and Christian dominated parts of Ambon are still seen as very dangerous by the other groups.

3 FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY (FORUM KERUKUNAN UMAT BERAGAMA): A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As the only Government affiliated institution in Maluku, FKUB represents a significant opportunity for several reasons. The study mainly shows that the FKUB as an interlocutor for the project both due to its potential and its needs. That is, the study mainly examines the mandate and role of the FKUB, how it interacts and connects to other actors, some organizational challenges and opportunities for strengthening its role and contributions to peace-building.

The FKUB was established in 2006 by a joint regulation from the ministries of Religious Affairs and Home Affairs. The regulation sets out the objectives and the mandate of the FKUB, and stipulates that it should be operating at the province and district levels. Local organizations were established in many provinces and districts, including in Ambon. The FKUB's mandate is to provide a regional interfaith dialogue umbrella at the province and district levels of government. Its role is to conduct dialogue among religious and community leaders; to work with religious and community based organizations and ensure their aspirations are captured as policy submissions to the local government and to conduct capacity building for communities. This forum is also mandated to conduct outreach programs on the government's law and regulations concerning religious harmony; and finally, to provide capacity building for the community. The objective is to encourage interfaith ties and harmony.

The members of FKUB are to be suggested by the people and selected by the government at each respective level of the province or district. The FKUB may be composed of up to 21 members at the provincial level and 17 at the district level. All existing religions at the province or districts/township level should be represented. In FKUB Maluku, due to the mobilization and individual circumstances, at present only counts 12 active members. Interviews highlighted that generally, the head of religious groups appointed members and the names were submitted to the Governor or the District Head/Mayor who issues the letter of appointment.

Funding is a key challenge for the FKUB. According to FKUB in Maluku, the organization received an amount of 200 million rupiah for 2015.These funds are said to only cover office and operational costs, and there is a shortage of funding for programs and activities. The FKUB stated they were not allowed to conduct their own independent fundraising, is seen as a challenge. Maluku, as a province of islands, inevitably needs more funding in operating their work if FKUB is expected to get into the remote districts. The local government's limited allocation could be an indication of the lack of political will to support FKUB in their peace building effort. Regardless, being a government affiliated organization, changes of government can potentially impact on FKUB's program and sustainability.

Despite the FKUB being authorized to be composed of 21 members, there are only 12 active members, and the Maluku FKUB is significantly short of their mandated membership. An active member of FKUB Maluku claimed that he was not informed or consulted about his recruitment process. He was given a letter of appointment from the Maluku Governor without any due process.

4 EXAMINING THE POTENTIAL OF FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY (FORUM KERUKUNAN UMAT BERAGAMA) IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION IN AMBON

The FKUB and interviewees expressed that there is significant missed opportunity with the FKUB. Based on its official mandate, if it were to function to its expected capacity, it would be a robust association or forum that made a significant contribution to peace building and conflict prevention. As the FKUB forms part of the hierarchy of the Indonesian government also comes with expectations for it to be a body that can perform as a bank of solutions to interfaith and communal conflicts.

Although the FKUB was established in Maluku in 2008 and is now in its seventh year of operations, the impact of their work has not been felt by the general public. As FKUB's mandate include capacity building for the community and conducting public outreach, it is necessary to first establish relationship with other actors. This is the key if it is to serve as a strategic body to accommodate the aspirations of the stakeholders from the three level groups (elite, middle level and the grassroots) in Maluku society. The FKUB is also well placed to identify and drive synergy and interaction between the formal interfaith institutions in Ambon and Maluku and the informal and private interfaith institutions that may need support for their united movements. It should assist Maluku society shift from the current negative peace to a positive peace setting. In order for it to work, it needs to strengthen relations with actors at all levels, and enhance its capacity in a targeted areas.

It is more likely that the public at all levels is not aware of the role of the FKUB. There is a need and the opportunity to conduct public outreach to raise awareness of the role and mandate of the FKUB. As an institution funded under the government, it is expected that it could at least play an exemplary role for other interfaith groups. In order for the FKUB to function effectively, there is a need for making FKUB's presence known to the public and for relationship building with other relevant religious and interfaith stakeholders. Currently, FKUB has yet to perform its coordination role and is limited to networking within the elite circles. Due to the lack of association and coordination between the lower vertical levels, information disseminations and

outreach activities as stated per FKUB's mandate are yet to be implemented.

The FKUB could engage with all groups, and perhaps specifically the middle level group. As set out above, embracing the middle level group can minimize the association or engagement gap. By specifically targeting the middle level groups, actors that are influential could come to participate actively, gain ownership of peace building through the process. They could also be important in providing access for the grassroots to information, knowledge gathering, developing skills in peace building and conflict prevention. The FKUB should also work with mews media as part of the middle-level group to disseminate information regarding FKUB's vision, mission and efforts to implement its mandate and support peace (Figure 2).

As an institution formed and funded by the government, FKUB Maluku Province and Ambon City showed awareness of their mission and vision. FKUB members intended to fulfill the expectations; however, the need for a tailor made strategy and an implementable work program was recognized.
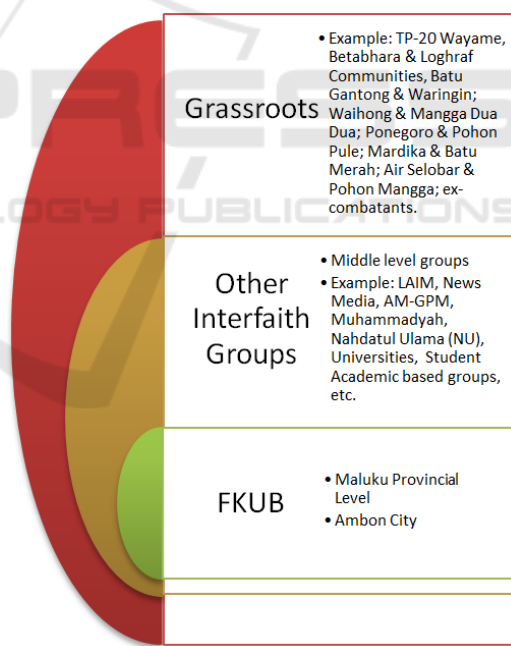

Figure 2: Different Levels of Cooperation FKUB Needs to Maintain

FKUB as mandated by the Government of Indonesia is not equipped with a detailed term of references to guide the members in conducting their day-to-day work. The Joint Minister Regulation No. 9 & 8/2006 was the only legal document to guide their work; however, it is insufficient as guidance on

operational and implementation aspects.

For the Provincial FKUB in Maluku, formed by the Governor of Maluku, members that are known to the public for their leadership roles in other public activities have been recruited. This is not seen to be the case with the Ambon City FKUB members. In the shadow of the provincial level, there is considered to be significant missed opportunity in the functioning of the Ambon City FKUB. It has not been utilized as it should in Maluku peace building's effort. One interviewee expressed that the establishment of the FKUB seems like more of a formality and to check a box than to meet any real objectives. It has not been turned into a forum with a significant role in sustainable peace building for Maluku. At best, the FKUB has been given the role and resources to be a firefighter and reactive only when there is a conflict, when it should be working to prevent and preempt.

A couple of types of building capacity efforts that would benefit the FKUB in fulfilling its mandate and better utilize its unique position in Ambonese society to contribute to positive peace have been identified. Firstly, support to enhance relationship building with other actors and communications to raise awareness of FKUBs role. Although FKUB may be able to some extent, perform coordination tasks with religious or interfaith middle level groups, but certainly they cannot perform hands-on work at the grassroots level due to the high level position in the provincial hierarchical structure. In reaching the grassroots and general public this forum will need to the assistance of other religious or interfaith entity, which are operating in the middle level group. Secondly, training and capacity building in mediation and dialogue will primarily make the FKUB able to effectively carry out these initiatives. Finally, some organizational development is needed. The FKUB does not have a sound strategy and accompanying work plan to guide its work.

5 CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note that some positive developments can be traced in addressing post conflict trauma, stigmatization and vulnerability in Maluku, but that segregation and lack of trust still defined societies. Government efforts have gone some way in addressing problems, mostly focused on economic development and access, and a range of local and international organizations have also done much to address issues. There is still significant potential in improving these efforts, in particular by linking up organizations from different religious

background and producing more joint work.

The FKUB has been identified as a particularly well positioned organization to do this, given its formal links to the government and influential membership, while mandated to work with communities at large. It is a multi religious organization, and thus has the ideal starting point for both providing an example for other organizations and bringing groups together as well as working with all. It is expected that FKUB and the middle-level groups in Maluku that are involved in the effort of peace building and sustainable peace effort will be able to continue the work independently through other means and efforts.

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