

**THE AUTHORITY OF INDONESIA ULAMA COUNCIL (MUI)
IN EXAMINING AND VERIFYING HERETICAL SECTS:**

**Problematic Issues Concerning Institutionalisation of Ulama Vis a Vis the Unitary
State of the Republic of Indonesia**

DR. HM. Jamil, MA

(State Islamic University of North Sumatera)

Presented in University of Kentucky, USA

September 15th-16th, 2017

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ASIAN SOCIETY *for* INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Indiana, PA, May 5, 2017

Dr. M. Jamil, MA
Dean of Science and Technology
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Dear Dr. M. Jamil, MA,

Congratulations! Your abstract submission, "Authority of Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) in Examining and Verifying Heretical Sects. Problematic Issues Concerning Institutionalisation of Ulama Vis a Vis the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia" has been selected for presentation at the 2017 Indonesia Focus Conference

It is my pleasure to issue a formal invitation to you to attend the 2017 Indonesia Focus conference due to take place in University of Kentucky campus, in Lexington, Kentucky, on September 15-16, 2017. The theme of our conference this year is "*Indonesia's Role in World Development: Creating Partnership in Globalized World*." There will be well-known keynote speakers and a few interesting speakers from Indonesia, as well as from the United States. You can find further details of the conference by visiting our website at <http://www.indonesiafocus.net>.

Please note that this letter is only a letter of acceptance to attend and present your paper. We will issue a letter of confirmation of attendance, if required, at the conference time.

For more information about the conference and hotel, please see the information on the conference website. If you have any question, please contact our conference Chair, Mr. Bambang Sutardjo at +1 859-275-2170. We look forward to meeting you at the conference!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nurhaya Muchtar", is written over a horizontal line.

Nurhaya Muchtar Ph.D.
ASIRPA President
Associate Professor, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Introduction

The Indonesian nation is a pluralistic nation when viewed from the aspect of ethnicity, race, religion and language. From the religious aspect, the government recognized six official religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Christianity (Catholik Christian and Protestant Christian), Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Indeed, not all Indonesian citizens adhere to one of the six religions. A small portion of the population is a belief group where they attend one of the mysticism. Beyond that, there are those who embrace Judaism and Bahaism.

The majority of the Indonesian population embraces Islam. From the aspect of religious understanding, generally Muslims in Indonesia are divided into two groups, namely the old people who are called traditionalists and the young people known as the modernist group. The elderly are reflected in the understanding of the Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Al Ittihadiyah (Ja'far: 2011, 2018, Bush: 2009, and Siddik & Ja'far: 2017), while young people are seen in understanding about Muhammadiyah (Azra: 1994; Burhani: 2018) and Islamic Unity or Persis (Minhaji: 2000). However, there are many Muslims who are not affiliated with these Islamic organizations, and some are not included in Sunni school of thought. Outside of Sunni, there are some Indonesian Muslim community that adheres to the Ahmadiyya, Shia (Siradj: 2013; Iqbal & Ja'far: 2019) and several new groups assessed by Sunni majority groups as heretical groups.

In guarding the faith of the Ummah, Muslims in Indonesia represented by scholars from various Islamic organizations established Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulama Council), abbreviated as MUI, which was established in Jakarta, 17 Rajab 1395 Hijriah or 26 July 1975. Indeed, the MUI administrators came from scholars representing various Islamic organizations affiliated with Sunni schools of thought, especially NU, Muhammadiyah, Al Washliyah, and Al Ittihadiyah. This eventually became the trigger that MUI was only an extension of the Sunni group. Finally, groups except the Sunni group were not accommodated, even as the target of the fatwa issued by the MUI.

This study examines the authority of MUI to respond the heretical sect in Indonesia. In particular, MUI will be seen as an Islamic-owned institution and the role of MUI in responding heretical sects in Indonesia. This study is a literature review, and the data obtained from written sources are processed by using the content analysis method.

Indonesian Ulama Council

Indonesia Ulama Council is a forum for ulama and Muslim scholars in Indonesia. The main task of the MUI is to guide, foster and protect Muslims. Historically, MUI was established in Jakarta, 7 Rajab 1395 or July 26, 1975. MUI was born as a concrete manifestation of the meeting of ulama and scholars. There were many elements involved in the establishment of the MUI, including Islamic organizations such as NU, Al Washliyah, Al Ittihadiyah, Muhammadiyah, Mathla'ul Anwar, Sarekat Islam, Perti, GUPPI, PTDI and DMI. The meeting resulted a decision to establish a container that served as a place for the ulama to consult (Mudzhar: 1993). MUI consists of representatives of Indonesian ulama both of the traditionalist group and the modernist group (Hosen: 2004).

As a place of discussion for ulama, MUI tried to do four things. First, provide leadership and guidance to Indonesian Muslims in realizing religious and community life that is blessed by Allah SubhanahuwaTa'ala. Second, giving advice and fatwa on religious and community issues to the Government and society, increasing activities for the realization of ukhwah Islamiyah and the harmony between the religious communities in establishing national unity and integrity. Third, to be a liaison between the ulama and umara (government) and reciprocal interpreters between the people and the government in order to succeed national - development. Fourth, improving the relations and cooperation between organizations, Islamic institutions and Muslim scholars in providing leadership and guidance to the community, especially Muslims by holding consultations and information reciprocally.

Didin Hafidhudin (2015) stated that there were seven tasks of the MUI. First, as a guard for adhrerents of Islamic religion. Second, giving education and guidance for adherents of

Islamic religion. Third, recruiting better cadres. Fourth, providing solutions to religious problems in the international community. Fifth, the formulator of the concept of Islamic education. Sixth, guarding content in mass media. Seventh, the organization that runs cooperation with religious organizations.

It cannot be denied, the birth of MUI in Indonesia is inseparable from government policy. At least, there are three objectives of the government to want the establishment of the MUI. First, scholars can participate in national development. Second, the MUI is expected to be able to participate in maintaining harmony between religious groups. Third, MUI is expected to strengthen religion in a way that is explained by Pancasila to ensure the national security.

MUI was established when Suharto was in the second period of his presidency. Since the formation of this country the position of Ulama of Indonesian has been and is very important. Suharto considered the group of ulama as a source of justification for his power not only at the early stage, but also at the middle stage and to some extent, at the latest stage of his power. Authoritarian regimes often need to consolidate support from Muslim communities including mass Islamic organizations to maintain their legitimacy. However, not all Indonesian ulama agreed to the presence of the MUI. Through a persuasive approach, although the support was not there, Soeharto was ultimately successful in persuading other ulama from other Muslim organizations to establish the MUI.

MUI's Authority in Responding the Heretical Sects in Indonesia

Since the reform era in 1998, the ideology of the MUI has evolved from Pancasila to Islam and can be considered as the early position of the MUI to be very critical to the idea of pluralism. This ideological shift was a consequence of the MUI's response to the political movement that emerged in the post-Suharto regime which had revived Islam as its ideological basis. Since now, MUI has been accepted increasingly in state and society. This is proven in many public and legal discourses that regard the MUI's fatwa as an inspiration for the making of public law and morality.

MUI claimed that there have been 14 Islamic deviation groups in Indonesia over the period 1971 to 2007. In the past ten years, their presence has become increasingly visible in Indonesian public discourse. MUI sees the existence of heretical groups as a threat to the purity of Islam, therefore the increasing the development of these groups must be stopped.

Five points to be categorized as heretics and out of Islam. First, religious groups that do not believe in the hadith as the second main source of Sharia. Second, those who consciously follow this group are reminded to return to the true path of Islam (tobat). Third, all Indonesian Muslims are warned not to be influenced by group ideas. Fourth, ulama are expected to provide

guidance and advice for those who return to Islam. Fifth, the fatwa demands that the Indonesian government take decisive action to ban group teachings.

On November 6th, 2007, the Central of MUI has formulated 10 guidelines for identifying heretical sect. A group or understanding is said to be heretical if it fulfills one of 10 criteria (Al Hamat: 2017, 354):

1. The group rejects one of the six foundations of Islamic belief (pillars of faith) and one and the other and five Islamic foundations (pillars of Islam).
2. The group believes and follows a religion that is not in line with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna.
3. The group believes in the existence of revelation after the Qur'an
4. The group rejects the authenticity of Al-Qur'an content.
5. The group interprets the text of the Qur'an without referring to the main basis of the science of interpretation.
6. The group rejects the position of the hadith as a source of Islam.
7. The group harasses and demeans the Prophet Muhammad.
8. The group rejects that Muhammad was the last prophet in Islam.
9. The group changes, adds, or reduces the basic parts of worship as determined by Sharia, such as stating that the pilgrimage is not to Mecca, or that the five daily prayers are not compulsory for Muslims.
10. The group calls other Muslims infidels without presenting strong arguments based on Sharia.

There are ten criteria for a group called the heretical sect. First, the status of heresy was decided by the MUI based on the Qur'an, hadith, ijmak, and ijtiihad, and based on the opinion of the majority of ulamamu'tabarah in the Sunni tradition. Second, the decision must contain the response aspects, pro-action, and anticipation. Third, the issuance of fatwas is taken collectively through official meetings involving MUI council members, research commissions, and fatwa commissions. Fourth, there must be a difference between error (perverted) and error (heresy); the first means that the understanding and wrong practices related to the aspects of Sharia and their consequences are categorized as masyiyah (committing sins), while the second is the wrong understanding related to the domain of 'aqeedah or Sharia, which is absolutely indisputable in Islam, so the consequences of this is the status of non-believers. Fifth, a decision was taken when a group insisted on believing things about false aqidah and Shari'a as true teachings. The five categories developed by the MUI only apply internally to member organizations. In the

perspective of Indonesia's basic constitution, because the MUI does not have legal authority under Indonesia's basic constitution to assess the truth of the beliefs of other Islamic organizations, these categories are not binding on Indonesian Muslims.

MUI conducts a scientific investigation before issuing a fatwa. First, the commission collects the data, information, evidence, and watches interviews about the ideas, thoughts and activities of the group under investigation. Second is legal investigation. In this step, consultation is carried out with experts who have extensive knowledge in the thoughts and activities of heretical groups. Third, heretical group leaders are invited to meet knowledgeable experts for tahqiq (verification) and tabayyun (clarification) about the data, information, and evidence related to the thoughts and activities of heretical groups. The fourth of the investigations was to submit research findings to members of the MUI leadership. The fifth, if needed, for members of the MUI leadership to give instructions to the fatwa of the commission for further discussion. On the basis of this discussion, the commission can issue a fatwa.

In 2017, the Commission of Study and Research of Indonesian Ulama Council found 60 school which were misguided in Indonesia. MUI has carried out 60 of these schools, and seven schools have been interpreted by MUI as heretics. MUI have discovered and released a number of heretical sect that emerged and developed at the local level. The West Java MUI, for example, saw heretical sects flourishing and found 144 heretical sects in the West Java region. This data is not to mention from the outside of this area, such as in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi. Indeed, the number of heretics is very much in Indonesia.

The central of MUI has issued fatwas related to some of schools in Indonesia. The school taken by the Central of MUI (Central MUI: 2015) was Darul Arqam, Ingkarussunnah, AhmadiyahQadiyan, Islamic Jamaah, al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah, Pluralism, Liberalism and Secularism, and Salamullah (Sajari: 2015). Some regional of MUI have also issued fatwas against a number of local scale schools (Wahid: 2017). Hasyim (2015) mentions that fatwas about heretical sect have become the center of attention. According to him, the political and legal motives of the MUI in formulating a fatwa were very dominant in regulating their religious social functions. Some Islamic organizations in Indonesia support the MUI's fatwa. Al Washliyah for example decides the heresy of the Ahmadiyya sect (Ropi: 2010; Ja'far: 2016). Of course, MUI was born because the supports of Islamic organizations in Indonesia.

Conclusion

MUI is an institution authorized to issue fatwas related to the problems faced by Muslims in Indonesia. The fatwa that attracts the most public attention is the fatwa about heretical sect. Indeed, all MUI fatwas actually function as a means of da'wah but some MUI fatwas stimulate controversy not only among non-Muslims but also Muslims. In this regard, the

fatwa of the MUI in 2005 was criticized by some elements of the Muslim group as a setback which tended to be a backwardness of Indonesia because it denied the ideological and philosophical basis of being an Indonesian state. The fatwas of MUI regarding heretical sects are considered not to accommodate human rights principles and conflict with the spirit of democracy. Indeed, a wise way is needed that can accommodate religious freedom on the one hand and respect the religious rights of others to the other.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

*The Organizing Committee of The 2017 Indonesia Focus Conference proudly presents
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H. M. Jamil

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