

PROMOTING INTER-FAITH APPROACH IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1325¹

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Foreword

First of all, let me convey my great pleasure because ICRP has the honor as one of the organizers of this momentous event. ICRP is an organization that actively promotes the importance of religion for peace, through an interfaith dialogue approach and by upholding pluralism towards a stronger democracy in Indonesia.

There are two reasons why this conference has such great significance. Firstly, it is because the aim of this conference is to strengthen the role of women as negotiators of peace or peacemakers, particularly in regards to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This resolution was adopted on October 31st 2000 and is the only UN Resolution that addresses the impact of war on women and women's contribution in conflict resolution and durable peace.

Secondly, this conference also reaffirms the importance of using inter-faith approach in resolving gender discriminative issues on peace and security. The gender inequality is not merely personal problem, but it is widely accepted as social problem that must be overcome in integrative way by analyzing various aspects. It is generally known that, one of the main factors is that patriarchies-based religious interpretation. We cannot deny the fact that numerous forms of discrimination and violence against women, whether during peaceful times or in times of conflict, are often closely related to interpretations of religion widely adopted in community. These interpretations are influenced by feudalistic traditions, patriarchic cultural values and irrational myths.

In speaking in this forum I will stress more on inter-faith approach in women's work in peace building and conflict resolution. Let me elaborate more on why such an approach is important and what are the prerequisites needed in that approach.

Women and religion

What is the relationship between religion and women? My long experience in dealing with issues on women and religion brings me to the conclusion that religion and women has never been best friend, and they don't

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complement each other. Religion has for far too long shown its masculine face rather than its feminine side.

So, it is not surprising that in the name of religion, women are always considered as the moral pillars of the community. Let me give you a clear example of Indonesian context. The construction of the nation's morality is wholly burdened on women and that is why their bodies must be controlled as is stipulated in Indonesia's Law on Marriage and Law on Pornography. My critical question is how can we build a moral nation if men are permitted to be immoral? We have to propose that both men and women should be moralistic human beings in order to achieve a peaceful and harmonious nation.

I believe that the core aim of all religion and faith is for all human beings, both women and men, to be pious and useful, for them self, the family and the community in general. A number of studies have shown that there are many cases of domestic violence that stem from religious interpretations that are discriminative towards women. It is my sincere hope that women groups can transform religion's masculine face so that women feel more comfortable and feel that their interest is accommodated within it.

Women's analysis on conflict and security

Perspective and experience of women in conflict areas provided a new dimension to conflict theory and analysis, because it revealed what has covered and forgotten about conflict's original character and structure that are very gender bias.

Conflict is functioned as means to reach a specific purpose, means to reach community admittance on male power competition among political elites, military effort in order to control the stability of national politics and security, to have monopoly on natural resources, etc. Conflict itself has a potential masculinity character, and could easily bring the community into a larger conflict. Basically, conflicts among women have not enough potency to cause a large conflict. In the country, fighting among drunk hoodlums in bus terminal, or disturbing someone's can easily seen as "harassment" to the whole family, community or even to tribe dignity. This has a significant potency to become a confrontation or an open conflict.

In the context of this patriarchy and masculine character of conflict, women have no right to assume and give meaning on a conflict. But they must support male's assumption and meaning of conflict. In conflict, male have a job to maintain violence to defeated their enemies, to protect and guard their village, meanwhile women are positioned as supporter, helper or even instrument to defense enemy attack, and they have no opportunity asking or questioning why the violent way is chosen by man (the community's leaders) in order to solve their problems.

Configuration of that patriarchy and masculine conflict could be clearly seen when the parties involved in conflict initiate peace agreement. We will see

that peace is defined as war accessory, as part of male war ritual, full of symbols, very theatrical, for instance, all parties sit and talk one to another and is witnessed by public and mass media. Last but not least, most of that kind of “peace theatres” is only attended by man or male participants. From this specific experience, and realizing the masculine character of conflict, women necessarily need to be more critical, not only in analyzing conflicts, but also in redefining the meaning of security, particularly because of its meaning as understood by society and the state.

With agreeing to new trend on international society, women define security especially in its relation with humanity concept, not territorial security concept which is rested on state oriented and military oriented assumption. Humanity security concept focused on individual welfare and security and also on social environment. This humanity security concept will operate effectively to prevent and to decrease the possibility of armed conflict and violence that always places women as its victims.

Women as peacemakers

Women necessarily need to be more critical in defining the concept of peace. Peace means safeguards humans against harm, creates secure environment, enhance human development, radiates the soul, strengthen religious piety, increases faith and love, creates tranquillity in the home, fosters healthy families, helps children to live fruitful lives, increases wealth, brings prosperity to nations, promotes individual responsibility, strengthens our inner resources, fosters creative thinking, allows culture and arts to flourish, heightens respect and appreciation for others, recognizes all humans as equal, affirms that all religion are for peace. So, with peace came images of harmony, unity and well-being.

Why is it so important to increase women’s role as peacemakers. There are at least two reasons for this. The first one is that women and children, because of their weak position, are vulnerable to discrimination and violence. They become potential victims especially during conflict and war. Women and children are the ones most likely to be impacted by war, and this includes their becoming refugees and targets of armed elements. The second reason is that the presence and active participation of women in peace and reconciliation efforts are often disregarded. This is despite the facts that in many conflicts and wars, women are always actively involved in caring for the wounded victims and provide food, and they even become the instigators of peace, but when negotiations are in progress, they are excluded. Their existence is ignored.

These two reasons were the background for the birth of Resolution 1325. This resolution reaffirms five very important things. First, the Resolution states international recognition on women’s role and their concrete participation in conflict resolution and peace building. Second, it also stresses on the importance of equality in participation in all efforts to maintain peace and security and the

need to increase women's participation in the overall process of decision making. Third, it stresses on the importance of women's rights under all conditions, including during war and conflict, and in the aftermath conditions, namely post-conflict and post-war. Fourth, to urge all parties to address the special needs of women, teenagers and girls in all programs related to peace and conflict resolution. Fifth, the Resolution also highlights to ensure progress in gender mainstreaming into the overall peace and conflict resolution processes. Ultimately it is our hope that governments and communities do not disregard the importance of women's role as peacemakers.

The importance of inter-faith approach

There are so many interpretations of religion that have caused women to suffer from discrimination, exploitation, violence, and even death, both in the domestic as well as public domain. To mention just a few, there are religious interpretations regarding women's position and obligations in marriage. Women are considered as mere sexual objects; forced to become reproductive machines; women are regarded simply as supporters or helpers of men; women are not considered as head of the family even though it is she who is the sole provider in the family. And in the public domain, women are only objects in development, not subjects. Women are not involved in almost all decision making process, both in the family life as well as within the community.

Religious interpretations are gender biased. Those gender biased interpretations lead to a huge social problems that are disadvantageous for women. Among those problems are the high rate of children marriages, unregistered marriages, polygamy, forced marriages, divorces, house maid, illiteracy, migrant workers, prostitution, women and children trafficking, unemployment, poverty, domestic workers, and women who live with HIV/AIDS. If in peaceful times women are already experiencing discrimination and violence, how much worse it is during conflicts and war.

It is apparently time for us, women groups to make religious teachings as the basis for our struggle to eradicate all forms of gender-based discriminations rampant in society. The problem lies in the fact that conservative religious interpretations generally adopted by communities are still not conducive for women empowerment and peace building efforts. For that reason, once again, efforts to deconstruct religious interpretations are needed. What is needed now is a return to universal values of religion and faith.

I do believe that all religion brings universal values such as peace, justice, humanity, and piety. So, we have to promote and implement religious interpretations that are accommodative towards humanistic values and are women-friendly. We need religious interpretations which are conducive with the protection and fulfilment of women's rights. We need religious interpretations which is compatible with the principles of this UN Resolution.

What is the inter-faith approach?

Actually, inter-faith approach is not something new for women groups, especially for Indonesian women. In many conflict areas in Indonesia, like in Ambon, Halmahera and Poso this approach has been used by women's groups to resolve conflicts and create peace. Before the men had found a way to restore peace among the conflicting parties, women of faith, women from various religions and faiths have sat together and discussed their problems they faced and what they needed to do in regard with peace building and conflict resolution. They create alternative education program for children and women, they support campaigns on ending violence against women, etc.

Hence, the inter-faith approach is one that uses the teachings of various religions and faiths adopted by the communities in efforts to create peace and conflict resolution. This can also mean that women from various religions and faiths come together, work hand in hand and support each other in building peace and security, and in preventing conflicts.

The question that arises is why is inter-faith approach considered important? It simply because religious values in various religions and faiths have a great impact on the community's behaviour and public opinions. And also religious institutions are still considered important by communities. Religious leaders are still viewed as those who hold authority over religion so that their statements is often used as a main reference in making public policies.

This inter-faith approach is important as I mentioned before that all religions basically bring a mission of peace for all human beings. All religions teach about the merits of a civilized, just and kind behaviour. On the other side, all religions condemn behaviour that is deceitful, unjust, dishonest, discriminative, violent, greedy and hurtful. All religions condemn conflict and war whatever reason may be the cause behind it.

Inter-faith approach based on pluralism

One of the major problems faced by people with religion in this era of globalization is religion-based conflict and violence, both internally as well as between congregations of different religions. Certainly, in every conflict, women are the ones most vulnerable to become victims.

Why do conflicts happen? It is because people with religion no longer live in isolated blocks, but interacts with each other so it is very possible that frictions happen with the potential to cause conflict. The relationship between inter-religious groups is not always peaceful. Religion-based conflicts and violence frequently occur in a number of areas, including in Asian countries.

Nevertheless, we must hold on to the belief that inter-religious conflicts are never recommended by any religion in the world. No religion encourages its congregation to cause conflict. Religion-based conflict and violence usually occur as a result of growing politics of identity. In other words, it is the mobilization of religious identity for the political interest of certain parties.

Ironically, religious provocation is often carried out by those who claim to speak in the name of religion.

I still believe in the hope that religion, as the spiritual governing media between an individual and God as well as among human beings in the social relationship, can become a transformative power. Religion can be a strong power that transform people towards peace, justice and welfare.

And so, how do we turn religion into a media for peace? The answer is very clear: through dialogue among different religious communities. Through this dialogue, those who embrace different religions and faiths learn more about each other, and this will subsequently lead to a better understanding between them. Mutual understanding ultimately leads them to seek common factors between the different religions to be then rendered as the foundation for living together in peace and harmony.

In order to achieve an effective dialogue that will be accepted by all parties in society, the parties in the dialogue must adopt a tolerant and pluralistic attitude. Tolerance is the ability to constrain oneself and one's emotions in order to minimize and eliminate potentials of conflict. Meanwhile, pluralism is much more than tolerance.

Pluralism is the willingness to recognize differences and accept diversity as a natural force in life to subsequently be committed to build solidarity and cooperation for the sake of peace and harmony. Pluralism must be built upon a principle of love, caring, equality and the recognition of human dignity. Pluralism urges for the fulfilment of human rights, including women rights.

Pluralism is a process of active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. To sum it up, pluralism does not mean that one has to shed one's own religious identity and disclaim one's own commitment to the religion embraced, and it also it doesn't mean syncretism that one mixes teachings of different religions. The core of pluralism is the strong commitment to build a synergic relationship with each other in order to ensure peace and harmony.

When one is a pluralist, it does not mean that one does not recognize the existence of religious differences, because such differences are natural, intrinsic, and given and can't be avoided. But such religious differences can become the source for a healthy inter-religious relationship as a uniting force, and not as a divider that threatens certain religious identity and culture. Pluralism is built upon a foundation of inter-religious dialogue.

Pluralism can be achieved, at least through two activities. The first one is that intensive dialogue. The problem is the dialogue between people of different religions has been too frequently done but it is not effective. Why? Most dialogues end at the level of elites, which means only among prominent religious leaders at the national level. So, dialogue should not only be carried out among the elite, but should be done at the "grass root" level. It must involve all elements of society, namely youth, women, entrepreneurs, cultural and educator organisations. Moreover, the process should involve marginalized

groups. And also, the topics of the dialogue should be based on religious universal values and humanist religious interpretations.

Secondly, participatory activities. This strategy must be carried out following dialogue. Through participatory activities, religious leaders and religious communities from different religions are able to experience living or working together. This can be realized in the form of, for instance, a jamboree, or in activities involving the provision of humanitarian aid or medical aid for victims of disasters. The experience of living or working together will open their minds and encourage them to eliminate all forms of prejudice and to eradicate all the tendency to stereo-type other groups.

Conclusion

Inter-faith approach in women empowerment, including women's efforts in peace building and reconciliation is necessary. This approach can be implemented into several programs such as human rights education and political education for religious community, engaging religious leaders in order to empower and strengthen their positive and effective role in building a more just, democratic and peaceful society.

Other important programs are to promote religious interpretations based on humanist and gender equality that are accommodative towards humanistic values and are women-friendly in nature. This can be realized through efforts to empower women and increase the number of female religious leaders. It is also important to provide training for male religious leaders to equip them with a gender-equality perspective so that their sermons in churches, mosques or in other places of worship stress the importance of fulfilling women rights.

Other programs that are no less important are ones that take the form of cooperation in social or humanitarian activities in peace building and conflict resolution, and provide humanitarian aid to victims of disasters or to marginal groups.

Thank you