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Strategy of the Religious Harmony Forum: Realizing a Peaceful and Harmonious Life

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: 10 October 2024	<i>This research aims to explore the Strategy of the Religious Harmony Forum to Realize a Peaceful and Harmonious Life, specifically focusing on the role of the Religious Harmony Forum in building harmony, supporting, and inhibiting factors in building religious harmony. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design and uses observation, interviews, and documentation as primary data collection methods through direct observation and interviews with key stakeholders. Data analysis includes three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. The Jember Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) prioritizes a collaborative strategy to build a peaceful and harmonious life amid diversity. Through regular silaturahmi between religious leaders, FKUB strengthens tolerance and opens space for dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and early conflict prevention. In addition, FKUB is active in interfaith humanitarian programs that strengthen solidarity and demonstrate that cooperation in social action can reduce differences. FKUB relies on mediation and deliberation as effective resolution mechanisms when friction arises, maintaining social stability without exacerbating differences. By utilizing local culture such as Pandalungan, which is closely related to the values of inclusiveness, FKUB can instil awareness of the importance of harmonious coexistence despite facing challenges such as identity politics and limited resources.</i>
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Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi strategi Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama untuk mewujudkan kehidupan yang damai dan harmonis, khususnya berfokus pada peran Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam membangun kerukunan, Faktor pendukung dan penghambat dalam membangun kerukunan umat beragama. Penelitian ini

menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif dan menggunakan observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi sebagai metode pengumpulan data primer. Melalui observasi dan wawancara langsung dengan para pemangku kepentingan utama. Analisis data meliputi tiga langkah, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) Jember mengedepankan strategi kolaboratif untuk membangun kehidupan yang damai dan harmonis di tengah keberagaman. Melalui silaturahmi rutin antar pemuka agama, FKUB memperkuat toleransi dan membuka ruang dialog yang mendorong saling pengertian serta pencegahan konflik sejak dini. Selain itu, FKUB aktif dalam program kemanusiaan lintas agama yang mempererat solidaritas dan menunjukkan bahwa kerja sama dalam aksi sosial mampu meredam perbedaan. Ketika gesekan muncul, FKUB mengandalkan mediasi dan musyawarah sebagai mekanisme penyelesaian yang efektif, menjaga stabilitas sosial tanpa memperuncing perbedaan. Dengan memanfaatkan budaya lokal seperti Pandalungan yang lekat dengan nilai-nilai inklusivitas, FKUB mampu menanamkan kesadaran akan pentingnya hidup berdampingan secara harmonis, meskipun dihadapkan pada tantangan seperti politik identitas dan keterbatasan sumber daya.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian nation has a gift that not many other countries have because of its diversity, such as a variety of plants and animals live in it, supported by the fertility and natural potential it contains, various tribes, races, religions can coexist without any significant conflict (Rahman, 2020). This gift is an asset to make Indonesia a great country that can compete with other countries in the world. However, this gift can be a very serious threat if it cannot be managed properly and responsibly (Wahid, 2019).

The Indonesian Constitution recognizes six official state religions: Islam, Christianity, Protentasn, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The existence of these religions comes from outside Indonesia, their presence is accepted with open arms by the citizens because the culture that is built is an open culture, so they can accept various kinds of sects and religions from anywhere (Shofwan, 2023). Openness in the religious aspect, on the one hand provides an advantage for the people of Indonesia because they can choose a religion according to their beliefs. However, on the other hand, religious diversity raises the potential for conflict because its presence in Indonesia has different goals, styles and interests so that

between one religion and another religion there are often destructive differences that even tend to lead to conflict (Iffan, 2023).

Some conflict events with religious backgrounds have occurred, such as in Ambon, Poso and others, so the religious element needs to be watched out for as a trigger for conflict in addition to other elements. Even during the New Order era, the government said that four potential conflicts needed to be watched out for: Ethnicity, Religion, Race and inter-group conditions. This condition was the background for the Ministry of Religion at that time, which made a policy prohibiting preaching to spread religion to already religious people (Syaputra, 2019).

Da'wah to invite others to embrace a particular religion is a fairly sensitive issue because the spread of religion is the teaching of several religions, especially the heavenly religions, for example in Islam, there is an order to invite "others" to embrace Islam, as well as Christianity, Catholicism and so on so that influencing others to be able to believe in the religion they embrace is a pride in itself (Hanifah, 2024).

On the other hand, when someone converts to another religion, it will certainly irritate the adherents of the religion they left behind, especially not infrequently someone's conversion is accompanied by arguments that demonize the previous religion, especially when the conversion is associated with the existence of majority and minority religions, of course, the conversion will lead to tremendous potential conflict because the majority will not be happy if the ummah move to the minority religion, and vice versa, the minority does not want its citizens to do to the majority religion because it will pose a threat to the existence of its religion, this condition will have an impact on harmonious communication patterns and even tend to suspect each other (Jamrah, 2015).

According to Ashafa (2017), In Indonesia's historical record, there are several conflicts with religious backgrounds, especially Islam and Christianity, that have occurred in Indonesia, such as tensions between Muslims and Christians in Aceh and Toraja in the 1960s Muslims protested against the construction of a large number of churches in the areas of East Java, Central Java and North Sumatra, the construction was considered to injure the existence of Muslims. The entire nation

must watch out for potential conflicts like this because if conflicts like this continue to be allowed, they will impact the integrity of the Indonesian nation.

One of the efforts to reduce the potential for conflict that will occur in Indonesia, especially among those with religious backgrounds, is to raise awareness of the harmony of the nation's citizens despite their different backgrounds, harmony based on the awareness that differences are a gift given by God to the Indonesian nation, so that all citizens have the responsibility to protect it, even when there is a group that does not want to be different then, in essence, he has rejected God's decree, Harmony will be able to create a harmonic community life, mutual help and mutual care, mutual respect, and mutual respect for the differences that exist (Nastiti, 2023). The life of harmony, especially between religious communities, must continue to be fought by all levels of Indonesian society so that peace, tranquillity and order will continue to take place in our beloved country because when conflict occurs, it does not rule out the possibility that the conflict will last a long time on a large scale because learning from several countries, especially the Middle East and Afghanistan, they are in conflict continuously for years even though their population and background are not as pluralistic as the Indonesian nation (Masrum, 2023).

Jember is one of the regions in the eastern part of Java known for its ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. The city is a meeting point for various community life patterns without the indigenous population's dominance, who feel they have full authority. This makes Jember a *Pandalungan* city, where various groups of people live side by side. In the context of religious life, Jember has unique dynamics. Although most of the population is Muslim, other religions recognized by the government, such as Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, also have adherents and houses of worship. Faiths that have not been officially recognized, such as Bahai and Ahmadiyya, show their existence in the community.

Religious life in Jember is generally harmonious, but differences in perceptions and interests between religious communities cannot be avoided. Tensions that arise, although rare, can disrupt social stability if not managed properly. Therefore, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) strategically maintains harmony and

communication between religious communities in Jember. This forum, established through the two ministerial decrees 8 and 9 of 2006, consists of religious leaders from various religions in Jember. FKUB functions as a medium for dialogue and friendship to manage differences and prevent potential conflicts.

This research focuses on the role of FKUB in maintaining religious harmony in Jember. Conditions in the field show that although FKUB has run various programs, challenges in the form of differences in views and interests still arise. Therefore, this study will examine how FKUB attempts to overcome these differences and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs implemented to create a harmonious religious life in Jember.

Religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity are the main characteristics of Indonesian society. This diversity is both a gift and a challenge in maintaining social harmony. In the context of religious pluralism, the potential for conflict can increase if there are no proactive efforts to build tolerance and understanding across religions. The Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) is present as a strategic forum to encourage social harmony through interfaith dialogue and conflict management. In Jember Regency, the role of FKUB is becoming increasingly crucial, considering that this area has a *Pandalungan* cultural character that reflects the diversity of society without a dominant indigenous population.

According to Sumartono (2019), conflict can be constructive if managed properly, but on the contrary, it can damage harmony if left unchecked. This theory is relevant in understanding the FKUB strategy, which focuses on preventing conflict and creating intensive communication between religious leaders to resolve problems before they become destructive. In addition, a compassion-based approach, as stated in Goleman's theory (2000), is an important foundation for building empathy across religions to create a peaceful life.

Previous research supports the importance of the role of FKUB in social harmony. A study by Fanani (2023) stated that regular FKUB dialogues effectively reduce interfaith stereotypes. Another study highlighted the role of FKUB in mediating conflicts related to the establishment of houses of worship (Azizah, 2020). However, these studies have not discussed the internal challenges of FKUB much,

such as limited funds or the absence of structures at the village level. Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in studying "The Strategy of the Religious Harmony Forum: Realizing a Peaceful and Harmonious Life" more deeply.

II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore an in-depth understanding of the Religious Harmony Forum Strategy: Realizing a Peaceful and Harmonious Life. This type of field research aims to find out FKUB Jember's strategy is active involvement in interfaith humanitarian programs (Moleong, 2019). Researchers conducted direct interviews with key stakeholders. Observations were conducted at the location of FKUB activities, such as interfaith meetings, places of worship, or social gatherings. Researchers directly observed the dynamics of participant interactions, the atmosphere of the activities, and the processes that occurred during the program's implementation. This observation involved FKUB administrators and interfaith figures, carried out at certain times and locations over three months. This study focuses on understanding communication patterns, participation, and the impact of FKUB activities on the community. Documentation is carried out by collecting documents such as FKUB activity reports, meeting notes, event documentation photos, and related official policies. In addition, diaries or journals of relevant religious figures were used to track patterns of interaction and changes in interfaith relations in Jember. All data collected was then analyzed using the theory of (Milles & Huberman, 2014)

Data analysis used Miles and Huberman's theory, which includes three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Ikhwan, 2021). Data validity in this study uses triangulation of methods and sources. Method triangulation combines various data collection techniques, such as interviews, observation, and documentation. Source triangulation uses data sources such as documents, archives, interview results, and observation results from seemingly different perspectives to provide a view of the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2018).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The strategy of the Religious Harmony Forum in building harmony

The Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) is an independent organization formed as a forum for communication, dialogue, and cooperation between religious communities at the regional level. FKUB functions to facilitate the creation of social harmony, prevent religious conflict, and find solutions if friction occurs between religious communities. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation conducted, FKUB in Jember Regency has an organizational structure consisting of core administrators, such as a chairman, secretary, and treasurer, as well as members representing various religions in the area, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

This organization operates on the principle of inclusivity, where each member has a role in strengthening interfaith dialogue and supporting tolerance programs. FKUB holds regular meetings, which serve as a forum for exchanging views, conveying aspirations, and preparing work programs. The programs implemented include interfaith friendship activities, training on tolerance, and organizing humanitarian assistance such as disaster relief and community empowerment.

In its implementation, FKUB Jember shows its commitment to building intensive communication between religious leaders through activities carried out in strategic locations such as places of worship or local government halls. The documentation results show that FKUB is also often involved in mediating conflicts related to establishing houses of worship, providing recommendations for building permits, and creating interfaith social programs. However, several interviews revealed challenges such as budget constraints, organizational structures that only exist at the district level, and lack of community support for certain programs.

FKUB, which the government formed based on SKB numbers 8 and 9 of 2006, has a very significant role in building interfaith harmony because this forum consists of religious figures from each religion recognized by Indonesia. There are several roles that this forum can play in realizing harmony, including:

1. Building a culture of tolerance

Building a culture of tolerance is one of the efforts to encourage the creation of harmony and peace among religious people because, without the realization of a culture of tolerance, it is possible that religious adherents suspect each other and then conflict with each other, a culture of tolerance is defined as a life behaviour that reflects peace, order, tranquillity, and prosperity, the people have a culture of mutual respect, respect, have a high sense of tolerance, and can live together as a mirror of the teachings of religion and Pancasila (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

Building a culture of tolerance does not mean negating differences between religious believers so that all religions are the same and united into a totality of religions known as religious syncretism, but what is sought is to find common ground between existing differences so that differences become mercy for human life, they can coexist safely, comfortably, undisturbed and without feeling one party threatened or threatening, building a tolerant culture of society is the responsibility of all parties, especially religious leaders who are patrons for their communities.

Building a culture of tolerance by instilling awareness in religious believers to always believe that tolerance is the best way to realize peace and brotherhood among the nation's children. There are several awarenesses that are always shown to religious adherents so that they will continue to maintain a culture of tolerance, including:

- a. Awareness of religious plurality, in the reality of life, we will find very many religious truths and the truth is believed by its adherents, so it is impossible in this life that humans will unite religious truths in one religious institution, so what we have to do is believe in the religious truths they embrace, but respect the truth of religious beliefs embraced by others.
- b. Awareness of human rights, awareness of the right of every person to determine their life choices, including having a religion, needs to be a

common awareness so that every human being can make choices based on their rights, and these choices must be respected and respected.

- c. Awareness of inclusiveness, building awareness that humans live not in a closed empty space but side by side with other people who have differences; this awareness continues to be encouraged so that we can coexist with other people who have differences. This is in line with research by el Ishaq (2023), which shows that humanitarian programs involving various religions increase public trust and solidarity towards FKUB as a neutral mediator.

This is reinforced by an interview with a member of FKUB Jember, Mr H. Ahmad Faisal, who explained that FKUB acts as a bridge that connects various religious communities in an effort to create harmony in a plural society. FKUB actively holds regular meetings between religious leaders to discuss issues that have the potential to cause tension, as well as develop work programs that support the creation of social harmony. One of the flagship activities that is routinely carried out is the interfaith *silaturrahmi* forum, which is held in various places of worship. This activity aims to strengthen relations between religious communities and build mutual respect.

2. Resolving intolerant cases

Intolerant cases continue to grow in Indonesia. As an example of the results of impartial research noted, there were 24 church closures and 12 violations of freedom of religion and belief in 2005, while the Setara Institute stated there were 135 violations of religious freedom in 2007, PGI and KWI noted there were closures, attacks and destruction of churches as many as 108 in the period 2004-2007. Intolerant cases become a record that needs to be a concern of all components of the nation because the success of the Indonesian nation out of the colonizers and can build up to the age of more than 70 years because it capitalizes on diversity, do not let the diversity of this nation become a conflict vulnerability that threatens the existence of the

Indonesian nation (Subagyo, A., 2020). There are several ways to solve intolerant cases, including:

- a. Inter-religious dialogue, with dialogue expected to find common ground among the differences that exist. Of course, the implementation of the dialogue requires the greatness of the soul of all components that exist in order to easily find similarities and differences (Hasan, 2018).
- b. Planting multicultural education from an early age is hoped to help Indonesian society deal with differences and appreciate them (Firdaus, 2018).
- c. While each religion has specificities that distinguish it from others, there is common ground in some aspects, especially in social aspects, which can help strengthen humanitarian and social activities involving all religious adherents. This needs to be improved in order to build values of togetherness, strengthening humanitarian and social activities involving all religious adherents needs to be improved in order to build values of togetherness.
- d. Conducting intense internal guidance is necessary to give birth to individuals who are ritually pious but also have piety and social sensitivity (Prakosa, 2022).

Furthermore, Maria Kristina, the administrator of FKUB, also revealed that FKUB plays a role in organizing tolerance education and training programs for the younger generation. This program involves young people of different religions intending to instill values of tolerance from an early age. Mrs. Maria said that the younger generation is an important asset in maintaining harmony in the future, so it is hoped that this training can build collective awareness of the importance of living side by side in peace.

Supportive and inhibitor factors in building a Peaceful and Harmonious Life

Religious harmony is one of the important pillars in maintaining social stability and harmony in a plural and diverse society. Indonesia, as a country with religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, faces great challenges in ensuring that inter-religious

relations remain harmonious (Kristeno, 2024). In this context, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) has a strategic role as a facilitator and mediator in maintaining harmony and preventing inter-religious conflicts. However, in this effort to build harmony, there are various supporting factors that strengthen the process, as well as inhibiting factors that can slow down or even disrupt the creation of the expected harmony (Abror, 2020).

One of the main supporting factors in building religious harmony is a local culture that is inclusive and has a strong tradition of tolerance (Almu'tasim, 2019). In Jember Regency, for example, *Pandalungan* culture is one of the social assets that plays a major role in creating a harmonious environment. *Pandalungan*, which is a blend of Madurese and Javanese cultures, is known for its openness and tolerance towards differences. These cultural values are passed down from generation to generation and help strengthen interfaith relations in Jember. Through customary activities and local traditions, the people of Jember are accustomed to coexisting in diversity, thus fostering mutual respect and appreciation between religious groups.

As stated by Mr. Abd Muis, chairman of FKUB Jember, FKUB acts as a mediator and facilitator in interfaith dialogue. *"We hold regular meetings between religious leaders to discuss issues of harmony and maintaining interfaith relations. In addition, FKUB also plays a role in educating the community about the importance of maintaining harmony and preventing conflict. We also support interfaith gathering activities held at various places of worship as a form of our commitment to maintaining peace"*.

In addition to local culture, religious leaders also have a significant role in shaping public opinion and maintaining interfaith harmony. Religious leaders are often role models in their communities and have a great influence in spreading messages of peace and tolerance. On various occasions, religious leaders from various denominations are involved in interfaith dialogues facilitated by FKUB. Through these dialogues, they not only strengthen personal relationships but also provide a direct example to the community that religious differences are not a barrier to coexistence. Interfaith gathering activities held at various places of

worship are a tangible form of the commitment of religious leaders to build harmony (Fahri, 2022).

The attempt to build a religious congregation must have a dynamic in order to carry it out. There are many factors that support or hinder the attempts to build a religious community (Nurdin, 2021). In building a religious community, there is a great potential that needs to be continuously developed so that it can form an ideal relationship between religious believers. Such a potential among others: First, better education of the people, with education expecting society to be more rational and open so it is not easy to be provoked to carry out destructive actions. Second, technological and informatics development is very fast; this development will have a positive impact when technology and information are used for the welfare of the public so that the believers have wide information and insights so that they can sort out and choose constructive measures in their lives, both in aspects as well as social rituals.

Meanwhile, several factors hinder the creation of a prosperous and peaceful society due to differences in ethnicity, race, religion, differences in teachings about truth and salvation, cultural differences, and differences in minority groups and ethnic groups. Most of these differences are hampered by certain religious conflicts, which are often triggered by religious groups or factions, resulting in a number of conflicts, both religious conflicts, ethnic conflicts, and political conflicts.

Therefore, it is important for the community to be tolerant, both within the same ethnic group and between religions. According to Mr. Abd Muis, in implementing its work program, FKUB Jember often holds training and education on tolerance for the community, especially the younger generation. This program aims to instil values of harmony from an early age and build collective awareness of the importance of living side by side in peace. The younger generation is considered an important asset in maintaining social stability in the future, so continuing education is a priority in efforts to build harmony. In addition, FKUB is also active in humanitarian activities involving various religions, such as disaster relief and other social activities. Interfaith involvement in this humanitarian program not only strengthens solidarity but also shows that cooperation in social action can

reduce differences and strengthen a sense of togetherness. Thus, the existence of FKUB can provide a positive impact by designing strategies to realize a peaceful and harmonious life in a multicultural environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) in Jember Regency plays an important role in building interfaith harmony through communication, dialogue, and cooperation involving various religions. With an inclusive organizational structure and programs that support tolerance, FKUB tries to create a culture of mutual respect among religious communities through friendship, tolerance training, and humanitarian activities. FKUB is also active in conflict mediation, especially with regard to the establishment of houses of worship and licensing, and serves as a bridge between different religious communities. Although faced with constraints such as budget limitations and suboptimal community support, FKUB has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening awareness of religious plurality, human rights and inclusiveness to achieve peace and harmony.

Supporting factors in building religious harmony include an inclusive local culture, such as the *Pandalungan* culture in Jember Regency, which instils the value of tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. In addition, the role of religious leaders as role models for the community is very important in spreading the message of peace and tolerance. The better education of the people, as well as the development of technology and information that can broaden people's horizons, are also significant supporting factors. On the other hand, inhibiting factors in building harmony include the high level of education that sometimes triggers differences in understanding, which leads to conflict, as well as differences in culture, ethnicity, and religious teachings that can trigger friction between groups. In addition, religious conflicts triggered by certain groups or groups are also obstacles to creating a harmonious society. Thus, the FKUB Jember strategy to overcome these obstacles is by organizing tolerance training, continuing education, and interfaith humanitarian activities that strengthen solidarity and brotherhood between religious communities.

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