



The Influences of Religion in Southeast Asia (Part II)

- Interviews with Wawan Gunawan (Jakatarub) and Vandrazel Birowa (ZABIDA)
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Topic Background

Throughout the month of September, SEAN-CSO's campaign continued to focus on the influence and impact of religion in Southeast Asia.

Religion is not only a key component in many people's personal identities, but it plays a dynamic role in shaping the construction of social structures within different societies. Through research and interviews, we highlight the work of individuals and organizations who aim to build bridges between various faith groups in their communities. Our goal is to encourage our audience to embrace religious diversity and understand the value of working across differences.



Profiles

Wawan Gunawan

Wawan Gunawan is an activist and a founding member of Jakatarub (Inter-Religious Network). He has been active in promoting peace and tolerance since the early 2000s.

Jakatarub is an acronym for Jaringan Kerja antar Umat Beragama (Inter-Religious Network). The organization works to facilitate peace education and promote tolerance.

Jakatarub was created in response to the Reformation era in Indonesia. During the Reformation era, there were a lot of attacks and social conflicts going on in the name of religion. At that time, a group of young people gathered and made a commitment to create a forum called Jakatarub. The organization focuses on peace education, the promotion of tolerance, and we also advocate for victims of religious violence. Jakatarub approaches issues and



challenges through four different lenses: theological, socio-cultural, nationalism, and media literacy.

Since joining Jakatarub and being involved with peacebuilding efforts, Wawan Gunawan has felt that his life is more peaceful. As part of his work, he directly interacts with many people from different religions. He understands how important it is to learn from others. He also feels that his spirituality level as a Muslim has become richer. Furthermore, Jakatarub has helped to build solidarity across religious lines. For example, when Christian members are discriminated against due to their faith, other members of Jakatrub will defend them.

The organization has also helped dispel stereotypes and has changed how some non-Muslims view Islam. This year Jakatarub was a recipient of a Pancasila Achievement Icon Award from BPIP (Pancasila Ideology Development Agency). When asked about what the award means to him and his team, Wawan Gunawan said, “We feel that this award is for all of us, especially for Indonesians who want to live in peace and according to Pancasila.” Ultimately, collaborating with people of different faiths can enrich our spirituality and strengthen our humanity. As Wawan Gunawan so nicely put it, “There is no dialogue between religions before dialogue between friends.”

Vandrazel Birowa

Vandrazel Birowa is a project coordinator with the Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance Inc, (ZABIDA).

Based in Zamboanga City, ZABIDA is a consortium of four non-governmental organizations in the Philippines: Katilingban sa Kalambuan, Inc. (KKI), Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ), Reach Out to Others Foundation (ROOF) in Zamboanga City, and Nagdilaab Foundation Inc. (NFI) based in Basilan. All four organizations are dedicated to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged communities in Zamboanga City and Basilan.

One of ZABIDA's big projects is their Youth Peace Camp. During the summer, youth from different parts of the country will come together for this event. Their days are packed with indoor and outdoor activities aimed at enhancing participants' perspectives on peace and peacemaking. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, camp was virtual this year. Another major initiative is the Mindanao Week of Peace. The observance of the “Week of



Peace” was originally initiated by PAZ and the SAALAM Foundation 23 years ago. Since 1997, the Interreligious Solidarity Movement for Peace has played a huge role in further developing the celebration. In 2001, former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared that from that moment forward the last Thursday of November up to the first Wednesday of December would be nationally recognized as the Mindanao Week of Peace (Proclamation No. 127, s. 2001). It was the government’s formal recognition of Mindanaoans’ desire to live in peace, unity, and harmony with each other. The Mindanao Week of Peace is celebrated annually not only in the six regions on the island, but in other areas of the Philippines as well. Various communities do

different things, but the week is usually marked by interfaith dialogue, parades, and large and small scale peacebuilding activities.

Vandrazel Birowa has been working with ZABIDA for five years and is extremely passionate about his work. Originally from the province of Sulu, he draws upon his own experiences belonging to a religious minority group and strives to build bridges between communities in Zamboanga and Basilan. He closed the interview by saying, “We at ZABIDA hope to see more dialogue between different faith groups so that we can talk, we can work, and we can work together. Religious tolerance and solidarity have a lasting impact and will help us build a stronger society.”



Compassion in Different Religions

Compassion is a core character trait of loving and kind people. Many different religions encourage individuals to lead compassionate lives and recognize that humans rely on care and help from others. **Demonstrating compassion is one of the main ways people show that they are good followers.** Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, the Buddha, and a number of other religious figures not only preached about compassion, but were compassionate towards all people.

For this month’s theme, we provide you some infographics about how compassion is perceived by several religions.



● **Compassion in Islam**

The importance of compassion in Islam is made abundantly clear in the Quran and other Islamic texts. In order to be a good Muslim in the eyes of Allah, one must be sensitive to the suffering of others. It is crucial to care for all living things: humans, animals, and plants.

Furthermore, compassion should be shown not only to those who are similar, but also to those who are different. Muslims should not discriminate against other humans based on faith. These ideals are central in Islamic teachings. Here are the tradition in Islam which teach the values of compassion:



*Illustration:
Fasting and Zakah in Islam that teach value of compassion*

Fasting

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. During that month, Muslims only eat one meal before sunrise (sawm) and a small meal after sunset (iftar). It is a time for self-reflection and an opportunity to recharge one's faith. It also makes people aware of the hunger of others and is a reminder that they have a duty to help those in need.

Zakah/Charity

Those who follow this pillar donate a percentage of their income, usually 2.5%, to charity. The money collected is used to maintain local mosques and provide financial assistance to those in poverty.

This practice is found in the hadith. Muslims consider it their social responsibility to ease the burdens of their fellow community members.¹

● **Compassion in Christianity**

Compassion has an important place in Christianity well. In the Gospel of Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In his teachings, Jesus emphasized the importance of showing compassion and helping those in need.

When speaking to his disciples, Jesus says, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me". Those who live their lives according to these values will be welcomed by God.

Churches show compassion in different ways. Pastors encourage people to not only think compassionately, but take action as well. Nearly every church around the world engages in charitable activities.



*Illustration:
Compassion in Christianity*

There are also a large number of Christian based charity organizations that work to support communities in need, such as:

Christian Compassion Ministries Foundation

It is an organization in the Philippines, which is a ministry of Cubao Reformed Baptist Church. Based in Manila, CCM helps low-income people in the community. Donors can “Sponsor a Child” and the funds are used to provide housing, food, schooling, and healthcare to children in unstable living conditions.²

● **Compassion in Hinduism**

Compassion is an important virtue in Hinduism. It is important to be aware of the pains and needs of others. Like other religions, Hinduism also emphasizes the importance of demonstrating compassion through one's actions.

One of the ideals of Hinduism is ahimsa. People should avoid causing harm to others at all costs. This compassion is extended towards all living beings. In fact, while there are plenty of Hindus who eat meat, some Hindu texts encourage vegetarianism out of compassion for animals.



Illustration:
Nyepi is a day for meditation and deep self-reflection for Hinduism

Nyepi

Nyepi is a major holiday for Hindus in Bali, Indonesia. It is the first day of the Balinese new year and on that day the whole island essentially shuts down. It is a day for meditation and deep self-reflection. Most people stay in their homes all day and there is no working, traveling, or lighting fires.

Some choose to fast or refrain from speaking for twenty-four hours. The days before and after Nyepi are filled with elaborate community-wide events which include animal sacrifices and purification rituals.³

● **Compassion in Buddhism**

Compassion plays an important role in Buddhism. The Buddha taught out of compassion for other beings and encouraged his followers to do the same.

An individual must be aware of the self, but also understand how one is part of a larger whole. All human beings are connected to that greater whole. Compassion involves the ability to see true suffering and helping those in need without expecting anything in return.

Buddha Jayanti/Vesak

Buddha Jayanti or Vesak is one of the biggest Buddhist holidays, which is celebrated annually on the day of the full moon in May. It is considered to be the most sacred day in the Buddhist calendar. It is said that three major life events occurred for the Buddha on the Day of Vesak: his birth, his achievement of enlightenment, and his passing.

On that day, Buddhists visit temples, engage in prayer and meditation, and make offerings. It is a day to reflect on the Buddha's wisdom and commitment to peace, goodwill, and compassion.⁴

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2 Bible
Christian Compassion Ministries.
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3 "Religions: Hinduism." BBC. 2014.
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4 United Nations. "Vesak Day" 2020.
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Member Highlights



The Pailig Development Foundation, Inc. (PDFI)

from the Philippines

The Pailig Development Foundation, Inc. (PDFI) is an NGO, based in Iligan City, Mindanao, Philippines. For the past 21 years, the PDFI team has been actively involved in grassroots peacebuilding and rural development initiatives. As highlighted on their website, PDFI's mission is to "help build empowered, self-reliant, gender sensitive, environmentally friendly, peaceful, and sustainable communities through Sustainable Integrated Area Development (SIAD) in partnership with key stakeholders."

The organization has extensive experience providing communities with technical assistance, training, project development and management, and managerial support in the field of conflict transformation. PDFI assists with dialogue and mediation; emergency relief and rehabilitation; community empowerment and development; livelihood and income generation; micro, small and medium enterprise

development; human rights production and the rule of law; and, transparent and accountable governance advocacy.

Recently, PDFI has begun holding Community Sharing Sessions (CSS). These online meetings provide participants with the opportunity to engage with people who are both similar and different from them. These conversations increase mutual understanding, respect and tolerance between those of different backgrounds and serve to strengthen communities at large. Within the context of the coronavirus pandemic, these sessions have been particularly insightful as participants have shared the ways in which they have adapted to their new circumstances. Furthermore, PDFI notes that the CSS affirm the innate capacities of youth leaders as valuable actors and contributors in the promotion of positive change for peace and development.

Islamic Renaissance Front from Malaysia



The Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) is an intellectual movement and think tank based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. IRF focuses on youth empowerment and the promotion of Muslim intellectual discourse. Since its founding in December of 2009, IRF has engaged in discussions concerning the promotion of democracy, liberty, and social justice both at home and abroad. As stated on their website, IRF is committed to liberating the Muslim mind from rigid orthodoxy and conservatism. IRF is dedicated to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and appreciation in order to enable the Ummah to confront their present challenges more meaningfully towards the progress and happiness of all.

IRF's mission statement consists of five primary objectives: offer Malaysia the best possible information on issues relevant to IRF's vision;

provide the best analyses of policies towards the promotion of peace and harmony; advance our understanding of a compassionate and democratic Islam; maintain, nurture, and expand our network of like minded individuals, corporate entities, NGOs, governments and other bodies towards ensuring the effective dissemination of our analyses and positions; and enhance intercultural understanding and foster civilizational dialogues in Malaysia and beyond.

Throughout the year, IRF hosts many informative and educational lectures, panels, and discussions with scholars and specialists from around the world. Past topics include Malaysia's political impasse, authoritarianism in the Arab States, the role and future of religion in politics, and the role of Islam in advancing democracy and human rights in various Muslim societies. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, these events were held in person at various locations in Kuala Lumpur. Starting in March however, these gatherings have become webinars which have made them more accessible to more people. These events directly support IRF in their pursuit of revitalizing the dynamism of Muslim intellectual discourse.

Wahid Foundation and The Patani Video Series:

If you want to know how the pandemic affects Thai society or if you're simply curious about what violent extremism is, our members from Thailand and Indonesia have created some videos about to Covid-19 and P/CVE issues. Check them out now on our YouTube Channel:



▶ **CHAT: Countering Hate in Anxious Times.**

How to make a self-recorded video:

Want to be exclusively featured on SEAN-CSO's Social Media? Send in your best video to us! In October, our theme will be 'Member's Voices' and we want to hear more from you, especially in these pandemic times. You can talk about interesting projects that you're currently involved in, how the pandemic has affected your work or organization in the field, or anything related to P/CVE issues.

Still don't know how to make a good video? Don't worry, we have got your back. We have created this simple 2-minute tutorial on how to make a decent self-recorded video in your own home. Stream it online on YouTube:

bit.ly/SelfRecTutorial

Funding Opportunity



Ending & Preventing Violence against Women and Girls in the context of COVID-19

► bit.ly/SEAN-CSO-UNWomen

Global Call for Proposals for 2020 European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

► bit.ly/SEAN-CSO-EIDHR

UNDP Call for Proposals: Research on the Role of Women in Religious-Based Organization

► bit.ly/SEAN-CSO-UNDP

Updates

- SEAN-CSO currently **has**



- All SEAN-CSO social media is **followed by**

3,479 accounts

- SEAN-CSO posts focused on PVE **receive**

2,658 likes
an average

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Also check our website:

sean-cso.org

Synergy in Harmony

Walk together for a better world



Would you like to be featured in the next SEAN-CSO Newsletter or in our upcoming social media campaign?

If you have stories, research, or programs focused on Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism, contact us at:

sean-cso@peacegen.id

This update has been brought to you by SEAN-CSO in collaboration with Peace Generation Indonesia.