

Reinventing *Pesantren*'s Moderation Culture to Build a Democratic Society in the Post-Reform Republic of Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to analyze problems faced by *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia) in the Post-Reform Indonesia by employing a historical-critical analysis approach. By relying on the related literature, the writer focuses on some serious problems faced by *pesantren* today, i.e. the emergence of a number of rigid religious expressions contrary to democratic values and the culture of *pesantren*. As argued in this paper, *pesantren* fundamentally has values inherent in the democratic society. From a historical perspective, *pesantren* since its inception has demonstrated the nature of tolerance by accepting diversity of the community. The *pesantren*'s moderation culture should be managed properly in order to create an understanding for mutual respect in a pluralistic society. At this point, *pesantren* as a tool to ignite social engineering needs to do a reformulation of its education system to form a democratic and civilized Muslim society.

Keywords: Democracy, moderation, *Pesantren*, radicalism, reform

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INTRODUCTION

With the fall of President Soeharto on May 21, 1998, Indonesia, as believed by many people, experienced a number of changes, such as political stability, economic growth, and cessation of social and ethnic conflicts (Platzdasch, 2009). The conflicts appear to have intensified in the era of *reformasi*, in the two years since the fall of the Soeharto regime (Wilson, 2001). On one hand, this situation does confirm the existence of

pesantren to participate in voicing the values of democracy, pluralism, and human rights. However, on the other hand, it also gives a fresh breeze for the growth of transnational ideological movements which are castrated because the government at that time treated Islam merely as a religion and approached it as an ideological as well as political movement (Effendy, 1998). However, in the Reformist era, the government opened the door of democracy widely. This led to transnational ideology which evolved so rapidly and generated a new conflict between the pro-democracy groups and the counter-democracy groups. In fact, sometimes the presence of transnational movements is counter-productive and works as a hurdle to formation of a civil society and to implementation of democracy. Frequently, this situation also drags a SARA- (tribe, tradition, race, and religion) based conflict and leads to violence in the name of religion.

In his research, Helfstein (2010) showed that the Islamist movement in Indonesia was strongly rooted in early Islamist and *jihadist* thinking. The emergence of radical thoughts that always interpret *jihad* as *qital*, or fighting with arms, is indeed contrary to the teachings of Indonesian Islam famed with tolerance and peace. Such an interpretation is certainly very different from the perspective of *Kyais* (teachers) in *pesantren*. The term *jihad* does not necessarily mean war, but it is derived from the word *al-juhd* which means putting (hard)

efforts and earnestness. It can also mean “trouble” (Umar, 2008). Sometimes *jihad* is interpreted as “to mobilize all abilities to fend off and confront an enemy that does not appear” namely evil desires of *nafs* or ego (El Guyanie, 2010). This kind of *jihad* has seemingly proven to give birth to Islam in Indonesia, which is so peaceful.

The phenomenon of radicalism¹ has now become a worry to researchers, *kyiais*, and the Muslim community in general because it is often associated with *pesantren*. This fact is really strange considering the number of terrorists who become followers of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syam) are *pesantren* alumni. However, *pesantren* of this type is relatively small in number and they exhibit a set of ideologies and cultural values which are far different from the *mainstream* of *pesantren*. Though the non-mainstream *pesantrens* are few in number when compared to *pesantren* of moderate Islam (*al-wasathiyyah al-Islamiyya*), according to Wahid (2001), the voice of this group is impactful and seems to dominate political discourse in Indonesia.

Indeed, generalization and stigmatization of *pesantren* with disrespectful labels, such as the source of radicalism and terrorism, and attacking the *pesantren* are not new

¹ According to Rijal (2010), phenomenon of radicalism is product of the 20th Century in the moslem world particularly in the Middle East. Radicalism is the product of crisis identity faced by Moslems that trigger a resistant behaviour to the Western Countries.

subjects.² *Pesantren*, historically, has been connoted negatively by some people who are not responsible, such as people belonging to conservative, traditional, and closed institutions (Lukens-Bull, 2000; Rahardjo, 1974). In fact, *pesantren* in the history of education in Indonesia has never stopped developing and has always been dynamic, evolving, and moderate. The doctrines of *pesantren* that have a historical link with the spread of Islamic propaganda (*da'wah*) conducted by *Walisongo* (the nine saints) always attach to the values of humanity, brotherhood, and respect for diversity. The *pesantren's* education model of non-violence always sows peace and tolerance, acculturated with local culture. Therefore, with the openness and moderation invested, *pesantren* shows uniqueness as an institution that has always answered the actual problems of humanity.

As an old education system in Indonesia, *pesantren* has values that are always attached to the changing times. The *pesantren's* education system has always imparted the principals of humanism in every generation whereby these students are expected to maintain the continuity of history and ideology of the nation for the sake of civilization, culture, and humanity, in addition to being religious people (*tafaqquh fi al-din*). That is, *pesantren* always instill

² See the synthesis from Bruinessen (2004), that formulates typology of *pesantren* namely, traditionalist *pesantren* and Islamist *pesantren*. In fact, Islamist *pesantren* follows the ideology of radical Islam Movement; however, substantial and essential Islamic teaching is taught in traditional *pesantren*.

a great responsibility for their students to be able to align the interests of education with the existing developments to keep up with other nations. The vision and mission of *pesantren* for religion, humanity, and state should be constantly held and passed on by *pesantren* institutions in the present era. This is especially to overcome and keep the *pesantren* education system from the infiltration of the pro-radicalism networks that threaten the government and society. This situation is a challenge for the *Kyais* as a form of responsibility to not only educate the students to have good manners, moderate character and value the diversity, but also promote a *counter discourse* against any form of radicalism that occurs in the name of *pesantren*.

The researcher aims to highlight the Reform Era with its political nuances. His second aim is to justify a thesis proposed by Hefner (2000) that held the dynamics of religion and society in the modern age were marked by the emergence of two phenomena. The first is the spread of democratic ideas to different communities and cultures around the world while the second is the reappearance of issues of ethnicity and religion in public affairs, such as the rise of Islamic movements in the Muslim world. The truth of this statement can be seen in Indonesia, especially in the Post-Reform era that gave rise to religious and social developments characterized by the emergence of various trends of thought and unique religious movements to manage conflicts.

METHODS

This is a retrospective and introspective study of the phenomenon of *pesantren*. To address the objective of this case study, an in-depth critical analysis of the history of *pesantren* as well as its *status qua* was conducted. The data source consisted of the related literature such as *kitab kuning*, journals, books in Arabic, English and Indonesian languages. The historical facts came from the library or directly from *pesantren*. A critical review and analysis of the data followed. Data analysis was interpretive. More specifically, it was based on William Leo Lueey's method in which all testimonies from a certain period are collected and evaluated in order to compile facts proven to have causality and then presented in a scientific description (Lueey, 1958). The data collection and analysis procedures involved collecting, evaluating, verifying, and synthesizing evidence to enforce the facts and obtain strong conclusions. In order to do this, *pesantrens'* activities were recorded as comprehensively and accurately as possible, and then the reasons behind those activities were analyzed. To obtain valid and reliable data and results, a panel of experts validated the data collection and analysis procedures as well as the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of the Post-Reform Indonesia

In the Post-Reform era, Indonesian society is confronted with various problems that, on one hand, test its maturity as a democratic

society, while on the other, give rise to serious issues, such as fanaticism, radicalism, discrimination against minorities, and the growth of intolerance. In the United Nations Forum in Geneva in 2012, Indonesia gained appreciation in the human rights performance. However, still Indonesia needs serious work and improvement regarding escalation of religious intolerance and lack of protection of minorities (Baqir et al., 2013).

This reality is supported by a number of frequent events which reflect a lack of respect for human rights, such as diversity, and freedom of speech, and flourishing the seeds of terrorism in Indonesia. Suicide bombing activities ruin the image of countries and nations. Radicalism has been troubling the people and government of Indonesia in many ways. In order to solve this issue during the Bali bombing, the government through the Decree of Chief of Indonesian Police No. Pol.: Skep/756/X/2005 formed Densus 88 with the aim of maintaining the security of the State from terrorist attacks and stopping crime against humanity. From an Islamic perspective, terrorism is a tragedy that is contrary to the values of Islam, i.e. being tolerant, loving, and merciful to the world. The question is why there are people willing to sacrifice their lives and commit savage, cruel, and violent acts. Such radicalistic issues are compounded by the religious sentiments deliberately blown to tearing the unity of Indonesia as a society.

There is a desolate sociological fact in the country known as the *emerald of the equator* in the Post-Reform era. When the

faucet of democracy is turned on, it seems to provide fresh air to the fundamentalist and radical religious groups. The condition that should be used to exchange ideas, build the nation, and promote common prosperity is misused by the radical groups to recruit and exploit younger people to be narrow-minded, and intolerant—adversely affecting their core national identity. This group is skilled, intelligent, fond of using justification by different means, and has strong overseas networks. According to Blinder (2001), although the groups categorized as fundamentalists are small in numbers, they have very high motivation and determination and they are capable of forming militant cadres who are ready to sacrifice their body and soul.

Attitude and perspective of fundamentalist groups, according to experts, are typically characterized by literal interpretation of the religious texts and refusing contextual understanding, rejecting pluralism and relativism, monopolizing the truth on religious interpretation and considering their own interpretation as the best neglecting the others; they are identical with bigotry, exclusivism, intolerance, radicalism, and militancy. It seems fundamentalists have made their social and religious paradigm as an ideology following certain characteristics. First, there is an ideology formulated and adhered by the followers with the intention of achieving a particular goal. Second, there is an ideology that is used to achieve their political goals, usually aimed at encouraging, supporting, and strengthening violent behavior (Sumbulah, 2009).

The emergence of the phenomenon of religious expressions, which is rigid and self-righteous, in the present era is often exhibited by our society through social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and other social networks. These issues are potential causes of frictions among members belonging to various religious backgrounds³. Moreover, this religious *immaturity* is exploited by the irresponsible people in a sense that it ignites the sentiments of people who already had the seeds of hatred, to undermine the State symbols or kill other groups of the unbelievers; it is certainly very dangerous, like the fire in the husk.

Pesantren: The Source of Peace

Everyone agrees that *pesantren* is the oldest form of Islamic education in Indonesia, but it is unknown when it began. However, based on a number of statements from experts, the history of the *pesantren* establishment coincided with the growth of Islam in Java around the 15th and 16th A.D., about the same time as *Walisongo's da'wah* (propaganda) was taking place (Mas'ud et al., 2002). The primary characteristic of learning in *pesantren* is that it offers much

³ According to Bakri (2004), rationale of radicalism was born and developed due to the religious emotion, cultural factor, and factor of anti-western ideology. Some factors emerge because of an understanding that West is accused as the cause of the decline of moslems with their political strategy and secular culture brought by them. Besides, there are also phenomena of economy and politics. Another argument reveals that radicalism emerges due to excessive capitalism.

more emphasis on the development of a moral character and indigenous Javanese culture. Therefore, the face of Islam that was transmitted by the *Kyais* in *pesantren* is basically an inclusive Islam and spreads peace on earth (*Rahmatan li l-'Alamin*).

This was because the *Kyais* usually pass on the teachings of *Walisongo* who always taught good manners, tolerance and respect towards local cultures. *Da'wah* of *Walisongo* always offered a wide range of changes and social reconstruction for indigenous people without disturbing the local culture. There are at least three reasons why indigenous people so fast and easily accepted Islam. First, Islam is contextual. That is, Islam is understood as a doctrine associated with the context of time and place. Islam as a doctrine is always dynamic and people can easily adjust the changes taking place. Second, Islam is tolerant. That is, the contextualization of Islam can be understood as the result of interpretation or *Ijtihad*. Thirdly, Islam respects tradition. It is, on its character, not hostile to local traditions. Rather, the traditions serve as a means of vitalization of Islamic values that are familiar with the lives of its adherents (Sutiyono, 2010).

Therefore, on the arrival the *Walis* (guardians or saints) in Java, the Javanese culture did not fade away; rather, it grew and was consolidated. Although the Demak Sultanate, founded in the 16th century by the first king named Raden Patah (1475-1518 AD), applied the Islamic law with the *Quran* as source of the law reflecting the success of Islamic propagation, this

did not mean that Javanese tradition and civilization perished. It can be stated that under the Demak Kingdom's civilization there was a continuation of the ancient Javanese Hindu civilization as claimed by de Graaf & Pigeaud (1985). Transition from the Majapahit Kingdom to the Demak Empire was used by *Walisongo* (the nine saints) to do the Islamization and turn elements of *Kejawen* (Java-related cultures) to the teachings of Islam. After the collapse of the Majapahit Empire in the early 17th century, the ruling dynasty was the Mataram Dynasty (whose territory covered an area of present Yogyakarta). The greatest king in Java in the post-Majapahit era was Sultan Agung who became successful in reconciling the intersection of the Javanese palace and the Islamic traditions (Ricklefs, 2013).

Along with the establishment of Islamic kingdoms, *Walisongo* established a model of education as a place to galvanize the *santris*, students. This was a proof of the nature of their preaching, which is flexible and accommodating. Thus, in making of educational models they also tried to reconcile Islam with the existing cultures. This kind of education system came to be known as *Pesantren*. *Pesantren* education system is considered as a modification of Hindu temples (Wahjoetomo, 1997). Steenbrink (1994) also considered *pesantren* as an institution similar to the Hindu tradition which was religious in nature. The *Kyais* are not paid but have great respect. They also live far from cities. Although *pesantren* is often associated with the Hindu-imitating education, called

as *padepokan* or the hermitage, it has a very noticeable difference. *Pesantren* does not recognize the caste system and nearly all students can learn in it. The system of Hindu hermitage teaches students from only special castes, i.e. the Brahmins and Kshatriya (Ditjen Bimbingan Islam, 1985) while the rest are largely ignored.

Considering the history of *pesantren* which is closely related to the tolerant teachings of *Walisongo*, it is counterproductive to regard *pesantren* as a source of terrorism enticing hatred against non-Muslims and attacking the country's symbols –especially after bombings in several places in Indonesia. It must be acknowledged that some terrorists, according to some experts (Coolsaet, 2008; Solahudin, 2013) are persons who have a relationship with one of the *pesantrens* in Central Java (*Pesantren Ngruki*) or with an alumnus from the *secondary pesantrens* (Ngruki). Even Amrozy Cs, the Bali-1 bomber gaining international attention, also provided recognition that he and his colleagues were alumni of *pesantren*. However, it is not wise if we hastily generalize that all *pesantren* alumni are terrorists. There are various types of *pesantren* in Indonesia, with different ideologies (Ma'arif, 2011). The *Pesantrens* have also experienced a rapid growth of dynamics which is evident.

The Reformulation of *Pesantren*

In order to ensure peace, education based on local wisdom in *pesantren* is imperative to re-think the entire concept of education that

allows bringing the students to have open and inclusive thoughts and be able to accept the reality of social differences. It is an educational concept that seeks specifically to distance insularity and exclusivity. Moreover, *pesantren* education is expected to develop sense of responsibility for the continuation of their lives, society, country, and all humanity with peace and mutual respect.

According to Haryatmoko (2008), Islamic education has at least four ideal goals, including: (1) the acquisition of knowledge and skills (competencies) or the ability to respond to market demand, (2) humanistic orientation, (3) responding to the challenges of social, economic, and justice issues, and (4) the progress of science.

Of the four educational goals, the second point becomes important for education process as it promotes humanism. It is also important to note that Islamic education should uphold the rights of learners to acquire knowledge and information. Besides, Islamic education should also strengthen the spirit of nationalism of the learners. Moreover, based on history, Islam and nationalism have colored the development of the system of Islamic education in Indonesia. Since Islam came to Indonesia through the Dutch colonial period, through the Islamic education, Muslims have been trying to realize the values of Islam in public life, in addition to the Islamic nationalism, civil society, and democracy (Djamas, 2009). According to Madjid (1998), democracy is an ideology, not only because of principal considerations, i.e. the

values of democracy have been justified and supported by the spirit of Islamic teachings, but also because of its function as the rules of the open political game.

Moreover, in reality, there is synchronization between nationalism, democracy, and Islamic education, as could be traced in the early independence of the Republic of Indonesia dealing with the contribution of Muslim leaders. It also proves that nationalism, democracy, and Islamic education have a contribution that should not be considered trivial as they are the foundation of a personally qualified personality and ready to live in a pluralistic society in order to achieve harmony, peace, and unity with the principle of love for others. Islamic Nationalism, according to Purwoko (2001), is the determining factor that binds the spirit and loyalty to create an ideal State. In addition, the growth and development of nationalism have produced many independent countries around the world. This is because nationalism has played a very important and positive role in supporting the unity and democracy. As a result, the State can implement the national development as an effort to increase prosperity and improve the quality of education, especially the Islamic education (Purwoko, 2001).

The approaches used in *pesantren* should focus on the communicative and flowing approach full of tenderness. Kyai Ashari (1993), in the book of *Adabu al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, prescribed approaches to teaching and learning with an emphasis on

ethics and morality. For example, a *Kyai* should love his students, and *vice versa*.

Schools of thought, culture, and ethnicity of the *santri*, or students, can also be used as material for discussion by comparing them with the schools, culture, religion, ethnicity, and beliefs of other people. This puts a positive momentum to boost cultural and religious diversity. In this context, it is the time for *pesantren* to redefine its curriculum that is moderate and responsive to contemporary issues. There should be no more curriculum of *pesantren* supporting or triggering religious radicalism, such as interpreting the word *jihad* with *qital* (war) and killing innocent people. Rather, *jihad* in Islam actually has connotation with seriousness and perseverance in realizing everything that is taken up as a destiny, a symbol of honor and sacrifice to others, and against any form of injustice that occurs in the community. The word *jihad* literally is derived from the word *jahada* that means "shedding the ability" (Asfar, 2003). *Jihad* should not be used to force people to embrace Islam, but to liberate all forms of oppression on earth regardless of any religion (Arkoun, 2001).

An important issue that cannot be forgotten, in addition to the factors above, is the support from teachers, clerics, and *Kyais* who are broad-minded. They are, in addition to the required competence of extensive religious knowledge, expected to have national and local wisdom. All of this needs to be done in order to create a harmonious and friendly religious life, mutual respect,

and interaction with each other in this beloved Republic. All of these steps can be immediately applied in *pesantren*, so that the label as the source of radicalism may disappear, a label that is very contrary to Islamic tradition and not in accordance with the teachings of Islam which is *rahmatan lil-'alamin*.

Some Important Characters Emphasized by *Pesantren*

In the context of Indonesia, *pesantren* as a sub-culture is understood to have a value system, in addition to its own central value. With contextual understanding of the *kitab kuning* (literally means yellow book) and other contemporary literatures, *pesantren* communities acculturate local culture with the values of *pesantren*. As an institution of the original product of the Archipelago, *pesantren* showed characteristic of *gotong royong* (voluntarily shared work) which is a part of Indonesian tradition. Other values of self-reliance developed by *pesantren* are independence, cooperation, patriotism, peace, tolerance, consultation, and equality.

The goal of the establishment of *pesantren* is to elevate morality, heighten spirit, and appreciate spiritual values and humanity (Dhofier, 1994). This is associated with the goals of education at the time of the Prophet that was to shape faithful companions and *Ummat* (people), and devoted servants to God as His caliph on the Earth who brought grace, peace, and prosperity (Majid, 2012). The educational institutions, including *pesantren*, which had been believed by many experts to be able to

form pious individuals, are unable to bring about a productive change in society.

Therefore, the idea of reinventing the culture of moderation in *pesantren* finds its significance in order to respond to the problems, especially related to culture of anarchism, which always appears one after another in the Republic and always uses the name of *pesantren*. In addition, the culture of moderation is also important for the sake of overcoming a number of humanitarian issues and restoring the face of Indonesian people who were formerly known as religious people and friendly with valuable cultures coming from religion and values of the intellect. For this purpose, *pesantren* should emphasize the creation of a complete generation, covering not only religious sciences, but also social intelligence, such as loving and caring for fellow human beings.

The values existing in *pesantren* are deemed successful in forming a positive character on the students because *pesantren* implements holistic education, such as learning, teaching, and character building or discipline. Some of these values are relevant to be explored and developed as a form of reinforcement of the noble ideals of the Nation. Some values in *pesantren* began to be neglected; thus, they need to be revived for a bright society in the near future. When emphasized and taught, those values will certainly contribute to realization of the State of Indonesia endowed with God blessing, or *baldatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafuur* (Octavia et al., 2014).

In addition, *pesantren* must design an educational system that is indispensable

in building the structure of a democratic and civil society.⁴ The moderation culture should be realized in every *pesantren*. In addition to building peace education and saving the future of *pesantren's* students, all parties, and key stakeholders must cooperate with mutual introspection by trying to make smart breakthroughs to counteract all violent movements and vigilantes. *Pesantren* also requires a breakthrough in the learning practice to be able to transmit and internalize the expected values and finally create students with noble character. This expectation becomes important because, from the perspective of education, *pesantren* should serve as a fertile garden where the seeds of kindness grow; rather than, vicious hatred by labeling others as infidel and confronting the State.

In this regard, the importance of *pesantren* education and training based on local wisdom is an effort to humanize humans, by encouraging them to morality, and respect the tradition that has become *cultural identity* in society. The process of transmission and internalization of values

⁴ We know that education is the effective instrument in the practice of blocking the current religious radicalism. A study conducted by Rokhmat (2012) was more concerned with implementing Islamic education. The implementation of religious education should run through strategy of preventive de-radicalization, preservative de-radicalization of moderate Islam, and curative de-radicalization. Religious education is the most appropriate solution in the process of de-radicalization; for instance, teaching-learning process in *pesantren*.

and education based on local wisdom in *pesantren* is, perhaps, as expected by Al-Ghulayani (1949). That is, education is a place to instill noble manners (*gharsu al-akhlaqi al-fadhilati*) among students.

Indeed, there are some values that are typical features of a civilized society. These values must be implemented in the Islamic educational system until they become a culture:

Promoting dialogue. Changes in society towards the paradigm of modern society that is open and without barrier gives an opportunity to the formation of world order that shares peace and mutual respect in society, particularly between the West and Islamic society which, according to Ahmed (2003), frequently show disagreement and conflict. This is caused by the idea of a clash of civilizations to portray Muslims as the main enemy of the West, and posits Islam as a barbaric civilization that threatens the West. Being a civilized society that prefers dialogues can be realized if the morality of the modern society is not as feared by philosopher Habermas (1975), that is, the society turns into a crystallization of principle of subjectivism and becomes selfish and materialistic measuring everything materialistically. This has become a real factor of the damage and destruction of civilization in the contemporary world. This is clear if we see the emergence of the phenomenon of religious violence and terrorism, radicalism and Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which according to the results of some research (Solahudin,

2013), are caused more by economic and political motives.

Strengthening tolerance. The religious education must prepare a generation that could apply democracy, fairness, legal sovereignty, and friendliness to differences. Borrowing Gus Dur's statements, the purpose of Islamic education is to realize the ideals of true Islam, namely the establishment of an egalitarian society, which sums up the freedom and responsibility of the public within the framework of the mechanism of *shura* and equality principles, and upholds tolerance (Masdar, 1999).

Creating social piety. In the case of Islam, for example, religious adherents need to always give priority to support the *akhlakul karimah*, or good manner, in a democratic society and shape Muslim personality completely. This is according to the nature of Islam that is called "omnipresence" (Rahman, 1966). Hence, the presence of Islam becomes a true moral guide for human action (Rahman, 1966). It is an ideal character of Muslim who is always coming up with actions fully supported by the religious teachings from *al-Quran* and *al-Hadith*, believes in the presence of Allah SWT, the equality of individuals based on *Taqwa*, and the concept of *Rahmatan li l-'Alamin*.

CONCLUSION

There is a crucial problem that needs immediate attention and response for its solution by *pesantren* when dealing with the issues of modernity, including the emergence of a number of transnational

post-reform ideologies, which seem to be contrary to the character and disposition of *pesantren*. One of the main things, which cannot be ignored, is shifting the paradigm. In this new paradigm, *pesantren* needs to be developed in order to hold a strategic point, that is, in the framework of the establishment of civil society and deliberative society.

In addition, *pesantren* must continue to explore the indigenous values that have proved to offer positive contributions to the Republic of Indonesia, such as moderation, *tasamuh*, and recognition to diversity. *Pesantren* should also be committed to the formation of a civilized society that is able to uphold the humanitarian issues, foster tolerance and freedom of speech, emphasize dialogue, and hold keen awareness of nationalism and social harmony.

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