



M. Din Syamsuddin

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President of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's largest Muslim social and educational organization



"Islam and the New Indonesian Democracy"

Tuesday, April 25, 2006
12 p.m.
Mershon Center
Room 120



This lecture is open to the public. Lunch will be served to invited students and faculty who RSVP to [Ann Powers](#) no later than Friday, April 21, 2006.

M. Din Syamsuddin is president of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's largest modernist Muslim social and educational organization; vice general chair of the Indonesian Ulama Council; professor of Islamic political thought at the National Islamic University in Jakarta; and president of the Asian Conference on Religion for Peace, based in Tokyo. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles and is author of *Islam and Politics in the New Order Era* (2000) and *Religious Ethics to Build Civil Society* (2001).

For more information, please see the *GermaNews* story "[An Up and Coming Leader: Din Syamsuddin](#)."

Indonesia is world's largest Muslim majority country. Because it is one of only two examples of secular Islamic democracy, the country has attracted much inquiry into how it structures the relationship between religion and politics. However, democracy in Indonesia is very young, and this relationship has not been firmly settled. What role Islam will ultimately play in the new Indonesian political system has yet to be seen.

Din Syamsuddin is a key player in both social affairs and politics in Indonesia. As president of Muhammadiyah, the country's largest modernist Muslim social and educational organization, he is directly involved in debates over the relationship between Islam and politics. Syamsuddin belongs to the modernist tradition in Indonesia, which argues that Islam properly understood is perfectly compatible with modernity. In other words, one can be Muslim and modern simultaneously: one need not abandon Islamic beliefs to achieve progress and democratic rule.

Although Muhammadiyah does not see itself as a political organization, its preference is for Islamic values to play a greater role in the new Indonesian democracy established after decades of authoritarian rule. Syamsuddin argued that a majority of Muslims in Indonesia do not seek an Islamic state based on Shariah rule. However, they do not favor a secular democracy completely devoid of any religious influence, either. Instead, he says, most Indonesians wish their system to be an "ethical democracy" that esteems Islamic values and whose laws and actions are based on traditionally held beliefs.

Although Indonesia is majority Muslim, it also has significant minority populations of Christians and indigenous religions. Syamsuddin emphasized that it is important for Muslims to be tolerant and embrace other religions in the country. To further this purpose, Muhammadiyah engages in activities that reach out to other religious groups and foster interfaith dialogue. Muhammadiyah sees respect and tolerance for other beliefs as a

cornerstone of Islam.

Since Sept. 11, Indonesia has attracted attention for certain actions and terrorist bombings allegedly committed by extremist Islamic groups in the country. Syamsuddin argued that while there may be a small group of extremists in Indonesia that opposes the West and democracy and pursues violence, we should not confuse these extremists with the majority of Muslims in Indonesia who are moderate and oppose radicalism. Muhammadiyah is opposed to any form of violence and war and is deeply committed to peace, not only between different communities, but also between civilizations.

Most Indonesian Muslims do not believe in a current or impending clash of civilizations, Syamsuddin said. They wish to live in a democratic system -- not a secular system in which religion and politics are completely separate, but a system shaped by their deeply held Islamic beliefs and values. Furthermore, their desire is to live in a peaceful system free of any form of violent conflict.

For these reasons, Syamsuddin argued, it is critical for the current "War on Terror" campaign not to lump Muslims in the same camp as a small group of extremists. The West, in particular the United States, should refrain from using heavy-handed force to deal with problems it perceives in the Muslim world. Instead, it should make an effort to understand the concerns of Muslims worldwide and to respect their deeply-held beliefs.

In the case of Indonesia, Syamsuddin said, moderate and modernist Islamic organizations like Muhammadiyah are in a much better position than an outside power to reach out to extremist groups in the Muslim community and push them toward becoming peaceful and moderate players. Radical groups are in a weak position in the Muslim world and Indonesia because for most Muslims, it is more important to live out their religion freely and follow Islamic teachings in their private life and the social sphere than to impose Islamic rule from above through actions undertaken by the state or any political authority.