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Defending Pancasila to protect Indonesian pluralism

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Jember, East Java / Wed, June 1 2016 / 07:53 am

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Broadly speaking, Pancasila should form the basis for legal and human rights development in Indonesia and hence an accurate understanding of Pancasila's five principles is a prerequisite to understanding the scope of protections under Indonesian pluralism.

The five principles are considered "supreme" because Pancasila is the philosophical basis for the founding of Indonesia. Apart from being the ideology of the nation, Pancasila serves as the highest source of law in the Indonesian legal system.

As a national ideology and supreme source of law, Pancasila may be interpreted either in a relatively open and liberal way or in a monolithic and restrictive way, depending mostly on the regime or society doing the interpreting.

For example, the first principle can be interpreted as supporting a "multi-faith God" that should inspire religious pluralism. This principle is the ultimate legal canopy for the protection of all religious believers.

A multi-faith God means that according to Pancasila, religion and God are basically sociological, so the concept of God and religion here is purely a matter of interpretation.

The flexible interpretation of God and religion in Pancasila is designed to provide inclusive norms that can facilitate religious pluralism. Therefore, all Indonesians have an equal right to interpret Pancasila in terms of religion and God as long as their interpretation is in accordance with the spirit of pluralism. Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, followers of local religions and Muslims can interpret God and religion based on their religious teachings.

Some Muslim scholars have argued that the majority of Indonesian Muslims would argue that Pancasila is in accordance with Islamic belief, as the first principle of Pancasila, in their opinion, is simply reformulation of the Islamic belief in the One



Some others like Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, two strident supporters of Pancasila, maintain that its humanitarian principle can be interpreted by Muslims as the Islamic noble spirit of *habl min al-nas* (humanitarianism) which

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Some also say that the principle of a multi-faith God in Pancasila is a principle that should guide all other principles. This means that the first principle of Pancasila can be considered the supreme religious principle that consists of ethical and spiritual principles inasmuch as it emphasises monotheistic religions, but it is still open to and respects all other faiths because it is not organically related to any particular religion.

The flexible interpretation of Pancasila's religious principle basically does not have a particular designation and hence any constructive interpretation is generally accepted by society.

Looking at monotheism and humanitarianism together, the monotheistic religions and the supreme religious principle of Pancasila were not created as an obstacle to humanitarianism because both emphasize that all religions, whether mainstream or practised by few Indonesians, must be protected.

This religious concept was intended to facilitate religious pluralism in Indonesia and should be capable of maintaining and inspiring all aspects of positive religious development in the country. Accordingly, all believers must enjoy an equal opportunity to develop, as long as they accept Pancasila as the ideology of the state.

Recent social and religious realities in the country demonstrate that Pancasila has lost its centrality even though it still maintains some of its earlier force as a symbol of an energetic, if sometimes beleaguered, Indonesian desire for unity, freedom and tolerance.

Some Indonesians may deem the above broad interpretation of the concept of a multi-faith God unsatisfying. They may perceive Pancasila as an insufficient tool or "a failed ideology" that cannot cope with all the problems facing the country.

Hence, they propose their "religious values" as an alternative doctrine to respond to social problems including religious pluralism. For example, some Muslims state that the Republic of Indonesia, as the largest Muslim-majority country, shall adopt a



with its teachings.

They further argue that there must be a more specific law to interpret the broad

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This suggests that some Indonesians, especially the orthodox, have never fully settled with Pancasila, including the multi-faith God principle, which they regard as an attempt to undermine the dominant status of their religion by awarding all religions equal status, replacing religion with a secular ideology.

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