

CONSTRUCTING INTERFAITH HARMONY THROUGH THE DA'WAH OF KH. MAHFUD RIDWAN IN SEMARANG, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Religious activists or da'i enlighten the *mad'u* (disciples) to coexist well and peacefully, require tolerant and wise da'wah, and convey the message of Islam as a mercy for all nature. However, the practice of da'wah is often faced with difficulties and obstacles. To overcome these challenges, a person needs to understand the concept of state life that binds all people from various groups and social groups to prevent unexpected societal conflicts. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the condition of Semarang Regency society before and after KH. Mahfud Ridwan's preaching. In addition, this research will also analyze the role of da'wah in creating inter-religious harmony from 1984 to 2015. This research was conducted in a descriptive qualitative manner using a historical approach. Research data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing process was used to analyze the data, and triangulation was used for data validation. The results showed that the condition of the people of Semarang Regency had been better before KH. Mahfud Ridwan's preaching was better afterward. His preaching uses various methods, such as the *bil hikmah* method, using noble reasoning, wisdom, and a clean heart. Various social and religious organizations, including the NGO Yayasan Desaku Maju, Forum Gedangan, FSUB, and the SOBAT movement, preach based on this bill hikmah. KH also established Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School. Mahfud Ridwan benefits the community and forms santri with religious, national, and societal insights. The method of *bil mau'idzah hasanah* is by holding regular recitations, teaching in pesantren and madrasah, holding seven minutes sermons, and holding activities on Islamic

holidays. The bil mujadalah method is used by discussing with people of various religions.

Keywords: *Da'wah; Diversity; Harmony*

Abstrak

Pegiat syiar agama atau da'i memberikan pencerahan kepada mad'u agar hidup berdampingan secara baik dan damai, mengharuskan dakwah yang toleran dan bijaksana, serta menyampaikan risalah Islam sebagai rahmat bagi seluruh alam. Namun praktik dakwah kerap dihadapkan pada kesulitan dan hambatan. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, penting bagi seseorang memahami konsep kehidupan bernegara yang mengikat semua orang dari berbagai golongan dan kelompok sosial, guna mencegah konflik di tengah masyarakat yang tidak terduga. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang kondisi masyarakat Kabupaten Semarang sebelum dan setelah dakwah KH. Mahfud Ridwan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga akan menganalisis peran dakwah dalam mewujudkan keharmonisan antar umat beragama dari tahun 1984 hingga 2015. Penelitian ini dilakukan secara kualitatif deskriptif menggunakan pendekatan historis. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Proses reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan digunakan untuk menganalisis data, dan triangulasi digunakan untuk validasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kondisi masyarakat Kabupaten Semarang telah lebih baik sebelum dakwah KH. Mahfud Ridwan, tetapi lebih baik setelahnya. Dakwahnya menggunakan berbagai metode, seperti: Metode bil hikmah dengan menggunakan akal budi yang mulia, bijaksana, dan hati yang bersih. Berbagai organisasi kemasyarakatan dan keagamaan, termasuk LSM Yayasan Desaku Maju, Forum Gedangan, FSUB, dan gerakan SOBAT, melakukan dakwah berdasarkan bil hikmah ini. Pondok Pesantren Edi Mancoro juga didirikan oleh KH. Mahfud Ridwan dengan tujuan memberikan manfaat kepada masyarakat dan membentuk santri yang memiliki wawasan keagamaan, kebangsaan, dan kemasyarakatan. Metode bil mau'idzah hasanah dengan mengadakan pengajian rutin, mengajar di pesantren dan madrasah, mengadakan kultum, dan mengadakan kegiatan pada hari-hari besar Islam. Metode bil mujadalah dengan mengadakan diskusi dan diskusi dengan orang-orang dari berbagai agama.

Kata Kunci: *Dakwah; Keberagamaan; Keharmonisan*

A. Introduction

Indonesians have many religions, ethnicities, languages, and customs.¹ The diversity of people's beliefs, cultures, and languages significantly impacts how they interact with others.² Diversity can contribute to social harmony, which can aid in national growth. Disagreements, however, can lead to divides and arguments, impeding harmony. Professionals with experience in handling Indonesia's culturally, religiously, ethnically, racially, and linguistically varied population, according to Muiyasaroh, may assist in constructing a happy and peaceful life.³ Plurality frequently produces conflict amongst groups because of its strong predisposition toward religious identification⁴. If Indonesia is to become a powerful nation, its people must be able to unite despite their differences. The unification of society leads to inter-religious peace.⁵

Da'wah, in actuality, is an attempt to influence society, which is a dynamic and diverse community⁶. As a result, the changes must be tailored to their specific circumstances⁷. Effective

¹ Akmal Mundry and Afidatul Bariroh, "Transformasi Representasi Identitas Kepemimpinan Kyai Dalam Hubungan Atasan Dan Bawahan," *Al-Idarah: Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2018): 234–55.

² Muhammad Ali Ridho, Andi Eka Putra, and Muhammad Jamil, "MAJELIS TAKLIM AND ITS ROLE IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT," *Ijtima'iyya: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 16, no. 1 (2023): 65–90.

³ Lailia Muiyasaroh, "Metode Tafsir Maudu'i (Perspektif Komparatif)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 18, no. 2 (2017): 163–88.

⁴ Charles Devellennes and Paul Matthew Loveless, "The Tolerance of the Despised: Atheists, the Non-Religious, and the Value of Pluralism," *International Political Science Review* 43, no. 4 (2022): 580–94.

⁵ Sardjana Orba Manullang et al., "Understanding Islam and The Impact on Indonesian Harmony and Diversity: A Critical Analysis of Journal Publication 2010 to 2020," *Al-Ulum* 21, no. 1 (2021): 68–88.

⁶ A Fikri Amiruddin Ihsani, Novi Febriyanti, and Abdan Syakuuroo SK, "Gus Dur's Multicultural Da'wah and Its Relevance to Modern Society," *El Harakah* 23, no. 1 (2021): 103.

⁷ Emily A Holmes et al., "Multidisciplinary Research Priorities for the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call for Action for Mental Health Science," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 7, no. 6 (2020): 547–60.

da'wah has the potential to transform social conflict into peace.⁸ Inappropriate behavior that violates rules, conventions, or ethics can cause social conflict, harming society⁹. People must be directed and invited to grasp religion correctly to avoid difficulties that depart from its norms¹⁰. Da'wah is a significant way to invite individuals to apply religious thought appropriately, which can be conveyed to the general population.¹¹

H Mundjirin, Regent of Semarang from 2010 to 2021, claimed that the people of Semarang Regency are highly diversified. This was said at the opening of the FKUB (Forum of Religious Harmony) secretariat office in Bawen. The situation of people of different religions can demonstrate this diversity¹². All religions emphasize the virtue of peace to construct a society.¹³ Peace is a notion that must exist for a diverse society of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions to coexist in a place.¹⁴ The residents of Semarang Regency have harmonious social situations because differences bring people together, which serves as the foundation

⁸ Anwar Nuris, "Ahmad Dahlan Dan Pesantren: Gerakan Pembaharuan Pendidikan, Dakwah, Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Di Indonesia," *Dirosat: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 243–58.

⁹ Oliver Scott Curry, Daniel Austin Mullins, and Harvey Whitehouse, "Is It Good to Cooperate? Testing the Theory of Morality-as-Cooperation in 60 Societies," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 1 (2019): 47–69.

¹⁰ Arifinsyah Arifinsyah, Safria Andy, and Agusman Damanik, "The Urgency of Religious Moderation in Preventing Radicalism in Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (April 27, 2020): 91–108, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v21i1.2199>.

¹¹ Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E Schulze, "Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 6 (2018): 911–32

¹² Keith E Stanovich and Maggie E Toplak, "The Need for Intellectual Diversity in Psychological Science: Our Own Studies of Actively Open-Minded Thinking as a Case Study," *Cognition* 187 (2019): 156–66.

¹³ Rojabi Azharghany, Abdul Adim, and Hae Ruli Rusdi, "Paradigma Dakwah Islam Kyai Dalam Kancan Politik Kekuasaan Pasca Kemerdekaan Di Indonesia," *Albadharab: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 21, no. 2 (2022): 1–17.

¹⁴ Ahmad Shofi Muhyiddin, "Islamic Boarding Schools and Da'wah of Religious Moderation," *Albadharab: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 22, no. 1 (2023): 85–99.

for harmony¹⁵. Da'i and other leaders who promote interfaith peace and harmony are critical to achieving interfaith harmony¹⁶.

The job of da'i is critical in teaching the mad'u (disciplines) how to coexist peacefully.¹⁷ A da'i must preach in a smart and tolerant manner for Islam to be accepted in a plural society.¹⁸ The da'i have recognized the need to convey the doctrine and da'wah of Islam, which entails bestowing compassion on all creation (*Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*). When Da'wah are carried out, they frequently encounter challenges and difficulties.¹⁹ One must understand the concept of state life to overcome many challenges and barriers in dawah, which links all people from various socioeconomic and social groups comprising different religions. This will aid in the prevention of disputes in a dynamic society.

According to Laili, KH. Mahfud Ridwan strives for social harmony through religious harmony organizations. He is a kyai who appears to the community as a pesantren. He started Desaku Maju in the early 1990s, a non-governmental organization with several community development activities.²⁰ The powerful non-governmental organization provides numerous benefits to the local

¹⁵ Sabara Nuruddin and Aksa Aksa, "Religious Harmony Through The Development Of House Of Worship Based On Local Genius In Kei Islands, Maluku," *Al-Qalam* 28, no. 2 (2022): 279–92.

¹⁶ A Ilyas Ismail and Badrah Uyuni, "The New Perspective of Interfaith Dialogue as Da'wah Approach in Global Era," *Journal of Xidian University* 14, no. 3 (2020): 1540–52.

¹⁷ Muhammad Fairus Kadomi, "Kyai Dan Politik: Peranan KH Mahfudz Ridwan Dalam Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa 1998-2008: Ulema and Politics: The Role of KH Mahfudz Ridwan in the National Awakening Party 1998-2008," *Journal of Islamic History* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–24.

¹⁸ Rini Setiawati et al., "Pesantren and Its Function in Improving the Worship of the Village Community," *Ijtima'iyya: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 16, no. 1 (2023): 91–110.

¹⁹ Ai Fatimah Nur Fuad, "Da'wa and Politics: Lived Experiences of the Female Islamists in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 14, no. 1 (2020): 19–47.

²⁰ Hasnida Hasnida, "Sejarah Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia Pada Masa PRA Kolonialisme Dan Masa Kolonialisme (Belanda, Jepang, Sekutu)," *Kordinat* 16, no. 2 (2017): 237–56.

community.²¹ His views and beliefs not only promote Islam but also unify all other religions in the Semarang Regency based on tolerance and peace, resulting in the formation of an Islamic society. He never forced people to accept his religious ideas. He demonstrated that no religion teaches evil but only good.

This research aims to investigate and analyze the interfaith harmony built by KH. Mahfud Ridwan's da'wah operations in Semarang Regency, Indonesia. The study focuses mostly on the benefits of preaching on regional interfaith relations. The study's primary goal is to comprehend the concept of harmony instilled by KH. Mahfud Ridwan and the extent to which his preaching contributes to the establishment of mutual understanding amongst different communities. This study will concentrate on the effect of KH. Mahfud Ridwan will take a thorough approach to promoting interfaith harmony through da'wah.

This research will include the rhetorical or speech parts of his work and the real activities he employs to foster interfaith cooperation. Furthermore, this research aims to determine how these da'wah activities affect the local community in the long run, as well as whether there are specific techniques or models that other communities might use to enhance interfaith harmony in Indonesia. As a result, this study expands our understanding of da'wah's function in fostering unity and harmony among religious believers in Indonesia's multi-faith community.

B. Methods

This study employs qualitative research methods.²² This research is employed to gather data containing meaning from in-depth research. The actual data is the meaning, and the value is based on the data that appears. As a result, the emphasis in qualitative research is on meaning rather than generalization. This research employs a historical approach method.²³ Historical

²¹ Abdul Basit, "Dakwah Cerdas Di Era Modern," *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam (Journal of Islamic Communication)* 3, no. 1 (2013): 76–94.

²² Farida Nugrahani, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Solo: Cakra Books, 2014).

²³ Deddy Mulyana, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosda Karya, 2017).

research is one approach in qualitative research that seeks to reconstruct events or narratives from the past systematically, accurately, and impartially.²⁴

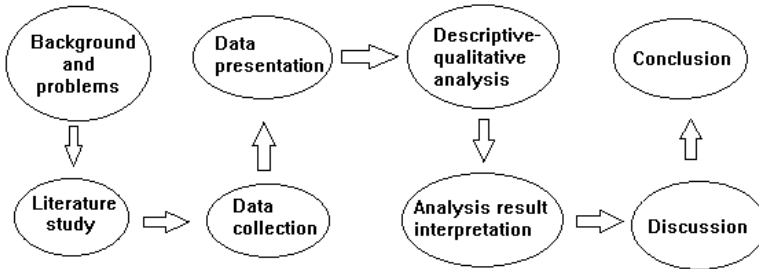


Figure 1. Research Procedure

In-depth data was collected through interviews, observations, and references like scientific journals, books, and digital references related to KH.Mahfudz Ridwan's Da'wah in Semarang Regency. The acquired data went into the data reduction stage by selecting useful data. The validity of data was verified by utilizing ways to compare it to different research outcomes from various available sources.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Community Harmony Before and After the Da'wah of KH. Mahfud Ridwan

Semarang Regency residents may be fortunate. Inter-religious harmony in the Semarang Regency community was already pretty excellent and conducive before the arrival of KH. Mahfud's condition has improved since his arrival. Many people were enraged when KH. Mahfud came in Semarang following the G30S PKI (30th September Movement of Indonesia Communist Party). However, people began to calm down once the G30S PKI was over. Before 1965, the Semarang district was rife with sociopolitical instability. However, circumstances improved after 1965. KH. Mahfud transformed the traditional social order of the kyai into one in which people gathered and cooperated with

²⁴ Ismail Nurdin dan Sri Hartati Hartati, *Metodologi Penelitian Sosial & Pendidikan*, 2019.

members of different religions. "Friction in the community after the 65 incident still exists, but his approach made the harmony worse," according to an interview conducted on December 13, 2021, at 16.30 Indonesian Western Time.

KH. Mahfud Ridwan pioneered recitation for the community in Gedangan village, which was held at the Darussalam mosque, before preaching to build inter-religious tolerance. KH. Mahfud Ridwan became involved in social activities in 1979, founding the Non-government Organization Desaku Maju Foundation, the Gedangan Forum, and the SOBAT Interfaith Forum. Mr. Ali Nugroho stated:

"His point of view in preaching is to convey something they don't know. His knowledge is a lot for those who already know, while the kyai here have not reached that realm. The important thing is to recite the Quran. In addition to reciting the Quran, some parties need an intimate welcome from the scholars who are representatives of the waratsatul anbiya. Therefore, KH. Mahfud has an idea so that people understand humanizing humans" (Interview on November 01, 2021 at 19.00 WIB).

KH. Mahfud Ridwan was inspired by the ideology of humanizing humans to move and participate in many social activities. When he taught inter-religious cooperation, the state of society did not always proceed well and amicably. There were several frictions of differences of thought that developed misunderstandings between one community and another, prejudice after prejudice circulating among the minds of the community. According to Mr. Ali Nugroho:

"In the past, when KH. Mahfud preached the friction was quite strong. However, when he started to open the veil by inviting dialogue in the forum, sharing thoughts with other religions and not only from Islam, he applied the Qur'an. Whatever the problem is, it can be discussed together. It does not belong to Islam alone" (Interview on November 01, 2021 at 19.00 WIB).

KH. Mahfud Ridwan provides instruction on the fundamental virtues of religious tolerance without straying from Islamic shari'a to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. During

the Indonesian monetary crisis, when many individuals could not meet their basic needs due to excessive inflation, the surrounding community refused a food handout (nine necessities) from one of Salatiga City's churches. They collectively rejected it because the people there believed the grant program was affiliated with Christianity.

KH. Mahfud Ridwan asked the community and Christian religious leaders to speak because he is a nice person who is open to all religions. He emphasized in the forum that the Church's grant program had nothing to do with faith and belief and that refusing a grant from anyone, including Christians, is unethical. According to KH. Mahfud Ridwan, Allah's sustenance can be received by anyone, including non-Muslims. There is no reason not to do good to our fellow people or even the whole universe because everyone around us deserves goodwill, and we should be able to recognize and appreciate whatever others give us.

Conditions and atmosphere, on the other hand, did not always remain. Finally, KH. Mahfud Ridwan formed the Gedangan Forum to address society's disharmony. According to him, because conflicts might emerge at any time in the Salatiga-Semarang Regency area, Forum Gedangan was founded to create the character of people who care about environmental life by working together to cope with the monetary crisis, managing social aid, and so on. According to KH. Muhamad Hanif:

"The most extraordinary event occurred when approaching the monetary crisis or before the reformation in 1998-1999. He established the Gedangan Forum to anticipate the rampant looting of conflicts involving many parties, especially in the name of religion in the Central Java region. He tried to fortify the people of Semarang Regency so that no conflicts led to riots". (Interview dated October 24, 2021 at 22.00 WIB).

As stated by Laili, the creation of the Gedangan Forum was prompted by dissatisfaction over the monetary crisis's rampant Christianization issues. One way the Gedangan Forum promotes a

conducive community is by having volunteers distribute food to the community on behalf of the Gedangan Forum rather than the organization that provided it. Mrs. Ambar Istiani, an Interfaith leader and activist in Semarang Regency, also stated that:

“A crisis is very unstable, so negative issues will spread easily in the community. One of the objectives of the Gedangan Forum is to neutralize this by managing aid due to the monetary crisis, which indirectly can also manage negative issues.” (Interview dated November 05, 2021 at 13.00 WIB).

The unstable and chaotic political conditions caused by the financial crisis in Indonesia impacted people's lives, particularly in terms of religion. Salatiga City and Semarang Regency were also pluralistic areas. KH. Mahfud Ridwan and Dr. Pradjarta Dirdjosanjoto convened a forum gathering of scholars and GKJ pastors at Edi Mancoro Gedangan Islamic Boarding School in Tuntang, Semarang Regency, to prepare for this situation. 16 GKJJ pastors, 1 GKJTU pastor, 2 Catholic pastors, and 15 Islamic leaders from Semarang Regency attended the gathering. The forum's goal was to allow pastors and kyai to meet and communicate with one another and break down barriers between them. The objectives were specified in the invitation, which was signed by KH. Mahfud Ridwan and Dr. Pradjarta Dirdjosanjoto:

“This dialogue aims to allow the participants to get to know each other intensely, intimately, and to dare to ask each other openly about anything. This way, psychological barriers, rigidities, and concerns can be thawed. We realize there is a high probability that this forum will not produce anything because the forum is very loose and informal, so the topics raised as the subject matter do not need to be scheduled in advance. Although small, perhaps this is the first step we can take to break the ice and establish social relations that encourage the development of divine values in this world.” (Pradjarta, Mahfud, & Sudarmo, 2003, hal. 99).

This statement was supported by Mrs. Ambar Istiani, an interfaith leader and activist in Semarang and surrounding areas:

“The first meeting was at Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School, which was still a guesthouse. This meeting had no agenda at all. The idea was

to eliminate the heartache that people inherited over hundreds of years. KH. Mahfud said, 'Humanity inherits heartache from hundreds of years of previous generations, for example, the crusades, which left enough pain between people.' So, we don't want to make things worse. The forum at that time hoped to unravel and heal the pain". (Interview dated November 05, 2021 at 13.00 WIB).

During this meeting, it was decided that each person would be free to talk about whatever they knew about Islam or Christianity. As a result, learning and speaking directly from the source would be simple when combined with a free and casual forum. The sessions addressed misinformation concerns such as Christianization, Islamization, pregnancies, interfaith marriages, and permits to build houses of worship, as well as participants' personal experiences with events relating to other religions.

The following sessions began with quarterly gatherings, with the location determined by which individuals wished to host. Following the third gathering, a network of interfaith connections developed due to the discussion agenda being held on a live-in basis with temporary mattresses, resulting in all participants looking alike and creating an open atmosphere. The term was changed to meeting forums during the next gathering. It began as a meeting place for kyai and pastors and was known as FSUP (*Forum Sarasehan Ulama dan Pendeta*). However, due to the presence of other religions, the name was changed to FSUB or *Forum Sarasehan Umat Beragama*. The term was modified again over time since some organizations did not accept the religion recognized by the government at the time.

Considering some of KH. Mahfud Ridwan's efforts and roles in achieving inter-religious harmony make it possible to infer that the Semarang Regency community was conducive before his preaching. However, following the preaching, KH. Mahfud Ridwan established inter-religious harmony using a humanitarian and silaturahmi approach. Respecting one another, respecting, conversing and collaborating, and caring for others, regardless of religion or group, leads to inter-religious harmony.

2. Da'wah Pattern of KH. Mahfud Ridwan

KH. Mahfud Ridwan began his da'wah after graduating from Baghdad University in 1970. The Darussalam Mosque was completed in 1971. He conducted his da'wah by teaching Islamic studies there. He took the initiative to build an Islamic boarding school about 100 meters east of the mosque in the same year. At the time, the da'wah strategy was tailored to the limited population engaging in diverse religious activities. He was a nice character who never complained in his everyday life. Despite being a Baghdad University graduate, he did not feel ashamed to live a simple life by farming and gardening, as the common people did. According to Mr. Ali Nugroho, a Gedangan community member:

“ For me, the most valuable method practiced by KH. Mahfud was uswatun hasanah and his role model who could melt the community on his left and right through understanding, compassion, and wisdom. This method was carried out with amar ma'ruf and politeness that is maintained to become a symbol in the interfaith and bureaucratic levels”.
(Interview on November 1, 2021 at 19.00 WIB).

KH. The local community first admired Mahfud Ridwan due to his character, which pushed them to work hard and be pious, particularly in sustaining inter-faith harmony. He employed one of the da'wah bil lisaan approaches at the Darussalam mosque, suited to the community's needs. He conveyed the word via movement and participation in the community. He spread the word about Islam by giving lectures. His second da'wah step was to form the Desaku Maju Foundation (YDM), which began with his concern for the community's socioeconomic and religious concerns. Yayasan Desaku Maju was a non-governmental organization that focuses on community empowerment and social issues that was founded in 1984. According to KH. Muhamad Hanif, son of KH. Mahfud Ridwan, the current custodian of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School:

“Yayasan Desaku maju is one of the foundations or NGOs engaged in community empowerment and social issues in collaboration with Bina Desa and then in collaboration with UNDP, a UN agency from the

early 80s to the 90s. UNDP brought Abah together with religious leaders and the wider community in Semarang Regency and worldwide". (Interview dated October 24, 2021 at 22.00 WIB).

Before the founding of Edi Mancoro Islamic boarding schools throughout Central Java, the Desaku Maju Foundation was created to develop the community's culture and economy. Concern for the environment formed KH. Mahfud Ridwan's personality. He wanted to live in a way that benefited others and was inspired to aid the community in thinking ahead. He formed the Gedangan Forum and the Desaku Maju Foundation as a result. The forum was formed in response to the 1998 Indonesian monetary crisis, which generated political instability throughout the country, particularly in economic and religious matters. As religious differences became more obvious, Forum Gedangan was founded to allow people to discuss the necessity of living with a religiously tolerant attitude and minimize prejudice and hurt caused by religious and believe differences. Differences are a blessing in understanding and comprehending other religions. As fellow humans, we must respect and value differences.

Mr. Faidi, a researcher of KH. Mahfud Ridwan's biography stated information on KH. Mahfud Ridwan's da'wah efforts in establishing inter-religious harmony:

"Mbah Mahfud's preaching to develop interfaith harmony was by establishing the Gedangan Forum, FKUB, SOBAT Forum, and so on by conducting interfaith discussions, facilitating, and mediating meetings of interfaith leaders. That was why when he died, many people felt lost, not only Muslims but also the Christian community who were close to him, and several pastors also came to pray for him here". (Interview on October 29, 2021 at 16.00 WIB).

KH. Mahfud Ridwan's da'wah technique was based on nurturing and respect rather than claiming or supporting specific groupings. He respected everyone around him, including gangsters, officials, members of the community, and religious leaders. As a fellow human being, he had an obligation to love and respect others, even non-Muslims. As a result, he contributed to

developing inter-religious harmony, particularly in Central Java and its surroundings. Thus, KH. Despite religious differences, Mahfud Ridwan's preaching in Semarang Regency resulted in advancement and acceptance by the surrounding population. One manifestation of this improvement was the community's recognition of the need to respect and embrace other religious differences. The interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims improved, and the once antagonistic relationship became more harmonious.

3. Facts of Community Harmonization Before and After the Da'wah of KH. Mahfudz Ridwan

Many variables influence society's peace, but religious leaders such as KH. Mahfud Ridwan advocated harmony toward fellow humans to realize the teachings of their different religions, namely doing good to others and eliminating prejudice-based animosity. According to the findings of the author's research, the state of communal peace in Semarang Regency differs before and after da'wah. The people of Semarang Regency had advanced before da'wah, but there was still little social care for other ethnic groups or beliefs.

Many people, even those who rejected KH. Mahfud Ridwan was opposed to his da'wah. The community's misunderstanding of the da'wah approach was created by the status of society at the time, which was caused by the financial crisis and the problem of Islamization and Christianization.²⁵ He persuaded individuals of different religions to communicate with each other to reduce prejudice. Furthermore, he established an open forum to address the disparities separating one group.

He founded Forum Gedangan in response to events in Indonesia in 1998, such as religious violence, the monetary crisis, and the transition period, which emphasized the subject of change. The Forum Gedangan preached religious tolerance. The Sarasehan forum, which Muslims and Christians attended, began

²⁵ Dadang Budiman, "Dakwah Pada Masyarakat Terasing Upaya Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (DDII) Terhadap Suku Akit SondeRiau," *Anida (Aktualisasi Nuansa Ilmu Dakwah)* 18, no. 2 (2018): 181–94.

in 2002 and eventually evolved into the forum Sarasehan Umat Beragama (FSUB) and, finally, the interfaith community SOBAT, which has been in operation for almost ten years.

KH. Mahfud Ridwan also formed an interfaith community forum to foster a prosperous and peaceful society and improve the community's quality of life by forming community groups. One example is the foundation of Yayasan Desaku Maju (YDM), a non-governmental organization. It aims to build a successful society by forming a joint business cooperative. The community began to appreciate the importance of organizational life through Yayasan Desaku Maju, which eventually drove the community to establish a flourishing society. By founding these groups, they successfully created a peaceful society by encouraging people to tolerate and communicate with individuals of different religions and views.²⁶

Semarang Regency, a plural community, has attained harmony after KH. Mahfud Ridwan's preaching. His approach toward people who did not distinguish between religions and those who wish to learn to respect, tolerate, and appreciate others, not just fellow religions, promotes unity.

4. KH. Mahfud Ridwan's Da'wah Pattern to Create Religious Harmony in Semarang Regency

Da'wah must fully grasp society's situation, accept others' perspectives, treat people gently, and not discriminate between groups to deliver messages in a plural setting.²⁷ KH. Mahfud Ridwan asked individuals to demonstrate tolerance through interfaith exchanges, accept the choices and perspectives of other religious groups, and demonstrate that people can coexist despite differences to establish a harmonious society. The findings revealed

²⁶ Derry Ahmad Rizal, "Pemberdayaan Berbasis Kemitraan Antara Pemerintah Dengan Kelompok Tani Tri Tunggal Wonorejo," *Jurnal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat: Media Pemikiran Dan Dakwah Pembangunan* 1, no. 2 (2018): 343, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpm.2017.012-07>.

²⁷ Harjani Hefni, "Makna Dan Aktualisasi Dakwah Islam Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin Di Indonesia," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017): 1–20.

that KH. Mahfud Ridwan had a very acceptable approach, tailoring his da'wah to the community's culture and circumstances so his disciples could accept it. The process of da'wah in the Qur'an is detailed in Q.S An-Nahl: 125.

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجِدِلْهُمْ بِآيَاتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

“Invite ‘all’ to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord ‘alone’ knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is ‘rightly’ guided.” (Q.S An-Nahl: 125).

Based on previous Qur'anic verses, it is possible to conclude that the Qur'an provides acceptable da'wah strategies, including wisdom (*hikmah*), good advice (*mau'idzoh hasanah*), and speech (*mujadalah*). From 1984 until 2015, KH. Mahfud Ridwan's wisdom-based da'wah approach was employed to achieve inter-religious harmony in Semarang Regency, which included the application of noble reason, wisdom, humility, and a clean heart. He never forced his will when giving his da'wah because he employed a communication method tailored to the situation and conditions of Semarang Regency's multicultural community.

He preached wisdom through numerous socio-religious and socio-community groups, including the NGO Desaku Maju Foundation, the Gedangan Forum, the Forum Sarasehan Umat Beragama, and the SOBAT movement. He held discussion sessions with Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, and interfaith religious figures through various groups to break down barriers. In addition, he founded the Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School to preach and educate students. Concern for the diversity of Indonesian society motivated the creation of this Islamic boarding house. The pesantren was founded to benefit the community by developing students with deep religious insights

and national and societal insights in a pluralistic Indonesian society.²⁸

KH. Mahfud Ridwan employed the *Mau'idzah Hasanah* approach to express his *da'wah*, which includes counsel, ideas, and good speech, to elicit sympathy from Muslim and interfaith communities. The *Bil Mau'idzah Hasanah da'wah* technique was used to encourage the community. The strategy involved frequent recitations, seven-minute sermons, and Islamic holiday festivities at the Darussalam mosque. In addition to providing a venue to study Islamic knowledge, this mosque acted as a means of *da'wah*. He taught the Quran in Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, universities, and the Darussalam mosque.

He preached using the *Bil Mujadalah* method and the *Bil Hikmah* and *Bil Mau'idzah Hasanah* methods. *Da'i* (preachers) must communicate opinions, argue, talk, and do other things this way. The person with whom you are sharing is a friend, not an enemy. This strategy was typically appropriate for non-experts and the general public. The *da'wah* strategy utilized by *Bil Mujadalah* was to host conversations on socio-religious and societal concerns in his home, attended by many interfaith leaders from Semarang Regency. Over time, numerous organizations, including religious leaders, students, *santri*, and interfaith communities, attended interfaith conversations and dialogues. The *Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School* eventually became the site of several interfaith activities, including a gathering of scholars and pastors, interfaith debate forums, and direct interfaith meetings attended by people across Indonesia.

This study examines how KH. Mahfud Ridwan's *da'wah* in Semarang Regency, Indonesia, helps to build interfaith harmony. Compared to related research, few previous studies have examined how *da'i* and *da'wah* contribute to interfaith cooperation. Similarly,

²⁸ Wawan Wahyuddin, "Kontribusi Pondok Pesantren Terhadap NKRI," *Kajian Keislaman*, 2016

more research may have focused on interfaith techniques or programs that promote religious interaction. Previous research may have investigated how da'wah influences people's perceptions and attitudes toward individuals of other religions. By examining these connections, we can gain a better understanding of the various ways that have been employed to attain balance in various communities.

This research could have a substantial impact on the growth of interfaith harmony. If KH. Mahfud Ridwan's harmony construction in Semarang Regency is effective. This research could serve as a model or guideline for da'i and other religious leaders seeking to improve interfaith harmony. The research can also assist policymakers and religious institutions develop more effective programs to promote local and national harmony. The research offers ideas such as tolerant and thoughtful preaching tactics, which can be used to inspire similar projects elsewhere. These repercussions have an impact on religious and societal dimensions. As a result, the findings of this study have the potential to substantially impact the process of building harmony and managing variety in a diverse society.

D. Conclusions

Based on the pattern of KH. Mahfud Ridwan's preaching in Semarang Regency (1984-2015), it can be concluded that the community's condition before his preaching began to be conducive and has improved since his presence in the 1970s following the G30S/PKI incident. However, post-1965 conditions were not entirely favorable, KH. Mahfud Ridwan's preaching was instrumental in improving inter-religious cooperation in Semarang Regency. His da'wah technique comprises three major components: *bil hikmah*, *bil mau'idzah hasanah*, and *bil mujadalah*. These strategies include a sensible and reasoned approach, normal religious activities, and socio-religious conversations. With this method, he restored communal cohesion following the G30S/PKI incident.

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