

UNITY IN DIVERSITY? Interculturation and Interreligious Relations in Indonesia

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The National motto of Indonesia is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, Unity in Diversity. Indonesia is a country where there are different cultures, religions, tribes and races. In this article we try to answer the question, "How churches in Indonesia try to respond to the challenge of this cultural and religious diversity?"

Introduction

On Saturday evening, 12th February 2011, with my wife I attended in Yogyakarta the wedding reception of a former student, who had just completed his study. His roots lie in Papua, the most South-Eastern Part of Indonesia. He was married with a Batak girl of Simalungun, a region in the North Western part of Indonesia. In them, two extreme ends of Indonesia were united. When the bride and bridegroom entered the reception place, they were honoured with a welcome dance from Papua, performed by Papua students from the Catholic Atma Jaya University in Yogyakarta. After that a quite different ceremony took place. According to the Batak tradition a non-Batak bridegroom with his family has to become a member of the Batak clan of his spouse through a symbolic action called *ulos*: the bridegroom and his father and mother were dressed with the traditional cloths (*ulos*) of the Simalungun tribe. Although in the morning their marriage was blessed in the GPIB (Western Indonesian Protestant Church) of Yogya, according to the Simalungun tradition, they were officially married only after this initiation ritual. The ceremony was continued by another dance of Papua to accompany

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the bride and bridegroom to their house to congratulate them and their parents, following which the wedding reception started. A number of Muslims also were present. This is a simple example of an encounter of cultures and religions in Indonesia.

Churches in Indonesia wrestle to give a proper place to the local, original cultures and to relate with other religions in a society where in general there are harmonious relations between religions and 'tribes,' but from time to time arise tensions, intolerance, clashes and conflicts between religions and 'tribes.'

SAGKI 2010

All five years the Catholic Church in Indonesia organises a national meeting, named Sidang Agung Gereja Katolik Indonesia (SAGKI=General Assembly of the Indonesian Catholic Church) with representatives of all 37 dioceses of Indonesia and guest-speakers of other churches and religions. The last meeting was from 1-5 November 2010 with 385 participants and took place in Wisma Kinasih-Caringin, Bogor, West-Java.¹ The theme of this meeting was: 'He (Jesus) comes so that all will have life in abundance' (cf. John 10:10). The inspiration for this meeting came from the first Mission Congress in Asia in Chiang Mai, Thailand in 2006.² The goal of this SAGKI meeting was to share stories of faithful experiences about the presence of the person of Jesus within the Indonesian context. Three main themes were treated: to know the face of Jesus in dialogue with other cultures; in dialogue with other religions and religious convictions and in the wrestling for life of marginal and neglected people. In the statement of SAGKI 2010 we can see how the Church wants to relate with cultures and other religions:³

6. ... God is present in the cultural diversity and addressed with all kind of names. His presence is known through peoples and those elements of cultures which are respecting and loving the life. His presence is understandable for the followers of every culture. ... 7. The Church is seriously interested in and highly respects every form of goodness, brotherly and sisterly love and truth which can be found

¹Agus Alfons Duka, SVD, Chairman of the SAGKI 2010 Commission, "Sidang Agung Gereja Katolik Indonesia 2010: Sebuah Hajatan Iman," *Hidup*, 8 Agustus 2010, no. 32; Administrator, "Pernyataan Akhir & Rekomendasi Sidang Agung Gereja Katolik Indonesia (SAGKI) 2010," 5 November 2010, <http://www.cathnewsindonesia.com/2010/11/08/pernyataan-akhir-dan-rekomendasi-sagki-2010>.

²The theme of that first Asian Mission Congress, held from Oct. 18 to 22 2006, was: "The Story of Jesus in Asia, A Celebration of Faith and Life."

³Here the most important lines of recommendations number 6-10 are quoted, since they give a good description of how the Church's ideals can deal with the cultural and religious diversity in Indonesia and at the same time meet the face of Jesus.

in cultures. ...In the meeting with local cultures the Church is renewed and at the same time renews several elements of the culture with the power of the Gospel. ...9. In several stories about dialogue with religions and religious convictions, the participants of SAGKI became aware that the Church can meet evangelical values which are brought to life by all followers of religions and religious convictions. So the Church needs to leave her own borders and has to go out to meet followers of religions and religious convictions as shown and taught by Jesus which dared to open Himself and took the initiative to cross religious and cultural borders (cf. Jn 4). ... 10. The Church hears also the invitation of Jesus to learn in a humble way from everybody which is a member of another religion or has another religious conviction to deepen our belief (cf. Mt 8:10; Lk 7:9). ... Learning from the kind-hearted Jesus, who was full of empathy and who was a man of prayer, the Church has to develop co-operation with all people of different religious backgrounds, who wants to do good, and has also to develop interreligious dialogue and humanitarian actions to realise peace (cf. Mt 9:13).

Interculturation

We use here the term interculturation instead of the term inculturation, because the last word still refers to the way the Gospel can become an integrated part of a certain culture. The above quotation from SAGKI is a clear statement that God is present in all cultures and that Evangelical values are already present in the different cultures. In dialogue with different cultures (intercultural) the meaning of the Gospel can become more evident and people of different cultures can help each other to strengthen the relation between the Gospel and culture. That is a process of confrontation and confirmation, which have to walk together side by side.⁴ This process can be compared with the transformation of the title of the mission document from Vaticanum II, *Ad Gentes* with the title of a mission document of the FABC *Inter Gentes*⁵ which shows the intention that the Church really has to become an integrated part of the Asian peoples. H. Boelaars called this in the Indonesian context the process of *Indonesianisasi*, Indonesianisation, the process from the presence of the church in Indonesia to an Indonesian church.⁶ Till now many churches in Indonesia are wrestling with the question how to relate to the local cultures including the great variety of original tribal religions. Not only

⁴Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Berteologi dalam Konteks: Pemikiran-pemikiran mengenai Kontekstualisasi Teologi di Indonesia*, Pustaka Teologi, Jakarta/Yogyakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia/Kanisius 2000, 40.

⁵Yun-ka Tan, Jonathan, "Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," *FABC Papers*, No. 109, 2004.

⁶Huub J.W.M. Boelaars OFM Cap., *Indonesianisasi: Het omvormingsproces van de katholieke kerk in Indonesië tot de Indonesische katholieke kerk*, KTC 13, Kampen: Kok, 1991.

for Christianity, but also for other religions it is for instance a question how to relate with the ancestors, because for many Indonesians the ancestors play still an important role in their daily life.⁷ If they are respected and venerated, all will be going well. If they are forgotten or not any more venerated, the result can be disastrous. Other questions are: how to deal with white and black magic, the finding of the good time for a wedding celebration, for building a house, and how to deal with traditional religious meals after the death of a beloved person?

Otherwise the influence of globalisation and modernisation makes the question of how the process of interculturalisation or contextualisation takes place, very complex. How can the local culture survive, or find a proper place, in a growing globalised world? An example can give a good picture of this complexity.

There is a strong Javanese tradition of religious meals (*selamatan*⁸) among others after the death of a beloved person. The history of the Javanese culture shows that this culture always could integrate cultures and religions which came from outside Java. In this way also elements of other religious traditions became part of the Javanese culture. This intermingling of cultures and religious traditions is also the case with religious meals. If someone dies he or she has to be buried at the same day or at least the following day. During 6 days after the burial there is in the evening a prayer session (for cultural Islamic people called *tahlilal*) with the first big *selamatan* on the seventh day. According to the Javanese tradition the soul of the deceased person is still in the house during these seven days, so the husband or wife of the deceased person has to be at home during this seven days. The second *selamatan* is after 40 days. Till that time the soul of the deceased is still near the house. A widower once told that he did not close the door of the sleeping room during these 40 days, because the soul of his wife may want to enter that room. After that time of 40 days the soul will go around in the neighbourhood until the 100th day. Then there is again a *selamatan*, so that the soul can go a little bit further to the borders of the village or of the town. After a year the following *selamatan* is held, so that the soul can go around further, for instance in the region, or in the province, but still sometimes can return to his/her house. The last *selamatan* is held after 1000 days, the celebration that the soul of the deceased person is free and can go everywhere. As a symbol a dove is loosed to fly free

⁷See for instance Alexander Jebadu, *Far from Being Idolatrous: Ancestor Veneration*, Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 2010.

⁸For an extended classic description of all kinds of *Slametan* see: Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986-7, especially the *Slametan* of the Death, 68-77.

where it wants to go. After the prayer service in the *selamatan* people who are present are eating something together, afterwards every family in the neighbourhood gets a box or a basket with food for their family. Originally there were strict descriptions for the food that has to be divided. But a sign of globalisation is that nowadays the traditional food changes. You can give also a basket with three packages of noodles, a few raw eggs, a kilo sugar and uncooked rice etc. Once on the 1000th day a widower gave even an umbrella with the name of his deceased wife! This is an example how traditional cultures are influenced by the process of globalisation.

For Christians, especially for the followers of the Calvinistic tradition, who believe that after the death their salvation depends totally on God, it is a serious question whether it is permitted to keep this *selamatan* tradition. The difficulty is not the prayer, because you can have a Christian prayer service; nor is there any difficulty in giving a meal. The difficulty is whether it is allowed to do it precisely on the 7th, 40th, 100th etc. day. The *selamatan* on these days has an intimate relation with the soul of the deceased person who is still going around or even is interpreted as a kind of veneration of the ancestors. But socially Christians are more or less obliged to follow the Javanese tradition. Some churches forbid these celebrations completely. Other churches search a way out by allowing *selamatan*, but not on the 7th etc. day, starting with a prayer service to console the bereaved family. Other churches allow doing it because of the social coherence in the society and there are also churches, such as the Catholic Church, which follow this tradition, because it is allowed to remember, pray for and seek the intercession of the ancestors to a certain degree.

Cultures and contexts are changing. So the answers of different churches in Indonesia to these cultural challenges are changing. Sometimes cultural traditions are accepted, sometimes declined. As shown in the SAGKI text, the Catholic Church in Indonesia takes very seriously the local cultures as signs of the presence of God. That is the reason why she tries to respond positively to the cultural diversity in Indonesia.

Interreligious dialogue

At the SAGKI 2010 meeting, the present situation in Indonesia and the need for interreligious dialogue was tersely formulated by Mohammad Sobary, an Islamic scholar, and a Buddhist monk Sri Pannavaro as follows:

It is clear that the improvement of the quality of the dialogue between believing people can overcome the problem of religious coloured intolerance and violence, which in the last time are threatening the religious harmony of the Indonesian nation. Dialogue between

believing peoples is not only limited to understand as a method, but also as an expression of faith to realise an authentic brother- and sisterhood. ... 'Dialogue has to be based on the love for all life on earth, at least for all people. If there are feelings of love for everybody, independent on what kind of religion somebody profess, for sure our coexistence will grow in a natural way. Where feelings of love and respect arise, there all will be living harmoniously. ... Dialogue as a realisation of compassion and love has not to be expressed in deep and philosophical conversations. Meeting and greeting one another and also helping people who suffer that is already enough...⁹

In this quotation are mentioned the present problems in Indonesia, intolerance and religious based violence, as well as the Indonesian ideal of harmonious relations (*kerukunan*) between people of all religions. A very short historical background of the relations between religions and interreligious dialogue in the independent Indonesia is needed to understand the present situation.

On 17th August 1945 Indonesia declared itself independent, based on the *Pancasila* (five pillars) ideology and the UUD'45 Constitution. This independence was the result of a good co-operation between Indonesian nationalists with different religious, cultural and racial backgrounds. The first of the 5 principles of the *Pancasila* is the belief in one God (head), the basis for the nation in Constitution article 29, (1). In that same article the freedom of religion is formulated as follows: "(2) The Nation guarantees the freedom of every inhabitant to confess his/her religion and to have religious services according to his/her religion and his/her religious conviction." To gain the independence fully the Indonesians had to fight the Dutch colonialists for five years. Because Indonesia is a state with a majority of Muslims (nowadays about 88% of the Indonesian population) some Muslim groups did not agree with the *Pancasila* ideology and wanted to establish an Islamic Indonesian State. They started a guerrilla war in Western Java and in South Celebes under the name of *Darul Islam*.¹⁰ Under the first President Soekarno, the communist movement in Indonesia developed well and the political communist party, PKN, got a big influence so that Soekarno formulated his 'Nasakom' strategy, to unite the nationalist movement (Nas), the religions (a=*agama*) and the communists (kom). But he failed and after a 'communist coup' on 30 September 1965¹¹ (G30S) Suharto took

⁹Why, "Dialog antariman perlu terus dikembangkan," SAGKI 2010, *Kompas* 4 November 2010.

¹⁰See C. van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam: the Darul Islam in Indonesia*, VKI 94, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.

¹¹Till now it is not clear what exactly happened. President Suharto used 'his' interpretation to forbid all activities of the communists in Indonesia. He accused

the power and started the New Order in Indonesia. One of the new rules was that all Indonesian inhabitants were obliged to confess one of the five (six) religions, which were acknowledged by the Indonesian Government: Islam, Christian Protestant, Catholic, Hindu and Buddha (and Confucianism). Around 1967 the formal dialogue between religions was initiated by the government, especially between Christians and Muslims, when there were some religious conflicts in Bukit Tinggi (Sumatra) and Makassar (Celebes).¹² Participants as representatives of their religious movements did not feel free to express their feelings in this *musyawarah*¹³ meetings, because they had the impression that they were only used by the government to avoid religious conflicts in Indonesia. This is in line with the SARA instruction of the government, where the press was not allowed to give any news about conflicts in Indonesia with a tribal (*Suku*), religious (*agama*), racial (*ras*) or societal movements (*Aliran*) background. The main newspapers in Indonesia got directly information from the Department of Information if there was such a conflict with the order: "do not publish anything about this conflict."¹⁴

The Department of Religious affairs in Indonesia took several initiatives to stimulate the dialogue. Under Minister Mukti Ali¹⁵ (1971-1978) the motto was "agree in disagreement." In his period 23 interreligious meetings were organised in 21 regions in Indonesia and little groups of students as future religious leaders were invited to have a camping together, to know and respect each other. Minister Alamsyah Prawiranegara (1978-1983) stimulated a threefold dialogue: 1) dialogue between the religions; 2) dialogue within the religions themselves; 3) dialogue between the religions and the

China of supporting this communist movement and forbid the Chinese in Indonesia to use the Chinese alphabet. They had also to change their Chinese names into Indonesian names and in 1967 Confucianism as a public religion was forbidden. In the aftermath of the coup, people who were considered to be communist were killed without juridical procedures. Till now it is not clear how many people were killed after the coup. Some estimates a few hundred thousands, others say, more than 1 million people were killed without any form of legal procedures.

¹²For the history of dialogue in Indonesia from 1969 onwards see: C.A.M. de Jong, ss.cc., *Kompas 1965-1985: Een algemene krant met een katholieke achtergrond binnen het religieus pluralisme in Indonesië*, KTC nr. 5, Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1990 (till 1985); J.B. Banawiratma, Zainal Abidin Bagir and others, *Dialog Antarumat Beragama: Gagasan dan Praktik di Indonesia*, Bandung: Mizan Media Utama, 2010, 37-62.

¹³*Musyawarah-Mufakat* is an Indonesian system of deliberation (*musyawarah*), where all participants have the right to formulate their opinions around a certain question till they come to a consensus (*mufakat*) that is acceptable for all participants.

¹⁴C.A.M. de Jong.

¹⁵This short description of the activities of Ministers of Religious Affairs is based on J.B. Banawiratma, 41-50.

government. For the economic development of the country a stable climate was necessary in Indonesia. Therefore, in 1978¹⁶ he made regulations that a certain religion may not disturb people who confess another religion by 'missionary' activities and also that the money religions receive from abroad may be used only with permission of the Ministry. In 1983 Suharto issued the regulation that all religious institutions were obliged to take the *Pancasila* as their first and only base because they all had their social activities. At that time Munawir Sjadzali (1983-1993) was already appointed the new minister, but during his term he only tried to continue the *musyawarah* and to stimulate the modernisation of the Islam. The last minister of Religious affairs in the New Order was Tarmizi Taher (1993-1998), who started a project named LPKUB, the institute to conduct research on harmonious religious relations. In the New Order the government did not stimulate a real dialogue between religions, but used dialogue as a means to prevent conflicts and to control religions. In this period Muslims felt threatened by Christians, and Christians by Muslims.¹⁷

In 1998 Suharto resigned as president and was succeeded by Habibie, his protégé. Since in the New Order all was done by the state to prevent conflicts, many conflicts broke out in the Reformation period (1998 till now) such as bombings: churches on the Christmas eve in Bali in 2000, 2002 and 2005, the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003 and 2009 and the Australian Embassy in 2004; Islam-Christian conflicts: Palu dan Poso (1998-2001-2007), in Ambon (1999-2002); racial conflicts: Borneo between 1996-2001 (Dayaks and Malays as original inhabitants of Borneo against people from Madura), and also the ongoing process of closing and destroying churches and sometimes also mosques.¹⁸ The last great conflicts happened in Cikeusik where three followers of the Ahmadiyah movement were killed and other

¹⁶SK 70 and 77/1978 of the Minister of religious Affairs and together with the Minister of Home Affairs SKB 1/1979.

¹⁷This is the main theme of the dissertation of Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened. Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, Amsterdam: ISIM/Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

¹⁸There are many publications on all these conflicts. We give only two references here: Kees van Dijk, *A Country in Despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000*, VKI 186, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001; Taufik Abdullah, *Indonesia Towards Democracy*, History of Nation-Building Series, Singapore: ISEAS, 2009. Especially for religious conflicts in 2009 and 2010 see: Cholil, Suhadi, Zainal Abidin Bagir and others, *Laporan Tahunan Kehidupan Beragama di Indonesia 2009/2010*, Program Studi Agama Dan Lintas Budaya (CRCS), Yogyakarta: Sekolah Pascasarjana UGM, 2010/2011. In 2009 (Tabel 8, 49-51) there were 11 problems around the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia. For 2010 there is a special description of the Ahmadiyah, pages 44-47.

seven were wounded on 6 February 2011 and in Temanggung, where three churches were burned down and destroyed on 7 February 2011.

One of the reasons why conflicts arose after the resigning of Suharto is that his interpretation of the *Pancasila* as state ideology became a kind of 'civil religion' and did not succeed to build a healthy, prosperous country. People in Indonesia started to search an alternative for the *Pancasila*. One of the alternatives was to become strict followers of religions as a way to build a better society. Some groups interpreted this in the sense that Islam could transform the Indonesian society in a good society if all Western decadent influences would be thrown out Indonesia. From these groups a small radical group¹⁹ started with terroristic activities.

However, non-governmental organisations (NGO's) are active in Indonesia just to build up and to stimulate good interreligious relations.²⁰ The number of these groups and their participants are still growing. One of the best known organisations is DIAN/Interfidei, founded in 1992 by Indonesian Islamic and Christian leaders in good deliberation with Hindu, Buddhist and Confucianist leaders. Interfidei is a kind of critical social organisation. The most important activity of Interfidei is the interfaith dialogue, the exchange of faith experiences between believers of all kinds of religions and religious convictions. Interfidei is not interested in religions as institutes which try to build harmonious relations to prevent conflicts. The main goal of Interfidei is to build a civil society through co-operation and dialogue of the faithful. In 20 years Interfidei has become a network of interfaith groups all over Indonesia, each having its own local and contextual identity. A comparable group is MADIA, founded in 1995. In the 80-s there were already two important organisations founded by Muslims, LKiS in Yogyakarta by students originating from Islamic boarding schools, *pesantrens*, especially concerned with the social responsibility of religions. Paramadina, an Islamic organisation in Jakarta, promotes strong tolerance between religions. Within Islam it represents Liberal Islam based on *ijtihad*, (the independent or original interpretation of present problems with one's personal ability and efforts) and takes decisions for present questions such as, for instance, interreligious marriages.

Besides these initiatives, there are academic institutions for interreligious dialogue. In Yogyakarta the UIN (State Islamic University) Sunan Kalijaga

¹⁹For the radical Islam (among others the Jamaah Islamiyah Indonesia) movement in Indonesia see: M Zaki Mubarak, *Genealogi Islam Radikal di Indonesia: Gerakan, Pemikiran dan Propek Demokrasi*, Foreword by M Syafi'i Anwar, Jakarta: LP3ES, 2007.

²⁰For a larger overview see J.B. Banawiratma, 50-62.

has a dialogue centre at the national UGM (Gadjah Madah University). There is the CRCS (Centre for Religious and Crosscultural Studies) and the ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies), jointly organised by the UIN, UKDW (Christian Duta Wacana University) and UGM.

It is clear that there is in Indonesia a kind of ambivalence in relations between religions. One of the reasons for this is that within the religions themselves there is a great diversity. There are all kinds of 'parties' involved in this interreligious process. The case of Ahmadiyah, a current topic, shows this ambivalence.

After his death on 30 December 2009 Abdurrahman Wahid, who was president in Indonesia from 1999-2001, got the honorary title "national father of pluralism" in Indonesia. During his reign public celebrations of Confucianism, forbidden by Suharto in 1967, were allowed again and also several religious movements, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Ahmadiyah were again free to develop their activities in Indonesia. According to Faisal Ismail, the Secretary General of the Department of Religious Affairs at that time, since all religions and religious movements were allowed in Indonesia according to article 29 of the National Constitution, UUD '45, the government had no right to forbid any religion or religious movement in Indonesia.²¹ As the fundamentalist Islamic groups did not agree with this policy of Abdurrahman Wahid, several conflicts broke out and a *Laskar Jihad* (Jihad army) was trained to fight against the so called Westernisation including Christianity.²² Due to the continuing conflict around the Church buildings of churches for many years, on 21 March 2006 the Ministers of Religious Affairs and Home Affairs signed a combined regulation (Norm: 9 Tahun 2006/and Norm: 8 Tahun 2006) as "guiding principle and line of action for the task of regional leaders/vice regional leaders to take care of the harmonious relations between religious communities, to keep an eye on the Forum for Harmonious relations between religious communities, and on the building of houses for worship."²³ It is clearly mentioned that the local leader (of a Province, a sub-district of a Province, a municipality or even a village) has the task of taking care for the harmonious relations between religions and of maintaining the public order. In the recent years there have been several

²¹Faisal Ismail wrote this in 2000 to me.

²²See Hasan Noorhaidi, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia*, Studies on Southeast Asia, Southeast Asia Program, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 2006.

²³See Gomar Gultom, *Seputar Ijin Mendirikan Rumah Ibadah: Dari SKB ke PBM*, Jakarta: Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia, 2006, 61-75.

violent attacks on the Ahmadiyah,²⁴ the last being in Cikeusik on 6th February 2011. After this attack, official government authorities and religious organisations condemned the violence against the Ahmadiyah as a criminal act. But at the same time a number of Islamic organisations added that the Ahmadiyah could not be considered a correct Islamic movement. In fact it is a blasphemous movement for mainstream Muslims, because this movement acknowledges Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of Ahmadiyah, as a prophet. For the orthodox Islam Muhammad is the last prophet. To acknowledge prophets after Muhammad means to scorn Islam. Several governors of Provinces forbade the Ahmadiyah movement as a heretic movement within Islam. On 16th March 2011 soldiers entered several mosques of Ahmadiyah followers in West Java and forced them to convert to mainstream Islam. After 6th February the President, H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, started consultative meetings with representatives of religious, governmental and police organisations, to hear their opinions before he would take a definitive decision whether the Ahmadiyah has to be forbidden in Indonesia or not. There are Islamic organisations which agree with the decision of certain local leaders to forbid the Ahmadiyah in their region, because it is a blasphemous organisation for them. But other Islamic religious leaders call these prohibitions as illegal, because it is against article 29 of the national Constitution. For them the Constitution is the most important source for jurisdiction and hence has to be respected more than the regulations of ministers.

The American Congress also became involved in the process when on 15th March 35 members of the Congress signed a letter to the President of Indonesia.²⁵ In this letter there is a clear statement on religious freedom and the right of existence of religious minorities:

We also ask that you immediately revoke the decree that bans Ahmadiyah from conducting religious activities in the country and repeal the country's long-standing blasphemy law, which is used to prosecute religious minorities who exercise their right to freedom of religion expression.

Till now (21 May 2011) the President has not taken a decision about the Ahmadiyah. It is clear that it is a very sensitive issue in the Indonesian context, because it has to do with harmonious religious

²⁴In 2008 the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Home Affairs took a common decision about Ahmadiyah. The JAI (*Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia* = the Indonesian Ahmadiyah Community) itself was not forbidden, but its activities in public were forbidden.

²⁵Some people doubt whether it is a genuine letter of the American Congress, or only a letter made by someone else, because it is spread by e-mail all over Indonesia.

relations and the freedom of religion. Although in Indonesia there is healthy interreligious relation, there is also threat to religious freedom. This is caused by some radical groups of the majority religion in Indonesia, which are intimidating and even using violence against minority religions.

Conclusion

The churches in Indonesia are challenged to act in a positive way in the context of this Reformation period. They do that by searching for ways to respect the local cultures, to respect other religions and religious convictions, to behave inter-culturally and inter-religiously, as shown in some conclusions of SAGKI 2010. Thus, they can give a serious contribution to the national motto of Indonesia: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Theologically speaking the churches are challenged to search in the rich diversity of all cultures, religions and religious movements in Indonesia, in which there are signs of the presence of biblical values, of the presence of God. On the other hand they have also the task to confront if important biblical values or the presence of God are clearly denied. In this way churches can start within the Indonesian context the process of confirmation and confrontation. The goals of this process are to enrich the Christian faith through an open dialogue with cultures and religions and at the same time to give as Christians a contribution to cultures, other religions and religious movements. At present, in Indonesia there is the threat of religious fundamentalism and radicalism. There are movements within the two main religions in Indonesia, both in Islam and in Christianity, which claim that only they have the absolute truth and that all other religions and cultural and religious expressions are wrong. This is the basis for several religiously coloured conflicts in Indonesia. To prevent further escalation of violence Indonesia needs 'culturally coloured' religions. The first Catholic Indonesian Javanese Bishop, Mgr. A. Soegiapranata SJ (1896-1963) wants that the members of the Catholic Church should become 100% Catholic and 100% Javanese. Within Islam also there is a strong movement which wants to defend the traditional cultural Indonesian Islam, the Islam that is fully integrated in the local cultures. One of the main characteristics of these culturally coloured religions is that they want to live in harmony with people of other religions and religious convictions, respecting cultural differences, so that they together can build up a harmonious, prosperous, peaceful society, which now is sometimes called a civil society, or with Christian words a society that becomes a sign of the growing Reign of God in our midst.