

2018 ASIA DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FROM GUSDURIAN NETWORK INDONESIA

When my father, president Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia, or Gus Dur as we fondly call him, passed away on Dec 30 2009, millions of Indonesians and many around the globe mourned him. His grave was never short of people paying tribute or just praying for him. Nine years after he passed away, 3,000 people to 15,000 people every day visits his grave.

We mourned him, but the real mourning for me came one day in 2010 as I sat comfortably in a coffee shop in a mall. I received a short message about an Ahmadi village being attacked by Islamist hardliners. I immediately sought out contacts inside the village and local activists networks to go straight to the place. And for the whole day, I worked from 500km away to assist those under attacks.

At one time, the Ahmadi leader told me “if only Gus Dur was still alive. I am sure he would be here by tomorrow morning. I am sure by now he would speak to the media and warned those responsible. Why did he have to die so soon?” He started to cry. And I did too. I realized, that Gus Dur was not only leading from his ideas, but he was always out there at the forefront. He was not only a leader in democracy. He was a blanket of security for people, especially those vulnerable and marginalized. The religious and ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, the villagers under pressures from extractive industries taking away their lands, women victims of a system that socially support gender based injustices, the transgenders seeking for a place in society, and many more.

And that day was the tipping point for my *obsession* to setup a network of his disciples. For four decades, Gus Dur worked hard to strengthen democracy, to fight for human rights, to lead Nahdlatul Ulama the traditional Moslem organization to be the backbone of the Republic of Indonesia. He was an inspirations to millions, he opened the doors for people of different background to work together. So to continue his legacy was not just a dream to the family, but to his disciples also. And there lies the opportunity for the network to continue the fight for democracy and justice for the people.

We started with nothing in 2010. Not a single dollar. Not even a single concrete idea of how the network would be like. Just a spirit and a vision and a very strong need from the grassroot. From 2010 to 2011, I visited more than 50 cities, meeting local activists. And now we operate all over Indonesia, we have thousands of human rights and democracy activists working together, and we have active communities in more than 100 cities.

We put 9 Core Values of Gus Dur as the guiding principles of our work, most importantly are Humanity and Justice. And that is how we’ve got involved in many aspects of human rights issues, how we amplified local cases onto national stage, and become the new habitus and locus of people from all kinds of background to come together in an era of diminishing space for human rights defenders and restrictive democracy.

Challenges come in different forms and shapes. In Indonesia right now it is religious populism, hate spins, extremism and violent extremism. God needs no defense, Gus Dur used to say. But now we see

how God and religion are capitalized to gain political power, to discriminate others, to do injustices. And when done in the name of God, how powerful. So this is where we currently focus on.

We never dream of receiving any award, especially from an established organization on democracy like Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. TFD has been working so long in this field, with so many network and organization, and in so many different aspects of democracy. Your depth of understanding and unwavering resilience in the struggle of democracy is commendable. To be chosen as the awardee of the prestigious Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award, is really an honor that we never thought of.

All we know is that we have to fight for the people, especially the people of Indonesia. Justice will never be an accomplished state. As long as there are individuals and people on this earth, there would always be conflicts. Justice and a world equal for all will always be an elusive state. But humanity progresses. It is almost like a dance as old as time. Two steps ahead, one step back. Sometimes one step ahead and two steps back. Justice and democracy are not the kind of work done in a happy settings. Always a painful work. But we never back down. We can't. Even when desperations come over us. Even when losses after losses are in front of us. Because we know, what we have today, some people and some heroes paid the price for. They never enjoyed the fruits of their struggle. They never experienced the life they were fighting for. We do. So we owe it to our future generations. To fight for them. At least to keep the torch of fights alight for them. We may never enjoy what we are currently fighting for. But hopefully they would.

As Gus Dur wrote:

In real life and in difficult struggle, we are not figures from stories or fables who are always courageous and full of heroic attributes. We are real, not mythical heroes, we have spouses and families, and we have our fears. But although we are afraid, we keep going, brave enough to jump over the fence of those fears. And that is probably where our dignity is decided.

And that is the spirit of Gusdurian Network Indonesia. To receive the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award from Taiwan Foundation for Democracy is our second greatest honor. Not because the Award is less important, but because we believe, our greatest honor is serving the people, fighting the injustices. The Award is a recognition of our work, but also serves as a reminder of our commitment to work harder. It would be the bar we would set to ourselves.

We thank you, our friends in Asia Democracy Network and others, to nominate us for this year's Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award. More than the nomination and the award itself, what is precious is your trust in us.

And we thank you, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, not only for acknowledging our fights in the past, to let us know that our work do matter. We thank you for supporting us to renew our pledge to people of Indonesia and of the world. To give us strength to jump over the fences of our fears. On behalf of thousands of gusdurians wherever they are in this world, from the bottom of our hearts, thank you.