

Muhammadiyah and Human Rights Discourse: Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Groups in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research focuses on analyzing the extent of Muhammadiyah's role in translating the human rights narrative and its relationship with Sharia principles, which are the guidelines in its movement to protect vulnerable groups of victims of human rights violations in Indonesia. Through *Al-Ma'un* theology, Muhammadiyah has transformed the discourse of human rights within religious contexts but also in practical efforts to protect vulnerable groups of victims of structural human rights violations and victims of national strategic projects, such as in the Wadas andesite mining case, the Rempang Eco-city case, the Pakel agrarian conflict case, the Trenggalek gold mining case, and various other cases. This research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent does Muhammadiyah play a role in disseminating human rights discourse in Indonesia? (2) How can the model of protecting vulnerable communities affected by human rights violations by Muhammadiyah be a best practice for the protection of human rights and also for the movement of civil society in the Eastern States? This research employs a socio-legal approach to identify struggles in defending the rights of vulnerable groups in Indonesia. Through an examination of its organizational pronouncements, advocacy initiatives, and grassroots activities, this paper explores the extent to which Muhammadiyah actively contributes to the protection and promotion of human rights for vulnerable populations in Indonesia, highlighting both its potential and its limitations in navigating the intricate landscape of human rights within a predominantly Muslim nation. Ultimately, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the role of Islamic civil society organizations in shaping and implementing human rights agendas in Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah, Human Rights, Vulnerable Groups.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia faces quite dynamic challenges in uniting the diversity and cultural patterns of its people, with the diversity of Indonesian society ranging from ethnicity, religion, and nation. Indonesia will occupy the first position as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world by 2025. Based on data from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration, in semester 1 of 2024, the number of adherents of Islam in Indonesia reached around 245 million people, or around 87.08% of Indonesia's total population of 282.5 million people (Kumparan.com, 2024).

In the context of the complexity of Islamic society in Indonesia, it is important to mobilize a society that can encourage harmony and democratic stability among Muslims in Indonesia. In this context, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have an important role in the reproduction of democratic discourse and continue to support religious pluralism. Through historical facts, the two Islamic organizations can provide solutions to the Indonesian people who not only stop at religious discourse but also in their social activities, such as on the issue of education and philanthropy (Brown, 2019).

The role of Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah became very crucial, especially after 1998, when the authoritarian regime of the New Order collapsed into reform, when the global Islamic world was at a nadir point after the terrorist acts of 9/11 and the series of Bali Bombings 1 and 2. Amid the strengthening of conservative Islam, the Muhammadiyah movement is expected to be an alternative solution in realizing the inclusiveness of the Islamic movement in Indonesia. Considering the strategic position of Muhammadiyah in encouraging a peaceful, tolerant society, and supporting the realization of democracy and respect for human rights in Indonesia (Hefner, 2019).

Muhammadiyah became a very strategic religious-based civil society movement, not only in terms of religious understanding but also in terms of the extent to which it could respond to the social problems that existed around it, both in the political spectrum of democracy and in terms of law enforcement and human rights (Jung, 2014). Due to the various situations of human rights violations that have occurred, both for the members of the organization and the community in general, Muhammadiyah still wants to come down to help with advocacy and provide adequate protection.

The Indonesian Commission of Human Rights recorded 2,305 cases of

alleged human rights violations throughout 2024, including agrarian conflicts and violence against students. These cases show that there are serious challenges in the enforcement of human rights in Indonesia (Ham, 2024). At the same time, there has been an increase in criminalization cases against human rights defenders, which reflects the insecurity of *human rights defenders* in defending legal and human rights work in Indonesia.

KontraS (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) December 2023–November 2024, recorded 45 *extra-judicial killings* that resulted in 47 victims. Based on the victim's background, as many as 27 victims were suspected of criminal acts, and 20 others were not suspected of criminal acts. The same monitoring also showed that 29 victims of extrajudicial killings that occurred were caused by shooting with firearms, and 18 others due to acts of torture. Resistance carried out by criminal suspects is often the "justification" for shooting suspects, ironically, KontraS monitoring data records that 24 out of 47 victims of extrajudicial killings were killed even though they did not resist the authorities.¹

Regarding the data presented, if you look deeper at *extrajudicial killings*, there were 45 incidents of loss of life due to this action, with 47 victims during the period from December 2023 to November 2024. Violations in the natural resources sector: A total of 161 incidents, including land occupation (70), destruction (43), and intimidation (28). Violations against indigenous peoples: Indigenous peoples are the most disadvantaged by development projects that are often carried out on their customary lands. Handling of Human Rights Violations Cases.

Agrarian conflicts are also a serious problem in human rights violations in Indonesia throughout 2024. On behalf of the Indonesian Strategic Project, various violations have occurred. The Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) noted that throughout 2020–2023, there were 115 agrarian economic events due to the national strategic project. The land area and the number of affected victims are 516,409 ha and 85,555 families, respectively. For 2023, agrarian conflicts in the infrastructure sector reached 30 cases with a land area of 243,755 hectares (ha) and the number of victims of 3,456 families, respectively. Of that number, 21 conflicts are related to the Indonesian

1. Notes on Human Rights Day 2024 Contrast, "Human Rights Day 2024 Notes: "Regimes Change, Human Rights Are Still Marginalized", Available at" <https://kontras.org/laporan/catatan-hari-hak-asasi-manusia-tahun-2024-rezim-berganti-ham-masih-dipinggirkan>

Strategic Project. Conflicts occurred in the acquisition of Bowosie forest land for the infrastructure of the Komodo National Tourism Strategic Area, the Padang-Pekanbaru Toll Road, the Sepaku Semoi Reservoir in the capital city of the archipelago, and the hydropower plant in Pinrang.

According to Yappika's records, there are at least 13 categories of human rights violated in the project of national strategic, five of which are related to civil and political rights, namely (1) the right to information, (2) the right to participate, (3) the right to express opinions, (4) the right to life, (5) the right to a sense of security. Repression in the style of the New Order of the Suharto era is a way to silence anyone who goes against the national interest for the pretext of development, especially the construction of the Indonesian Strategic Project.¹

Various cases of the Indonesian Strategic Project have caused victims of civil society and other vulnerable communities in the control of land rights, even using repressive and intimidating methods, such as the rights of the community in Wadas for andesite mines, the national strategic project on Rempang Island, Riau Islands; Poco Leok, NTT; KIH North Borneo, Pantai Indah Kapuk (PIK), Banten; the national strategic project Geothermal, and many other project national strategic in various regions in Indonesia.

Based on the background conveyed above, the formulation of the problem raised in this study is: 1) To what extent does Muhammadiyah play a role in disseminating human rights discourse in Indonesia? (2) How can the model of protecting vulnerable communities affected by human rights violations by Muhammadiyah be a best practice for the protection of human rights and also for the movement of civil society in the Eastern States?

2. Research Method

This research uses socio-legal methods to identify Muhammadiyah's role in the struggle for human rights in Indonesia, not only from a legal perspective but also from an interdisciplinary perspective, including sociological, political, and other scientific approaches (Wiratraman & Putro, 2019). This research also emphasizes the approach of actors, the extent of the contribution of Muhammadiyah's struggle and advocacy by looking at the contributions of Muhammadiyah figures in the field of law and human rights spread in various literatures, books, and other relevant research (Parsons, 1939).

1. <https://yappika-actionaid.or.id/posisi-politik-koalisi-masyarakat-sipil-indonesia-untuk-advokasi-ham-internasional>

3. Results and Discussion

3-1. The Indonesian Context on Human Rights Ratification Instrument

As part of the international community, Indonesia is committed to binding itself to various international conventions that regulate human rights. The strength of this legal commitment is evidenced by the accommodation of human rights principles in the amendment of the 1945 Constitution, including the increasing number of ratifications carried out by Indonesia as a form of commitment to be bound by international treaties made (Sidharta, 2017).

The position of ratification of international conventions on human rights is not only seen as an agenda with zero formalities, but also creates legal implications in international relations as full attachment and compliance in implementing it like its own legislation (Agusman, 2015). This means that both in the provisions of national law and in the context of international law, it has strong implications in the implementation of the international convention.¹



Picture 1. Instrument of law in Indonesia regarding protection of human rights

Considering Indonesia's position in the commitment to international ratification is quite good, but the fact is that there are various challenges encountered, including human rights violations that also often occur, so that the gap between legal regulations that regulate human rights and the context of human being protection for the community should be in line (Riyadi, 2024). This is the main responsibility for the state, but also provides obligations for all civil society organizations, to collaboration avoid all forms of human rights violations that occur in the past also in the future.

1. Butt, S. (2014). The position of international law within the Indonesian legal system. *Emory Int'l L. Rev.*, 28, 1.

3-2. Human Rights and Islamic Discourse from the Muhammadiyah Perspective

As part of the Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah views that human rights issues are part of sharia as the "Instructions of Allah SWT" which is sourced from the Qur'an and As-Sunnah, where human rights are seen as "*al-Dharuriyyat al-Khams*", such as: *hifdh al-din* (Preserving religion); *hifdh al-nafs* (Preserving the Soul); *hifdh al-`aql* (Preserving the mind); *hifdh al-nasl* (Preserving offspring); *hifdh al-mal* (Preserving Treasures) (Khan, 2024).

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah is of the view that the positive law of the state that regulates the principles of law and human rights must be obeyed and upheld, considering that Muhammadiyah's contribution has also recognized that Indonesian democracy based on Pancasila as a philosophy of the state is the meaning of *darul ahdi wa syahadah* (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023). Thus, this is where there is an interconnection between human rights in the context of positive law, both through international mechanisms that have been adopted and ratified in Indonesian law, as well as on sharia principles as a philosophical basis in the Islamic movement.

The basic principle of compatibility between human rights and sharia from the perspective of Muhammadiyah is to place the dignity of human dignity as a creation of Allah SWT to maintain human honor (*karamah insaniyah*). Thus, human potential is actualized in the form of charitable acts; the state, as the holder of authority, must protect basic human rights given by Allah SWT so that they are not violated and revoked in the name of exercising state authority.¹

Table 1. Several of the human rights that are seen as compatible with human rights in the UDHR and Sharia principles

Universal Declaration on Human Rights	Consideration of Human Rights in the Al-Qur'an	Compatibility
Freedom for life and respect (art.3 of UDHR)	1) Al-An'am (6): 151. " <i>wa la taqtulu al-nafsa-lati harrama Allah illa bi al-haqq.</i> " (...and do not kill a soul that Allah has forbidden (to kill) except with a righteous (cause)) 2) Al-Maidah (5): 32: "... <i>man qatala nafsan bighayri nafsin aw fasadin fi al-ardh fa kaannama qatala al-nas jami'an.</i> " (Whoever kills a human being, not because that person (kills) another person, or not because he causes damage on the earth, then it is as if he has killed all mankind) 3) Al-Isra (17): 70. " <i>Walaqad karramna bani Adam wa hamlanahum fil</i> "	Thus, human potential is actualized in the form of charitable actions; the state, as the holder of authority, must protect the basic human rights given by Allah SWT

1. Susan Muaddi Darraj, *Milestones in Modern World History; The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 15.

Universal Declaration on Human Rights	Consideration of Human Rights in the Al-Qur'an	Compatibility
	<i>barri wal bahri wa razaqnahum min al-thayyibat wa fadhdhalna 'ala katsirin min man khalaqna tafdhila.</i>” (And verily We have glorified the children of Adam, We have carried them on land and in the sea, We have given them sustenance from the good, and We have given them a perfect advantage over most of the creatures that We have created). 4) Al-Ahzab (33): 72. <i>“Inna ‘aradhna-l-amanata ‘ala-s-samawai wa-l-ardhi wa-l-jibali fa abayna an yahmilnaha wa hamalaha-l-insan ...”</i> (Indeed, We have sent a message to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, and all of them are reluctant to take up the command, and they are afraid of betraying it, and men bear it.) etc.	so that they are not violated and revoked in the name of exercising state authority.
Right to justice (art.7-art.8 UDHR)	1) Al-Ma'idah (5): 8. <i>Ya ayyuhalladzina amanu kunu qawwamin lillah syuhada' bil qisthi ...</i>” (O you who believe, be those who always uphold (the truth) for the sake of Allah, be witnesses justly...) 2) Al-Nisa' (4): 135. <i>“Ya ayyuhalladhina amanu kunu qawwamin bil qisthi syuhada' lilahi walaw 'ala anfusikum awi-l-walidain wa-l-aqrabin.”</i> (O you who have believed, be true enforcers of justice, witnesses for Allah even against yourselves or your parents and relatives.) etc.	The UDHR and the Qur'an both protect the right to justice from human beings.
Freedom of Religion (art.18 of UDHR)	1) Al-Baqarah (2) 256. <i>La ikraha fiddin.</i>” (Those who leave Islam after embracing it and then carry out resistance or rebellion against Muslims (state, society) must be treated as enemies. 2) Al-An'am (6): 108. <i>“Wa la tasubbulladzina yad'una min dunillahi fayasubbu Allah 'adwan bighayri 'ilm.”</i> (And do not curse the gods that they worship other than Allah, for they will curse Allah by going beyond the limits of ignorance) etc.	The UDHR and the Qur'an have a principle that respects the right to freedom of religion.

The OIC (The Organization of Islamic Conference), which consists of 59 Islamic countries, feels the need to create a human rights document based on Islamic values contained in the 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights. However, for the UDHR countries, it is considered inappropriate to the circumstances and conditions of the Islamic community, because it is considered not to accommodate the interests of human rights in the Islamic perspective. However, the principle of universality of human rights has brought a common position where the dignity and human being must be upheld by anyone, especially for countries that have a great responsibility to protect it (Salimi Namin, 2019).

3-3. Vulnerable Groups Protected by Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah has a characteristic movement that became its spirit at the beginning of its formation. That spirit is contained in Q.S. Al-Ma'un, where, in its implementation, Muhammadiyah continues to strive for its da'wah in helping the orphans and the poor. This then led Muhammadiyah to carry out all its da'wah efforts through the Muhammadiyah Business Charity, which

developed and played a real role in educating all levels of society (Budiman & et al., 2025).

Through schools to universities, providing health services through the Muhammadiyah network of hospitals, and philanthropically providing assistance to orphans and the poor through the Muhammadiyah orphanage network spread throughout Indonesia and even abroad.

In this context, Muhammadiyah's steps are aimed at providing protection for vulnerable groups, socially marginalized groups, and those who are impoverished due to the unavailability of jobs, access to adequate education, and health services that are no longer accessible to all levels of society. Not only that, but vulnerable groups accompanied by Muhammadiyah turned out to be victims of human rights violations that were directly or indirectly affected by state policies (Aziz & et al., 2023).

In its development, the vulnerable groups accompanied by Muhammadiyah have now developed, those who do not have access to determine their destiny in maintaining their living space, those who are marginalized in the name of national development, those who have no bargaining power so that they are eliminated due to public policies that are not participatory by the government, and so on. Muhammadiyah refers to this group as the modern poor people (*mustadz'afin*).

Table 2. Mapping of actors, classification of vulnerable groups, and the role of Muhammadiyah in community advocacy

Groups of people	Cases	Problem Factors	Muhammadiyah Strategy
Indigenous Peoples	Rempang, Air Bangis,	Living space taken away by the state, corporations, in the name of the development of Indigenous peoples' rights, is eliminated.	Providing advocacy for residents who are victims, giving testimonies, and
The Nationals Strategic Project victim community	Wadas Purworejo, Pakel Banyuwangi, Tumpang Pitu Banyuwangi, Surabaya Waterfront (SWL), Nickel mining in Morowali and Ambon, and several other cases	The Indonesian Strategic Project does not involve residents in the determination and implementation. The impact on the living space and livelihood of the people who are taken away	Providing advocacy and even financial assistance to create economic independence for the people who are victims of the national strategic project
Victims of human rights violations due to legislative issues	Issues of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, the Omnibus Law on Health, the Law on Water Resources, and the Controversial Law lainnya	People are affected by their constitutional rights to find work, get the right to adequate health services, the right to a healthy environment, etc	Providing advocacy for people who are directly affected by existing regulations, as well as conducting judicial review of laws that are contrary to the 1945 Constitution, as the Indonesian constitution

Groups of people	Cases	Problem Factors	Muhammadiyah Strategy
Other victims of human rights violations	Siyono and the suspected spreader of radical ideology	The anti-terror Special Detachment wrongly arrested the victim, and its impact on acts of violence and unlawful detention even falls into the category of extrajudicial killing	Providing legal advocacy to the victim's family and collaborating with state institutions such as Komnas HAM, the Witness and Victim Protection Institute, etc

The role of Muhammadiyah is not limited to protecting its worshippers only. Its participation in protecting and supporting the protection of natural resources, respect for human rights, and the realization of ecological justice has removed these limitations. This is what makes Muhammadiyah's role in advocating in several pivotal case that would be a structural problems around in Indonesia.

3-4. The Role of Muhammadiyah and Community Advocacy

The role of civil society greatly contributes to protecting and advocating for people who are victims of human rights violations due to the exploitation of Natural Resources. In this context, Muhammadiyah has implemented the interpretation of human rights in discourse and advocacy, giving great attention to maintaining the natural resources ecosystem through various kinds of advocacy, such as in Wadas and Purworejo. Then, Pakel, Banyuwangi, and the gold mine in Trenggalek have been proven to be well supported by Muhammadiyah (Al-Hamdi & et al., 2019).

The mining issue is part of a large spectrum of complex natural resource issues, where the "red carpet" will be given to illegal entrepreneurs and oligarch groups who will use corrupt officials to smooth out their licensing. This is also a big signal about the role of community organizations such as Muhammadiyah in advocating for various issues related to mining and natural resource corruption (Wahdini & et al., 2025).

The issue of national strategic projects in Wadas, which contributes to the destruction of natural resources and human rights violations for citizens, is where ambitious projects through the Master Plan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesian Economic Development (MP3EI) impact social and ecological crises. The national strategy project then divided the community with collaboration between government groups and thuggery supported by buzzers that twisted facts on social media. Resisting residents who defend their customary rights. How does the impact have a traumatic effect on the residents there? (Efendi & et al., 2021).

The same thing happened in Pakel, where 11 villages in Pakel District,

Banyuwangi Regency, defending their land use rights for the land, had to fight against PT. Bumi Sari, in this context, there is an agrarian conflict that is certainly detrimental to citizens. The role of Muhammadiyah in providing awareness and advocacy to the citizens through agrarian rights regulated in the Agrarian Law and Government Regulation No. 40 of 1996, which protects citizens from agrarian conflicts that occur, so that companies legitimized by the Banyuwangi Regency Government do not act arbitrarily and authoritarily for their citizens (Prakasa, 2022).

Including Muhammadiyah's advocacy for residents in several sub-districts in Trenggalek Regency for gold mining activities carried out by PT.SMN, which was legitimized through the Decree of the Governor of East Java dated June 24, 2019, with a period of 20 years. The destruction of natural resources under the pretext of gold mining activities covering an area of more than 357.59 hectares certainly has a huge impact on ecological problems; at least nine sub-districts will be affected. In this context, Muhammadiyah through Muhammadiyah Youth, together with GP Ansor, and fully supported by the Regent of Trenggalek, fought against gold mining, which had a major impact on damaging the residents' springs and natural resources ecosystem for the residents around the mining area (Prakasa, 2022).

From these three advocacies, it is proof that the contribution of Muhammadiyah as part of civil society is something that cannot be separated, through advocacy carried out both in the context of citizen intelligence (preventive), as well as legal mechanisms, of course it has a great challenge in the success of advocacy carried out and becomes an example for the role of Islamic organizations in protecting people's human rights.

4. Conclusion

Through an intense mentoring strategy, accompanied by ecological political-moral strength, Muhammadiyah provides protection and advocacy for victims of environmental damage, who are entitled to a solution from the point of view of law and human rights. Then, the impact of the sociological recovery of the community as victims of human rights violations in a cross-sectoral manner by involving other civil society groups, can encourage more comprehensive human rights protection, and becomes an example of the contribution of the Islamic da'wah movement on human rights issues for countries with a majority Muslim population.

Unity between civil society, through Muhammadiyah's role as a catalyst in the advocacy agenda, is certainly the key to advocating and protecting

vulnerable groups. Thus, the protection of human rights for the Indonesian people can be realized, and the human rights narrative of civil society groups can become a real advocacy movement to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights as a shared responsibility.

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