

## **LATENT CONFLICT POSSIBILITIES OF MINORITIES UNDER THE SHARIA LAW**

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### **Abstract**

*Aceh has authoritative legal privilege as it has a special autonomy in implementing sharia as the legal law. In the Islamic tenet, as the foundation of the Islamic law, harmony in society is one of the purposes of implementing sharia. Yet, upon the implementation of sharia in Aceh, several cases of violation interfered with the unity of people with different beliefs in Aceh. This study examined the issue of the scorching church in Singkil to portray intolerance from various perspectives. A qualitative approach utilizing an ethnographic study is implemented with observation and interviews of 25 respondents selected by purposive sampling. The result indicated that misunderstanding led by unharmonious communication and political influence triggered the religious-based conflict in Singkil. Mutual understanding through*

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*dialogue and rejuvenating local culture and wisdom are ways to build and maintain harmony among people with different beliefs upon implementing sharia in Aceh.*

**Keywords:** *Latent conflict possibilities; minorities; people with different religions; sharia*

### **Abstrak**

*Aceh memiliki keistimewaan yang otoritatif karena memiliki otonomi dalam menerapkan syariat sebagai hukum. Dalam ajaran Islam keharmonisan dalam masyarakat merupakan salah satu tujuan penerapan syariat. Namun, dalam penerapannya, beberapa kasus pelanggaran turut mengganggu orang-orang yang berbeda keyakinan di Aceh. Kajian ini mengkaji isu pembakaran gereja di Singkil untuk memotret intoleransi dari berbagai perspektif. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan studi etnografi dilaksanakan dengan observasi dan wawancara terhadap 25 responden yang dipilih secara purposive sampling. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa kesalahpahaman yang dipicu oleh komunikasi yang tidak harmonis dan pengaruh politik memicu konflik berbasis agama di Singkil. Saling pengertian melalui dialog dan peremajaan budaya dan kearifan lokal adalah cara untuk membangun dan menjaga keharmonisan antar umat yang berbeda keyakinan dalam penerapan syariat di Aceh.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Konflik laten; minoritas; syariat*

### **مستخلص**

تمتع آتشيه بامتيازات رسمية لأنها تتمتع بالاستقلالية في تطبيق الشريعة كقانون. في التعاليم الإسلامية، يعد الانسجام في المجتمع أحد أهداف تطبيق الشريعة. ومع ذلك، من الناحية العملية، أدت العديد من حالات الانتهاكات أيضًا إلى إزعاج الأشخاص من معتقدات مختلفة في آتشيه. تبحث هذه الدراسة في قضية حرق الكنائس في سينجكيل لتصوير التعصب من وجهات نظر مختلفة. تم تنفيذ نهج نوعي باستخدام الدراسات الإثنوغرافية من خلال مراقبة وإجراء مقابلات مع 25 مشاركًا تم اختيارهم باستخدام أخذ العينات الهادفة. تظهر النتائج أن سوء الفهم الناجم عن التواصل غير المتناغم والتأثير السياسي يؤدي إلى صراعات دينية في سينجكيل. إن التفاهم المتبادل من خلال الحوار وتحديد الثقافة والحكمة المحلية هو وسيلة لبناء والحفاظ على الانسجام بين الناس من مختلف المعتقدات في تطبيق الشريعة في آتشيه.

**الكلمات الرئيسية:** احتمالات الصراع الكامنة؛ الأقليات؛ الأشخاص ذوو الديانات المختلفة؛ الشريعة الإسلامية.

## **A. Introduction**

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia with authoritative legal privilege (a special autonomy) autonomy to implement Islamic sharia; Aceh now stands in the world's spotlight as a model of religious-based legal acts as legal law.<sup>1</sup> However, the implementation triggered polarity in society: those who accept and refuse. People refusing it argue that the law was discriminative while the penalties were not proven to prevent the violations. Meanwhile, those supporting the law viewed it as a legal system having a deep root within the Acehnese

<sup>1</sup> Abdul Manan, "Acceptance of the Implementation of Islamic Sharia Laws in West Aceh, Indonesia," in *International Conference on Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences*, vol. 2020 (KnE Social Sciences, 2020), 615–27, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i14.7919>.

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community. Despite the current debates, the implementation of sharia continues to focus on enforcement.<sup>2</sup>

The sharia governs not just *'aqidah* (faith), *maysir* (gambling), *khalwat* (seclusion), and *khamar* (liquor) consumption but also cope with the fundamental aspects of human life are meant to conform to the law, including *muamalah* (economic and social affairs) and *akhlaq* (behavior and attitudes).<sup>3</sup> It aims to educate and civilize the Acehnese Muslim generations so that they would act and behave as guided by Allah. So, the long-term project requires a legal standing before being carried out.<sup>4</sup>

In due course, the Indonesian reformation in 1998 paved the path for the implementation of sharia. There are at least two laws that overtly enable the realization of the aim, namely Law No. 44 of 1999 on the Distinctive Status of Aceh Province (legalized on October 4, 1999) and Law No. 18 of 2001 on the Special Autonomy Status of the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam province (legalized on August 9, 2001).<sup>5</sup> Although being formulated by the Muslims, sharia is by no means discriminative towards other religious holders in Aceh. Instead, it ensures and protects other religious believers as the realization of one of the Islamic tenets, *Rahmatan lil Alamin* (the blessing for the entire universe).

Compared to the other 22 regencies in Aceh, Aceh Singkil is long known for its multi-religious and multiethnic inhabitants; Islam and Christianity are the two predominant religions. However, the fact that every religious believer insists on practicing their beliefs without any hindrances, conflicts, indeed, sometimes occur. The Indonesian government ensures and protects the diversity among people, including religions, by admitting six religions: Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddha, and Konghucu. Yet, conflicts involving people of different faiths are still inevitable because some factors that may disturb the harmony among people were not addressed seriously by the government and the people.

A harmonious life among people with different religions was forged by tolerance, mutual understanding, respect, and social cooperation.<sup>6</sup> The government and the people had

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<sup>2</sup> Abdul Manan, Gunawan, and Muhibbuthabary, "Reality and Public Perception in the Implementation of Islamic Sharia Laws in Banda Aceh," in *Emerging Perspectives and Trends in Innovative Technology for Quality Education 4.0*, ed. Udan Kusmawan et al. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 183–86.

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Manan and Cut Intan Salasiyah, "Evaluating the Implementation of Sharia in Aceh, Indonesia (Examining the Qanun Jinayat in Bireuen Regency)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 9, no. 3 (2021): 549, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v9i3.593>.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Manan et al., "Banda Aceh as a Civilized City Model," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 8, no. 2 (2020): 243–57, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i2.489>.

<sup>5</sup> Fauzi Ismail and Abdul Manan, "Syari'at Islam Di Aceh: Realitas Dan Respon Masyarakat" (Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Manan, Kamarullah, Husaini Husda, Rasyad & Fauzi. "The Unity of Community in Cemetery: An Ethnographic Study of the Islamic Burials in Aceh, Indonesia. *Journal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 24(1), (2024): 21-50.

an equal obligation to maintain peace and harmony within society with various religions regarding public services, regulations, and social resources. Regarding this fact, Aceh has rules to maintain the unity of people with different faiths. One of them was actualized in establishing places for worship, which must follow the law and local wisdom. The existence of *qanun* (provincial law) Number 4 of 2006 and Governor Regulation Number 25 of 2007 regulates the establishment of worship in Aceh. To maintain harmony among people with different beliefs, the government established *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* abbreviated as FKUB (Forum for People with Different Religions), at regency, province, and nation.

Many incidents have occurred; one notable case was the scorching of people attending the worship in a church in 2015 on Tuesday, October 13, causing a man to be killed with ten injured. Such conflict frequently occurs due to the people's shallow understanding of the tenets of their religions. There were tendencies that conflict with religious nuances in Indonesia came of prejudices; the government had responsibilities in engaging people with different religions and beliefs to unify<sup>7</sup>. Only if they could comply with the given laws and regulations and respect the rights of others would harmony soon prevail.

The facts above and the conditions become the foundation of further study on conflict among religions. Such a problem affects the life of Indonesian people in general. In Aceh, the contingency of conflict with religious nuances required special concerns as it was the mere province in Indonesia enacting Sharia as legal law. Hence, the conflict with religious nuances had a latency to be potentially exploited in political issues.<sup>8</sup> The legalization of Sharia in Aceh, while in one hand reflected as the democratization process in Indonesia, triggered frictions in society.<sup>9</sup>

In Aceh, Christian is considered as minority, consequently, the latent potential discrimination toward them is inevitable. The dynamic within society, both internal and external aspects had influenced toward the triggering the conflict.<sup>10</sup> In Aceh the area with great potency of religious nuances conflict is Singkil, Aceh Tenggara; this regency has great number of Christian people comparing to other regencies in Aceh as 21% of its residents were

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<sup>7</sup> Firdaus Daus, "Conflict on Religion in Indonesia," *Berumpun: International Journal of Social, Politics, and Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.33019/berumpun.v6i2.112>.

<sup>8</sup> Winuhoro Hanumbhawono et al., "Potential for Religious Exploitation of Conflict in Indonesia," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 10 (2024): 403–11.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Buehler and Dani Muhtada, "Democratization and the Diffusion of Shari'a Law: Comparative Insights from Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 24, no. 2 (2016): 261–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X16649311>.

<sup>10</sup> Yaser Amri and Muhammad Ansor, "Shari'a State and the Making of Christian's Polyphonic Narrations in Contemporary Aceh, Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 250, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v5i2.9700>.

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Catholic and Protestants.<sup>11</sup> The conflict itself brought trauma for people living there and decreased mutual trust among people.<sup>12</sup> It was a shame reminiscing the fact that people living in Singkil, despite having different religions, shared similar ancestors.<sup>13</sup>

The analysis of the case in Singkil will become a reflection of the Indonesian government to deal with conflict involving religious issues. While the majority of Indonesian was Moslem, yet, in several areas, there is a large number of non-Islamic residents: in such a situation the latency of religious conflict is inevitable. This study adjuncts with Zainuddin in investigating challenges upon the issue of religion and democracy in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, it offered a detailed perspectives on the way people and government dealt with religious nuances conflict, particularly with minority relating conflict. This study provided insight into the factors causing the conflicts, as well as the way people and government coped with the situation. Then it brought a model for dealing with similar religious-nuances conflicts in Indonesia. As known, there are several areas in Indonesia having latent potency of religious conflict as in Sulawesi, Ambon, and Kalimantan.<sup>15</sup>

Being part of Aceh, most Muslim inhabitants in Singkil regard Islam as the host religion, whose domination was later bugged by the 'newcomer' faith, Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Located in the border of Aceh and Sumatera Utara, this area became a migrating destination for Pakpak and Batak People, whose the majority of them were Catholic and Protestant. The common trigger in Aceh was the issue of religious conversion along with illegal praying places.<sup>17</sup> In the area of Singkil, this issue was amplified by the fact that this area had important history toward Islamic development in Aceh. The Singkil Muslims who adore their area as the home of the celebrated Acehnese Islamic scholar, Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili, cannot endure the 'foreign' culture of alcohol drinking and raising pigs which is often associated with the Christians. Stated another way, the holders of different faiths always attempt to judge

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<sup>11</sup> BPS Aceh Tenggara, *Kabupaten Aceh Tenggara Dalam Angka 2024*, Bps, vol. 1102001.11, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Raja Oloan Tumanggor and Agoes Dariyo, "Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being with Resilience and Mental Health in Social Conflict Victims in Aceh Singkil Faculty of Psychology - Universitas Tarumanagara Jakarta International Seminar on Psychology 2017 , August 12th 2017 Below Is the Result," *International Seminar on Psychology*, no. August 12th, 2017 (2017): 37–40.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "We Are From the Same Ancestors: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporay Aceh Singkil," *Al-Albab* 3, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v3i1.47>.

<sup>14</sup> M. Zainuddin, "Plurality of Religion: Future Challenges of Religion and Democracy in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 9, no. 2 (2015): 151–66, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2015.9.2.151-166>.

<sup>15</sup> Greg Acciaioli, "Grounds of Conflict, Idioms of Harmony: Custom, Religion, and Nationalism in Violence Avoidance at the Lindu Plain, Central Sulawesi," *Indonesia* 72, no. 72 (2001): 81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3351482>.

<sup>16</sup> Haidlor Ali Ahmad, "Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan Di Aceh Singkil Dalam Perspektif Budaya Dominan," *Harmoni* 15, no. 3 (2016): 45–59.

<sup>17</sup> Al Makin, "Islamic Acehnese Identity, Sharia, and Christianization Rumor: A Study of the Narratives of the Attack on the Bethel Church in Penauyong Banda Aceh," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 10, no. 1 (2016): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2016.10.1.1-36>.

things using their values, which inevitably would trigger tension if the minor group failed to show deference to the majority's values.

As the seed of conflict has been planted in society, an open confrontation is only a matter of time. The climax, in this case, is a scorching of an 'illegally built' church. An illegally built Christian church in Singkil was considered a violation of the collectively agreed regulations on worship buildings, justifying the Muslims' strong reaction.<sup>18</sup> Such conflict is a latent danger in Indonesia as harmony between minority and majority can be disturbed by a simple matter. This study offered a deep understanding toward religious-based regulation and democracy, as emphasized by Winuhoro<sup>19</sup> along with the immersed analysis in dimension of religion in social conflict as noted by Rasidin et.al.<sup>20</sup> The result portrayed the factors triggering religious-nuanced conflict within minority along with the way government and society coped with it; it would be a model for reciliation upon religious-based conflict on minority.

This study is attempted as a qualitative study employing ethnographic studies. Ethnographic research is considered appropriate for depicting complex societal phenomena.<sup>21</sup> The data were collected using direct observation and interviews with 25 respondents, who were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling). The data analysis was done as qualitative data analysis proposed by Milles, Huberman, and Saldana consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.<sup>22</sup>

## **B. Result**

### ***1. The Factors Contributing to the Singkil Religious Conflict***

The riot in Aceh happened because of several factors. The matter of law and "disagreement" of certain people against the existing regulation; some minorities felt that the code was unfair. One notable case was the increasing number of illegal churches in Singkil. The construction of those churches violated the existing rule and disavowed society's commitment which had been agreed upon.

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<sup>18</sup> Mallia Hartani and Soni Akhmad Nulhaqim, "Analisis Konflik Antar Umat Beragama Di Aceh Singkil," *Jurnal Kolaborasi Resolusi Konflik* 2, no. 2 (2020): 93, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkrk.v2i2.28154>.

<sup>19</sup> Hanumbhawono et al., "Potential for Religious Exploitation of Conflict in Indonesia."

<sup>20</sup> Mhd. Rasidin et al., "The Dimension of Religion in Political Conflict and Violence: An Experience In Indonesia," *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.30983/it.v7i1.6146>.

<sup>21</sup> Loshini Naidoo, "Ethnography: An Introduction to Definition and Method," *An Ethnography of Global Landscapes and Corridors*, no. November (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5772/39248>. Abdul Manan, *Metode Penelitian Etnografi*. (Banda Aceh: AcehPo Publishing, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (United States of America: SAGE Publications, 2018).

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In Indonesia, religion is accommodated to be the basis for the country's version of consociationalism, where independent groups of people (e.g., religious groups) reserve rights under shared governance.<sup>23</sup> Next, proper citizenship becomes intimately associated with sacred belongings, highlighting reasonable beliefs and behaviors, and rules to regulate potential tensions between holders of varying faiths.

The conflict between Muslims and Christians in Singkil has a long historical root; the relationship between them was heated due to the evangelical movement in Muslim-dominated areas in Singkil. The notable case that appeared in society is the Case of 1979. It was the moment when the Christians' request to build a church, Gereja Tuhan Indonesia, was rejected by the regent at that time, considering the potential tension it might cause. For the Christians to build the church is a rightful need of everyone in Indonesia and must not be hindered. In contrast, for Muslims, the rule is somewhat different in Aceh and should not be hastily considered the same in other Indonesian regions.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, despite the Muslim protest, the construction of the church started. Consequently, the scorching of three churches within one night, June 6, 1979, became the accumulation of impatience among people.

The government then gathered representatives from both sides to fix the situation. The meeting took place in Lipat Kajang on July 11, 1979, and resulted in an agreement known as Perjanjian 1979, raising five agreed terms. The third term overtly underlines the attitude toward the building of worship places<sup>25</sup>:

"We will not undertake the building of churches, their renovation, and other related acts before obtaining legal permission from the local government of South Aceh, according to the contents of the Joint Decree between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Domestic of Home Affairs Number 1 of 1969."

The joint decree formed a decade before the conflict was essentially a national response to a heated debate about permission for houses of worship, which was mainly precipitated by the case of people's objection to a church built in Meulaboh, West Aceh regency.<sup>26</sup> It stressed that local approval has to be met before the plan of building more new houses of worship can be executed. Perhaps this decision might disappoint such minority

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<sup>23</sup> Daniel Andrew Birchok, *"Wild Churches" and Chronotopic Tensions: On the Space and Time of Interreligious Relations in Modern Indonesia*, 111th ed. (Indonesia: Cornell University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2021.0004>.

<sup>24</sup> Azwar Ramnur and Hambalisyah Sinaga, *Sejarah Konflik Singkil (1979-2015)* (Banda Aceh: Yayasan PeNA, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Imran, "Ini Sejarah Penyerangan Gereja Aceh Singkil Sejak 1979," *Tempo.co*, 2015, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/710342/ini-sejarah-penyerangan-gereja-aceh-singkil-sejak-1979>.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Andrew Birchok, "'Wild Churches' and Chronotopic Tensions: On the Space and Time of Interreligious Relations in Modern Indonesia," *Indonesia* 111, no. 1 (2021): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2021.0004>.

Christians in Singkil because the majority Muslims would tend to restrict their ability to found churches, despite legal action they could work on.

It was deeply regretted that some days after the agreement, the Singkil people were surprised to hear that a Muslim's house was intentionally set on fire. A victim in this scorching case was found in the building, tied and wounded by a sharp weapon. It revealed that the interreligious tension was not yet reconciled. The peacemaking act was attempted again on October 13, 1979, resulting in a pledge, *Ikrar Kerukunan Bersama* (Collective Peaceful Declaration), proclaimed by the representatives of both sides. Because a mere pledge was not legally binding, some other attacks on churches causing partial damage occurred in March 1995 and July 1998.<sup>27</sup> As time passed, the *Ikrar Kerukunan Bersama* seemed to have been forgotten as the number of illegal churches increased. Another agreement, *Perjanjian* 2001, was materialized to alleviate the anger of Muslims. Both sides then agreed to let one church and four *undung-undung* (small churches) be built within the administrative territory of the Aceh Singkil regency.

The agreement got its legitimacy six years later as the *Pergub Aceh* on the Guidelines of Worship Buildings Establishment in Aceh of 2007 was promulgated. The existence of the joint decree between the two ministries mentioned earlier, accompanied by Law No. 11 of 2006 About the Aceh Government (see Article 127 paragraph 4), which applied the law principle of *lex specialis* and *lex generalis* in Aceh, including the Aceh Singkil regency:

“The construction of houses of worship in Aceh is subject to permission from the Aceh government and the respective regency/city government.”

Despite the legal regulations existing toward the number of churches and *undung-undung*, the number of Christian places for worship exceeds the limit agreed upon in *Perjanjian 2001*. Today, there are four churches and 23 *undung-undung*, some of which were established without a legal permit. This phenomenon indicates insubordination against the existing deal and regulation, displeasing the peaceful community. That being the case, some irritated Muslims could not fight an urge to show their anger by demonstrating to show protest to the regency authority, but to no avail. This case portrayed the insubordination responded to by the authority's ignorance triggered physical confrontation occurring later.

In addition, the emergence of social prejudice also occurred since there was never any solution ultimately. In the end, the never-ending social bias has created a desire to do discrimination in various aspects of life. This attitude also has raised the concept of distrust in

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<sup>27</sup> Imran, “Ini Sejarah Penyerangan Gereja Aceh Singkil Sejak 1979,” *Tempo*, 2015.



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the regency government of Aceh Singkil. Those with such attitudes are considered a group of people with similar ideologies as the right group, while those with different ideologies are the wrong group. The latter was considered a threat.

Along with the globalization era, another factor that flickered the conflict in Aceh Singkil was the ill-founded and wrong ways religious fanatics viewed and understood the spiritual life itself. This phenomenon also prompted “social friction” in Aceh Singkil. The congregation will be provoked and angry if any words or sentences are conveyed satirically. Hence, cursing at each other could happen inevitably. The top of the conflict occurred on Tuesday, October 13, 2015, due to the long-existing friction. The bloody incident between Muslims and Christians led to the death of a Muslim. At the same time, dozens more were injured, and the burning illegal churches in *Desa Suka Makmur* (a village in the sub-regency of Gunung Meriah, Aceh Singkil).

### ***2. Political Influence upon Religious-Issued Conflict in Aceh Singkil***

The study also revealed the tendency of political influence toward religious-related conflicts. As cited by Paat, Ismail Hasani stated that the ambush on those churches was performed under the agreement of the regent and related officials.<sup>28</sup> This incident was also claimed as the misuse of power and regulations to discriminate against the minority in those areas.

It seemed that the political agenda within this region also influenced the emerging conflicts. A similar case happened in Maluku and Tual sometime before the 1999 general election.<sup>29</sup> Sensitive issues on *Suku, Agama, Ras, dan Adat* known as SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and other social classes), were circulated to gain votes. It was inevitable that religious issues became sensitive matters around Aceh during the election. To achieve a voice, some parties evoked these issues to get the people’s sympathy.

Within the Aceh Singkil, the issue regarding religious life was even more crucial since it was the borderline between the provinces of Aceh and North Sumatra. Most people living in the area of North Sumatra near this borderline were Protestant, while the majority of people living in Aceh Singkil were Islam. Since the development of Aceh Singkil, particularly in the economic and agricultural area, the people of North Sumatra near the borderline started migrating to Aceh Singkil. Thus, the number of Protestant people increased due to this fact.

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<sup>28</sup> Yustinus Paat, “Bupati Aceh Singkil Dituding Restui Pembakaran Gereja,” *Berita Satu*, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Yunus Rahawarin, “Kerjasama Antar Umat Beragama: Studi Rekonsiliasi Konflik Agama Di Maluku Dan Tual.” *Kalam* 7, No. 1 (2013):106-107.

Their need for a place for worship was also increased, then it pursued them to build sites to worship, either church or *undung-undung* (small church).

The case of illegal churches and *undung-undung* became fuel for political propaganda in an area of multi-religious and multi-ethnicity. As Islam is the majority here, the political parties try to grab the vote of the Muslims; the scapegoat is vibrant: the number of illegal churches is raised. The propagandist of the political party triggered the people as their violent actions also seemed neglected by the authority; both indicated that the violation was used to seize the sympathy of the majority of people here.

The incident could have been prevented should the government of Aceh Singkil have responded immediately to the people's aspirations. Most of the people of Aceh Singkil had delivered their protest to the government regarding the case of an illegal church. It was known that recently more than 20 churches and *undung-undung* existed in Aceh Singkil despite the regulations only permitting one church and four *undung-undung*. Referring to the treaty made among people in Aceh Singkil, if the number of churches and *undung-undung* had exceeded the quota, the Christian people had to close it. It never happened, and they still established new churches and *undung-undung*.

The people protested these occurrences, yet the government of Aceh Singkil repeatedly postponed the investigation of the case. It was also tendencies that the establishment of these churches and *undung-undung* cheated the government. Upon the establishment, the people built those churches by manipulating the signatures of provisions. It added tension to the case and made the people angrier. Then, this incident was used by the political figure to gain the people's vote.

## **C. Discussion**

### ***1. Religious Harmony vis-à-vis the Perspectives of Islamic and Indonesian Laws***

The co-existence of people with religions other than Islam is inevitable. The Islamic tenet has guided the relationship with people of different faiths. The principle of maintaining harmony among people in Islam is highly imperative. There is a belief that the universe originates from a single origin, the Light of Prophet Muhammad. Islam considers people are equal since they are similar entities. Because Islam denounces the compulsion of forcing people to embrace it, every person of any faith deserves justice<sup>30</sup>. And members of a plural society are encouraged to know each other (Qur'an, 49: 13). Then, each person has the right to

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<sup>30</sup> Hilal Wani, Raihanah Abdullah, and Lee Wei Chang, "An Islamic Perspective in Managing Religious Diversity," *Religions* 6, no. 2 (2015): 642–56, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel6020642>.

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believe in and practice a particular religion. Islamic sharia admits and protects the request and does not force non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Perhaps, the media portrayal of sharia in Aceh, which repeatedly associated it with physical punishment, makes people think of its reductive implementation. Aceh is not a perfect model of sharia enforcer, and the degree of its adoption is quite limited. The Department of Islamic Sharia officially shoulders this arduous task and is the first to receive a negative assessment if sharia is not tightly monitored. Singkil conflict should not hastily be perceived as a mere failure of sharia enforcement since it is attributed to various factors such as the area's geographical position and the people's collective memory.

Christianity was preached in the area during the Dutch annexation. For Acehnese, Barus in North Sumatra and Singkil in Aceh were famed for two necessary Muslim clerks during the heyday of the Aceh Sultanate, Hamzah Fansuri and Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili, respectively. This indicates the outstanding former quality of Islam in the two areas. In due course, the Christian Dutch encroachment from the regions south to Aceh on those Muslim-populated areas gradually paved the path for the Christian community to exist. Such unwanted cultural existence may seem like a thorn in the Singkil Muslims' side who imagine the old uninterrupted, historical Islamic link with their fellow Muslims in Barus, North Sumatra, and further with West Sumatra.

Freedom of religion is protected by Islam and has yet to be duly interpreted in the Aceh context. Excessive external intervention in translating the local regulation concerning religious practice could be irrelevant. People with different religions will not be subjected to hatred; they have the right to perform their beliefs. Islam does not force them to convert their religions. Allah said in the Qur'an (2: 256):

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clearly from Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things.”

The initial acts by Prophet Muhammad after migrating from Mekkah to Madinah were building a mosque and establishing fraternity between *Muhajirin* (the migrants from Mekkah) and *Anshar* (the natives of Madinah). The fraternity was meant to consolidate the Muslims, either *Muhajirin* or *Anshar*. Furthermore, the prophet drafted a charter to unify the entire citizens of the heterogeneous society in Madinah, which was immediately accepted by the community. This charter united every citizen irrespective of their tribes, ethnicities, and

religions, ensuring equality, justice, and rights protection and determining their duties.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, those who chose to remain non-Muslims, known as *ahl al-ḡimmah*, deserved protection from the Muslim authority through which they could execute their internal affairs, personally or collectively.<sup>32</sup>

Under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, the Madinah society became a role model as a social setting where the right to freedom in different religions was justly accommodated. In Madinah, Islam could thrive with clever strategies. The Prophet granted the non-Muslim traitors amnesty after specific considerations. Today, such an offense is punishable by death in at least 39 countries, six of which even declare the punishment mandatory.<sup>33</sup> As Islam came into Madinah, with the power he had already gained, the Prophet could sentence death punishment to the traitors of different religions. Yet, they were given amnesty from the prophet. On another occasion, after winning a war, the prophet released a non-Muslim prisoner with the condition that he must teach the Muslims how to read, write and do the calculation. Once, a guest came to the Prophet's house, and he was treated well, as if he was his family member, without coaxing him to convert to Islam.

The Indonesian Constitution of 1945 and Pancasila guarantee the right of the citizens to believe in a particular religion. Article 29 of the National Constitution of Indonesia mentioned that a) the nation is based on the belief in One Supreme God; b) the government ensures and protects the right of people to believe in one religion and perform worship following its tenet. Furthermore, the amendments of the National Constitution on article 28E mentioned that each person has freedom in a) believing and performing worship upon certain religions; b) getting and choosing education; c) choosing nationality; d) settling in a specific place, migrating, and returning within the area of Indonesia. Then, the amendment Article 28I mentioned the right of each citizen, including the right to life, protection from threat, freedom of thinking, the right to believe in a specific religion, freedom from slavery, the right to equality before the law, and the natural right of humanity that cannot be reduced for any reason.

The existences of the first verse in Pancasila, along with Article 29 of the National Constitution, are to serve as the main juridical and constitutional foundation of the relationship between the government and religion. This condition conforms to the Medina Charter, which puts government and religion as single entities. The Pancasila experienced a

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<sup>31</sup> Haza Hanurhaza Md Jani et al., "A Review on the Medina Charter in Response to the Heterogeneous Society in Malaysia," *Procedia Environmental Sciences* 28 (2015): 92–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2015.07.014>.

<sup>32</sup> Muhamad Ichrom, "Hak Sipil Agama (Hsa) Dalam Piagam Madinah" 4, no. 2 (2020): 233–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36671/mumtaz.v4i02.138>.

<sup>33</sup> Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

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phase of dispute when its five principles were in the formulation process to be the Preamble of the Indonesian Constitution. The first principle prescribes an obligation to Muslims to abide by sharia law. To win the trust of non-Muslim people in eastern regions of the country, the principle was revised, so it became as it is today, abstaining from specifying obligatory compliance with specific religions.

These bases have been maintained very strongly to sustain harmony among the people. To some extent, the country looks quite religious and never thinks to separate its governance from religion. However, interreligious conflicts, which are often uncontrollable, explain the complexity of how people imagine the freedom of practicing religions.

The explanations above indicate that Indonesia seriously governs religious affairs. The rights to embrace and practice religions have long been secured by the constitution since the year of the independence proclamation. The constitution later translates into regulations that address the establishment of worship places.

### **2. *Regulations on Houses of Worship***

The establishment of places for worship in Aceh, including in Aceh Singkil, is based on Mutual Regulations between The Ministry of Religious Affairs and The Ministry of Domestic Affairs (Mutual Letter of Agreement No. 8 and No. 9 of 2006). There is also The Governor's Regulation of the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam No. 25 of 2007 on establishing a place of worship within Aceh. The Mutual Regulations define the role of the head of governance in maintaining relationships among people with different religions, establishing inter-religious forums, and regulating the establishment of places for worship.

Chapter I of the Governor's Regulations explains the role of the governor and the vice governor, regents, and vices of regents, *Keuchik* (village chiefs in Aceh), religious organizations, religious scholars, The Forum of Inter Religions Relationship or known as FKUB (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*), and the committees of worship place construction. Chapter II explains that the structure of worship places is subject to the population number of respective religious holders in specific administrative units<sup>34</sup>. Villages (kelurahan or gampong) are the minor units first observed to ascertain that the required number of religious holders is already met. Suppose the number of these units' inhabitants is not satisfied while they cannot help but highly demand a worship place. The calculation will entail a broader administrative size, such as a regency or a city. The construction of a home

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<sup>34</sup> Gubernur Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, "Peraturan Gubernur Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam," Pub. L. No. 25 (2007).

for worship must consider the relationship between people of different religions, peace and order, and the existing regulations.

Furthermore, in Article 3, it is explained that the establishment of worship buildings must comply with the administrative and technical-building requirements. The number of worship place users has to reach at least 150, proven by copies of their ID cards. Proof of support has to be obtained from at least 120 local community members who are legally recognized by local officers, i.e., Lurah/Geuchik (the local chief of the village). Other necessary documents are a recommendation letter issued by the head of the respective regency or city Kantor Departemen Agama (the Office of Religious Affairs) and a recommendation letter from the regency or city FKUB<sup>35</sup>. If the required number of 150 users is met, yet the support from local people does not yet reach 120, the regency government should find ways to accelerate the process.

Moreover, Article 5 describes the petition for worship building filled by the construction committee to the local regent/mayor in acquiring the license of Izin Mendirikan Bangunan (Building Permit). The local regent/mayor is expected to give a decision at least 90 (ninety) days after the petition starts to ask. The regency/city government then provides a new location for the worship buildings, which already have the license if the former site is moved due to urban and regional planning<sup>36</sup>.

In chapter III, a description of the temporary permit for building utilization is stated in Article 7. The content is about utilizing a non-worship building as a temporary worship building, which must get temporary permission from the recent/mayor with the written approval of the local sub-regency head. However, the consent demands the following requirements: a. worthy function, and b. maintaining harmony among religious believers and the community's peace and order.

The requirements that must be met due to the maintenance of harmony among different religious believers and the community's peace and order consist of the following criteria: a. written consent of the building owner; b. written recommendation from Lurah/Geuchik; c. written report issued by regency/city FKUB; and d. written report dispensed by the Kantor Departemen Agama's head of regency/city.

The temporary permit of the non-worship building utilization as the worship building distributed by the regent/mayor is legally published after considering the written report given

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<sup>35</sup> Aulia Bintang Pratama, "Pembakaran Gereja Capai 1.000 Kasus Pasca Reformasi," CNN Indonesia, 2015, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20151014065145-20-84852/pembakaran-gereja-capai-1000-kasus-pasca-reformasi>.

<sup>36</sup> Lene Pedersen, "Religious Pluralism in Indonesia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 5 (2016): 387–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2016.1218534>.

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out by both the regency/city Kantor Departemen Agama and FKUB. The permit is applicable for two years at the longest. Additionally, in Article 9, it is explained that the permit above can be delegated to the head of the sub-regency after getting consideration in the form of written opinion issued by the Kantor Departemen Agama's authority of regency/city and regency/city FKUB.

Thus, the establishment of worship buildings in the Aceh province is already prescribed in the form of *Peraturan Gubernur* (Governor Regulation), which has been applied since 19 June 2007 or around eight years ago. The regulation is issued to guarantee the freedom of religious adherents to worship according to their religion and belief. Besides, it exists to avoid the emergence of conflicts among religious believers since there are no rules that govern religious freedom, predominantly related to the establishment of worship buildings. Shortly, from a legal point of view, the need for more churches in Singkil which follows the rising number of the congregation is satisfiable once all the requirements mentioned above are met.

### 3. *Reflection from Some Interreligious Conflicts in Indonesia*

Conflicts relating to religious issues commonly occur within the area where people with different beliefs and religions live, including in Indonesia. The media even reported that the scorching of churches had reached 1000 cases in Indonesia after the reformation<sup>37</sup>. This case was mainly caused by the growth of the minority people, which led to the demand for a new place for worship. In a country where religious tolerance is more understood as showing respect to the rights of the majority rather than accommodating the minority demands, the government's "unjust" stance in mediating conflicting groups could potentially sustain the tension.

The conflicts related to religious issues happened between Islam and Christianity and were associated with other minority groups within Indonesia. The dispute developed owing to the identifications of extra-local orthodoxies the people adopted and their worry about 'others' potential to gain power, like what happened to the minority Islamic group of Ahmadiyyah<sup>38</sup>. Another similar example is the expulsion of Syiah sect followers in Sampang, Madura, in August 2012, deemed an attempt to maintain unity (Mahbub, 2018). Regarding the Singkil conflict, a hasty judgment would frame that the conflict was instigated due to the

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<sup>37</sup> Patrick Ziegenhain, *Aceh, In: Bundeszentrale Für Politische Bildung (2011): Dos- Sier Innerstaatliche Konflikte*, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Hanna Dewi Aritonang, Bestian Simangunsong, and Adiani Hulu, "Love Your Enemy: A Christian Response to Embrace Others," in *Proceeding on International Conference of Education in the New Normal Era (ICEIAKN)*, vol. 1, 2020, 51–55, <https://doi.org/10.31098/iceiakn.v1i1.240>.

intolerance shown by the Muslim community, for example, as stated by Ziegenhain<sup>39</sup>, Aritonang, Simangunsong, and Hulu<sup>40</sup>, and Rogers<sup>41</sup>. A popular opinion among Muslims there says the conflict was conditioned by the growth of the minority, intensified by less tight control from the local authority on the minority activities.

Except for the Singkil conflict in 1979, it is noteworthy that more serious conflicts occurred mainly during and after the reformation of government in 1998. People tended to mistakenly understand democracy as the freedom to act violently against a minority. The fact that such vicious confrontation often juxtaposes the majority and the minority as unmediated social groups suggests the ununified understanding of how interreligious co-existence should be. In the complex Singkil society, one has to be sufficiently informed about the people's history and the socio-political situations they have lived in. Perhaps, Singkil Muslims are entirely aware of a frequently heard Indonesian saying, "*di mana bumi dipijak di situ langit dijunjung*," which equals to the English "when you are in Rome, do as Romans do." For them, Rome is now a regency in the Veranda of Mecca (epithet for Aceh). So, there is no need to bother about how colonial documents describe religious plurality in the region in the past or how it looked religiously before Islam was introduced. Islam is now the religion they expect to be identified with.

Indeed, plurality was and is not foreign for the territory on the shore of the Aceh west coast, which today directly shares a boundary with the Pakpak Bharat regency of North. Yet, the Muslims worrying about proselytization from today's Christian community assume that Islam had long been destined to be the religion of the people there before the Dutch brought with them Bible's preachers. Of paramount importance to highlight is that Muslims in Singkil might surmise that territories are tied closely to specific kinds of people and practices proper for them. Such a proposition has likely permeated the law, attempted to contain unwelcome 'outsider' influence, and designed to reinforce what most people consider natural to them. Viewed this way, Christianization by local priests is deemed a neo-colonial threat that harms Singkil's Islamic character.

Other instances of religious-related conflicts in Indonesia were the cases of Maluku and Tual. The dispute emerged after the reformation in Indonesia and cost many victims. Again, the conflict was occasionally unavoidable due to misunderstanding the freedom to act. It was once caused by a personal fight between two persons with different religions. Yet, it

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<sup>39</sup> Ziegenhain, Aceh, In: *Bundeszentrale Für Politische Bildung (2011): Dos- Sier Innerstaatliche Konflikte*.

<sup>40</sup> Aritonang, Simangunsong, and Hulu, "Love Your Enemy: A Christian Response to Embrace Others."

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rogers, "Otherwise Engaged: Social Media from Vanity Metrics to Critical Analytics," *International Journal of Communication* 12, no. 732942 (2018): 450–72.



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developed into a religious conflict between Islam and Christianity since the people had slight tolerance and understanding.

Noticeably, a series of religion-based conflicts gradually begin to shape the people's understanding that the democracy of Indonesia is an alarming situation. The issue of religion easily provoked people without clarifying the fact behind an incident, and it might trigger a broader and more gruesome act for the people. From the case of Tual and Maluku, it was also discovered that the conflict might repeatedly occur despite the reconciliation that has been made. This leads to the question about the reconciliation process: what is the most effective way to reconcile a religion-related conflict?

The answer lies in the government's role in tackling the conflict. It was confirmed that the reconciliation had been made thanks to the facilitation from the government, yet it seemed not to be socialized well. Equally important, cultural, and local wisdom should be considered as approaches to solving the problem. The modernization and the development of media allow rapid dissemination of false information about specific sensitive issues, including religious ones, at a massive and vast rate. At this stage, the local wisdom and culture can function as the filter for people in judging and assessing an issue. The cases of Tual and Maluku concerned personal circumstances, but they were then hyped as things related to the religious topic. The provocative information about the issue was circulated quickly, exacerbating the situation. The conflict might not have happened if they had reacted calmly and rationally to the tension.

It is part of the culture and local wisdom to endorse mutual understanding among people, and the government must facilitate it. From the cases of Tual and Maluku, it was clear that the people were divided into segregated parties. This condition occurred because there was no inter-religion discussion and events made in the areas. The demographic and economic dynamics made them live in such situations. Therefore, there should be programs to maintain and unify those people's relationships again.

Moreover, the people living as Muslims and Christians within that area are descendants of similar ancestors. Thus, the culture and local wisdom must be promoted to build tolerance among people. In addition, the diversity of religious and cultural comprehension in society is expected to produce a solution that can create harmony and peace<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Yunus Rahawarin, "Kerjasama Antar Ummat Beragama: Studi Rekonsiliasi Konflik Agama Di Maluku Dan Tual," *Kalam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 95, <https://doi.org/10.24042/klm.v7i1.451>.

The government, especially military and law-enforcing forces, has a significant role in maintaining the relationship and preventing religious-related conflict. The fact that little and personal incidents triggered those cases makes it urgent to react immediately and responsively to such matters. Violent acts were the resort the people could think of since the law-enforcing forces might not correctly respond to the cases. People lost their trust in the enforcing details and then decided their acts. Hence, it is the task of law enforcement forces to regain the trust and empathy of the people.

The government also has to cooperate with Forum Komunikasi antar Umat Beragama (Inter-religion Communication Forum), usually known as FKUB. This forum has to function as the first mediator if a conflict occurs between people of a different religions. The dialogs raising the relationship among other faiths have to sensitize the people to the culture and local wisdom within diversities. Despite the diverse choice of religion, the Singkil inhabitants are tied tighter with kinship. For example, the Pakpak ethnic group is accustomed to sharing bread with their neighbors and relatives on Eid day and during the New Year moment (Saragih, 2022). Sharing the spaces to live and speaking the same tongue make these people emotionally bound to each other. The main point is to unite the segregated society and to promote harmony that should prevail and be sustainably preserved in their social life.

#### ***4. The Religious- Conflict Resolution Steps***

The incidents in Aceh Singkil regency have already elicited reactions from some crucial figures in Indonesia. Commenting upon the Singkil conflict in 2015, the president of Indonesia, Jokowi, said those religion-relating conflicts do undermine the meaning of our national motto, "Bhinneka Tuggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity)<sup>43</sup>. Jusuf Kalla's vice urged for a just end to the conflict<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the government of Indonesia, the government of Aceh, and the government of Aceh Singkil regency have already maintained a variety of steps to contain the widespread potential triggering such conflict.

Indonesian law No. 7 of 2002 regulates steps to address social conflicts. The steps are preventing conflicts, cessation of conflict, and post-conflict recovery. For the Singkil case, the program must focus on post-conflict recovery, as the conflict is already over. The recovery process entails reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, respectively. Yet, in practice,

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<sup>43</sup> Susetyo Dwi Prihadi, "Jokowi Bicara Soal Kerusuhan Aceh Singkil Lewat Media Sosial," CNN Indonesia, 2015, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20151014130727-20-84879/jokowi-bicara-soal-kerusuhan-aceh-singkil-lewat-media-sosial>.

<sup>44</sup> Icha Rastika, "Kalla Minta Bentrokan Di Singkil Diselesaikan Dengan Adil," Kompas.com, 2015, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/10/13/19150241/NaN>.

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these three attempts would be herculean tasks. To expedite the process, from now on, the community's commitment is of paramount importance to shun further tensions.

The completion effort could be a profound examination of the root causes of the problem. It must investigate the people or parties directly or indirectly complicit in the conflict fairly and transparently, either Muslims or Christians. After the legal process is undertaken and the convicted persons are determined, the government, especially the police, must impose a strict penalty on them, highlighting the seriousness of law enforcement.

Furthermore, the government needs to review some laws on maintaining harmony among people with different religions, especially concerning the establishment of houses of worship in the Aceh province. The Aceh government responded to the Singkil conflict in 2015 by issuing Qanun Aceh No. 4 of 2016 on Religious Harmony Nurturing and Houses of Worship Building<sup>45</sup>. Hierarchically, the qanun position is higher than the Governor's Regulations of the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam No. 25 of 2007 mentioned earlier. Regarding nurturing harmony, the qanun allows a better range of measures.

It clarifies the roles of significant, influential actors at the provincial and regency levels (e.g., governor and mayor). It details the components and functions of the FKUB and preconditions before building houses of worship, regulates attempts to obtain assistance for religious purposes from abroad, and determines financial sources for all attempts to sustain harmony. Additionally, it holds steps of conflict resolution and balance monitoring and evaluating acts.

However, it is also possible to revise the contents of the law where necessary later. However, in our view, the rules had already been studied intensely, fitting the reality of religious life in Aceh. This being so, the lack of socialization about it leaves the people unexposed to its implementation procedure. Consequently, they may not realize if something of their acts is a violation. The socialization has been carried out by the government of Aceh and the local government (the government of Aceh Singkil) and organized by Dinas Syariat Islam (the Islamic Sharia Department). The program sent da'i (Islamic preachers) to specific Aceh and North Sumatra regions, including the Aceh Singkil regency. However, the efforts should be recognized and, thus, need further improvement and advancement. Training the da'i and cooperation with all social components are urgently required to succeed in the socialization of people of different religions living in Aceh.

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<sup>45</sup> Gubernur Aceh, "Qanun Aceh Tentang Pedoman Pemeliharaan Kerukunan Umat Beragama Dan Pendirian Tempat Ibadah," Pub. L. No. 4 (2016).

If the socialization of the rules came to fruition as expected, the control on the society not to do violation would be easily applied, of which the establishment of illegal worship was building. It was known that the conflicts in Singkil were mainly sparked because some “bad apples” violated the existing rules. The violators need to be tracked down, investigated, and punished. In the Aceh Singkil conflict, it appears that the authority lacked seriousness in tackling the committed violation, which could contribute to a series of disputes.

Holding dialogs among the religious leaders also can be considered as further effort. The conference is vital since it is a key to controlling the congregation of any religion, which their leaders convey. A presumption of malice and the incorrect suspect appeared because of the frequent lack of communication and misunderstanding of rules. Therefore, intercultural dialogue among religious leaders can be a very productive effort so that similar incidents will not repeat in the future.

The government of Aceh, in coordination with the Dinas Syariat Islam Aceh, has facilitated such dialogs. The program is even routinely held in areas prone to conflicts, such as Aceh Singkil and other provincial regencies. A careful, thorough strategy of socialization done by the religious leaders to their congregation becomes the most crucial measure to consider for now. If the socialization messages are well communicated, and the people understand them, further tension potentials can be swiftly handled, ensuring harmony among those religious adherents.

Those extraordinary head steps are believed to prevent the conflict in Aceh Singkil and other Aceh regencies and Indonesia. By doing so, the aspiration that sharia law should prevail in Aceh would not militate against harmony and justice among the religious believers.

### ***5. Considerations for Future Policies***

The case of religious-related conflict emerged because even though the people of Indonesia presently live in peace, the seed of clash among people is inevitable. Hence, as the policy maker, the government must take preventive measures to avoid further dangerous impacts on society. The first act could be maximizing the role of law enforcers and the military. The government needs to revitalize the part of both forces to gain the trust of the people. Both forces can work to maintain security and peace within society through persuasive acts. Law enforcers can also socialize the information about the harmful consequences of provocateurs who may benefit from conflicting groups of people.

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Then, the discussion on harmony among people with different religions has to be promoted by emphasizing local wisdom and culture. According to Jati<sup>46</sup>, the local culture can bond the people despite the difference in beliefs and religions. It should empower public understanding of the fundamental civil rights of all citizens and encourage non-Muslims' participation in public life to boost mutual understanding<sup>47</sup>. The advance and vast progress of mass media and technology make the people of Indonesia lose their identity as people with distinctive and noble local wisdom. Then, a discussion is vital to rejuvenate the spirit of togetherness and unity. The debate will later build reconciliation that becomes the peace path to break the chain of conflict in the post-conflict era. It is not to overlook the past but to convert the heart-rending experience into forgiveness<sup>48</sup>.

A cleaver act that is worth considering is pinpointed by Farida<sup>49</sup>. She initiated a discussion forum to bridge relationships among people with different religions. This forum accentuated three approaches to maintaining harmony and dealing with conflicts: theological, cultural, and media. The theological approach can be conducted through organizing dialogs, seminars, discussions, and visiting various religious communities. These events aim to boost understanding about diversity; this will help people unite despite their differences. The cultural approach can be made by holding events or cultural performances that promote peace and harmony. The last strategy is using media, which is the most effective approach in this modern era. It is obvious that provocations relating to religious issues are spread through the media. Thus, it is crucial to make people aware of that reality. Moreover, the spread of extremist and violent organizations also benefits from the media. Therefore, the effort to get the people unprovoked by sensitive issues must be taken seriously.

### D. Conclusion

The harmony among people with different religions is predicated on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect for religious teachings' equality, and cooperation in society and state life. The rules addressing religious harmony are already well set up in Islam and the

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<sup>46</sup> Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Kearifan Lokal Sebagai Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (2013): 393, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.2013.21.2.251>.

<sup>47</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, Arskal Salim, and Eka Srimulyani, "Islam and Dormant Citizenship: Soft Religious Ethno-Nationalism and Minorities in Aceh, Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 0, no. 0 (2020): 215–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1780407>.

<sup>48</sup> Abdul Manan, Abdul Hadi, and Iping Rahmat Saputra, "Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Aceh, Indonesia: Perspectives from the Victims," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 25, no. 2 (2021): 162–76, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.66177>.

<sup>49</sup> Anik Farida, "Manajemen Konflik Keagamaan Melalui Jaringan Kerja Antar Umat Beragama Di Bandung Jawa Barat," *Al-Qalam* 21, no. 1 (2016): 141, <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v21i1.203>.

constitution of Indonesia. In Islam, they were stipulated in the Madinah Charter – the first written constitution in human history. Meanwhile, the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia) guarantees the community members freedom to adhere to six official religions and worship according to their beliefs. Moreover, the rules related to the establishment of worship buildings in Aceh have also been laid down in the government regulation of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam No. 25 of 2007, describing the guideline of the houses of worship establishment in Aceh.

The Singkil problem revolves mainly around the church's building policy and is instantly framed as a religious intolerance act. The carelessness of the government in implementing the existing rules regulating the establishment of buildings for worship denotes the main factor. Concurrent with it is the disagreement of certain parties toward the sensibility of regulation existing in Aceh, the insubordination upon the agreed deal and regulation, the emergence of social friction since there is no good solution found, the ill-founded and erroneous fanaticism among religious believers in perceiving and understanding the spiritual life, and the unprepared and unhelpful communication between those adherents.

The conflict resolution among religious believers in Aceh Singkil is feasible by closely examining the crux of the problem. It has to be followed by a fair and transparent investigation of the people or parties involved. Besides, the government ought to ensure the rules related to harmony among religious believers are more tightly enforced, especially those concerning the establishment of worship buildings. Moreover, the government should sporadically facilitate the socialization of the existing rules and communicate its results to the religious leaders in the community.

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