

Press Release

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## **2018 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award Ceremony**

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy held the 2018 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award Ceremony at the Taipei Guest House today (12/10). At the ceremony, President Tsai Ing-wen presented the award plaque and TFD Chairman Su Jia-chyuan the grant to this year's laureate, the Gusdurian Network Indonesia from Indonesia.

President Tsai said in her speech at the ceremony that the Gusdurian Network Indonesia is an organization that bases its foundation on tolerance and dialogues. “It strengthens civil society through participation and empowerment, helps oppressed minority groups, and when tensions are running high, plays an important role in creating harmony between religious and ethnic groups,” the president said.

“When it comes to bridging the divide between diverse ethnic groups, and consolidating civil society, Taiwan has a lot to share. Over the past thirty years, Taiwan has undergone a democratic transformation, and we understand that the road to democracy isn't always smooth. Even today, there are new obstacles and new challenges to overcome” President Tsai continued, thanking the award laureate for reminding us that “for a democratic society, connecting different communities and promoting public dialogue will always be one of the most important tasks of a democratic society.”

In the international context, as democratic nations are being impacted by extreme viewpoints and divisions in civil society are

increasingly apparent, “the values upheld by the Gusdurian Network Indonesia like moderation, tolerance, and dialogue across religions and ethnic groups truly deserve greater support and recognition,” the president stressed.

“I hope that all of our like-minded friends in the international community will work together to protect the values we cherish,” she said.

TFD Chairman Su Jia-chyuan said in his speech that when different ethnic groups first encountered each other on this island, including the indigenous people and new immigrants who brought with them different cultures and faiths, there were challenges too. “But it was exactly because of the interactions and integrations between different peoples that Taiwan was propelled to improve and became a country that embraces a plurality of ethnicities and viewpoints.”

He said he would hope the award and the Taiwan experience could “help the world envision a future where all vulnerable groups can be treated equally irrespective of their gender, race or religion.” “We believe that only when mainstream groups empathize with the life experience of the vulnerable can the spirit of human rights be truly embodied in people’ s lives.”

In her acceptance speech, Gusdurian Network Indonesia National Coordinator Alissa Wahid described how the organization has been following the core values of Gus Dur, or how late Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid was also known in Indonesia, as the guiding principles of their work, “most importantly Humanity and Justice.”

But challenges come in different forms and shapes, she said, adding that in Indonesia right now, the challenges are 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.”

Ms. Alissa Wahid said: “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.”

She thanked the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy “not only for acknowledging our fights in the past but also for letting us know that our work does matter. “We thank you for supporting us to renew our pledge to people of Indonesia and of the world, and to give us strength to jump over the fences of our fears.”

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