

## Muslim scholars 'fail to preach' preservation

The failure of Muslim scholars to implement the teachings and values of the Koran have led to worsening environmental conditions in Indonesia, experts say. Every religion teaches the faithful about righteous things, such as maintaining hygiene, not littering and preserving nature, said Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta professor Azyumardi Azra, who added that Islam, the majority religion in Indonesia, also pays a great deal of attention to the environment.

He said that there are at least 199 verses of the Koran and many hadith (traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) related to environmental preservation, but there are many, including religious people, who neglect application of such teachings in their daily lives. "If we sincerely believe in our respective faiths, we should apply it to our practical conduct," Azyumardi said during a recent seminar on religion and the environment.

"According to the teachings of Islam, God created everything in unity. So, there is a unity between human beings and their environment."

Emil Salim, University of Indonesia postgraduate lecturer and former environment minister, said that the application of religious tenets was all about how to make religion an encouraging power in people's daily lives. He gave a simple example on conduct related to the environment and how Muslims could pray in favorable conditions.

"Before performing daily prayers, Muslims need clean water for ablution. Clean water comes from fresh springs in a forest. Therefore, Muslims have to preserve the forest," he said. Therefore, Emil said that the teachings of Islam were meaningful if they were capable of responding the daily needs of human beings in a way that is respected by society in a healthy and harmonious natural environment.

The teachings, he said, also had to respond to global challenges on environmental issues, such as global warming, adding however that there were few Muslim scholars who have a deep understanding of the issues. Emil was also curious as to why many Muslim scholars could not keep pace with scientific and technological progress, even though a number of Islamic scientists had achieved glory in the past.

He said Islamic scholars had been leaders in scientific and technological development. He noted, for example, Persian physician and philosopher Ibn Sina, whose work has become a reference for modern medicine. Azyumardi said that Muslim scholars failed to adapt to the progress of science and technology due to economic and political disintegration.

"What is happening now is increasing orthodoxy with a worldly approach, only focusing on halal and haram [legal and illegal according to Islamic law] discussion. It puts Islam and Muslims on the defensive, making them suspicious of new science," Azyumardi said. He said that suspicion has a relation with the harmony of nature.

"If there is suspicion among people in our society, then the social harmony can not exist. If we can't even personify social harmony, then there is no chance for natural harmony," Azyumardi said. (rcf)