

The Indonesian Churches' concern and hope to the Candidates for the Presidency

Jayapura, 24 August 2004. In the Sentani Indah Hotel, Papua, the Church leaders of Indonesia held a dialogue with the Candidates for the Presidency (2004-2009), Yusuf Kalla (Vice-President candidate) and Ibu Megawati (President candidate and actual President of Indonesia). During the meeting, the church leaders who represented various Christian denominations in Indonesia presented a statement of "Concern and Hope of the Indonesian Church Leaders to the candidates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency". In the statement signed by 15 church leaders, they appeal to the candidates to seriously pay attention to three areas of concern, including (1) law, human rights, and religion, (2) politics and governance, and (3) socio-economic development.

In the first part of the statement the church leaders emphasise the rejection of the implementation of Syariah Law in Indonesia. Moreover, the churches urge the candidates to enforce the law in a consistent way, to uphold the supremacy of civil society and ask the police to be serious and reliable in their task to enforce the law. In the second part, the leaders express their hope that the principles of democracy will be applied as the fundamentals of the administration of the state, whereas the government employment should be based on professional skills and the development policy should be based on equality; special attention should be given to empower the women.

On 24 August, 2004, Yusuf Kalla met with the leaders and Hardus Desa, the Chair of the Steering Committee, read the statement. This Vice-President Candidate sympathetically expressed his response to the church leaders saying that their concern and hope were also his own concern and that the statement encouraged and motivated him to go ahead with bid for the nation's leadership.

The next day, President Megawati held a dialogue with the leaders. Once again the statement was read, be it summarised as the protocol had requested to do so. However, the full statement has been handed to the President. In her response, the (candidate-)president emphasised that she inherited the country in a bad condition so the situation nowadays can not solely be attributed to her. Moreover, she explained that under her leadership, Papua has seen a lot of improvement, including the economy and political conditions. Hardus Desa commented, "It seems to me that Mega presents herself with the wrong hat on, as she takes the position as the president not as a presidential candidate. Therefore, her reaction is just very defensive". Bishop Leo Laba Ladjar agreed with this basic comment.

The Church leaders represented various denominations from all over Indonesia, including North Sumatera, Java, East Nusa Tenggara, Central Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua. There were also representatives of the Indonesian Council of Churches but a representative from the the Indonesian Bishops' Conference failed to show up.