

# Living with Islam and a Divided America

Address by Philip Flood AO to Order of Australia Association, Canberra, Australia Day, 26 January 2017

Distinguished guests, and friends,

I begin by acknowledging the Ngunawal people as traditional custodians of the place on which we gather, and pay tribute to their elders, past and present, for caring for this land.

Just a few months ago, Australia's population passed 24 million. Current projections put the nation at nearly 40 million people by 2050 and at 54 million by the end of the century. By next century, we may have a population comparable in size to the population today in England or in France. Yet even now, with our modest population, we are the twelfth-largest economy on the planet – and a nation whose quality of life is the envy of much of the world.

Crucially, we are a stable liberal democracy firmly founded on the rule of law. Our nation values an independent judiciary, a free media and freedom of religion. One of the world's most successful multicultural societies, we are not governed by corrupt elites, we do not jail political dissenters, and an expectation of moral rectitude on the part of government is a cornerstone of our culture. We are the only nation to claim sovereignty over an entire continent, we are happy with our borders and we have no designs on the territory of any other country.

Moreover, we as Australians place great value on a strong civil society in which vast numbers of citizens are engaged in unpaid community service – as are many of you here today.

For all the reasons I have just touched on, and of course for many others, we should be grateful as we celebrate Australia Day.

There is one more reason worthy of mention – we don't take ourselves too seriously. When the American evangelist Billy Graham proclaimed to a large crowd at the MCG 'We are all Christians here,' a voice from the crowd called out, 'But what about the umpire?'

Our strengths as a nation notwithstanding, most Australians recognise that a wholly optimistic view of our country needs to be tempered. 'Australia' is an adventure, a work in progress. Our potential as a fair, decent and prosperous society is yet to be fully realised: the best years lie ahead. We know that there is further to go on the road to reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australia. We know that some citizens are concerned about whether the system works for them. Many are apprehensive about the urban, high-tech economy. Among some, there is concern about the possible passing of the values of an older Australia – when we

were less populous and less prosperous, and hardship was more widely shared.

And we should be more concerned than we are about the extent and depth of our understanding of our Asian neighbours. We should also be concerned about what it means for Australia to live with Islam. In the last two decades, we have learned forcefully that we have no choice.

This brings me to our close neighbour Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world. Our northern neighbour is fabulously complex and fascinating.

Indonesia's first president, the charismatic but erratic Sukarno, was fond of saying that from his grandfather he learned about Javanese mysticism and the *wayang* puppet theatre; from his father, he absorbed Islam and theosophy; and from his mother, he learned about Hinduism and Buddhism.

Indonesia is the only place in the world where one might simultaneously be a Muslim and name one's children Vishnu and Sita; seek guidance from a *wayang* puppet performance based on a Hindu epic; and believe in the deity Ratu Kidul, the Queen of the South Seas.

With a population of over 250 million, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world. Around 87% of Indonesians (or 220 million) are Muslim, nearly 10% are Christian and 3% identify as Buddhist, Hindu and other religions. A country of more than thirteen thousand islands, of which some three thousand are inhabited, Indonesia has a land area marginally larger than that of Queensland. Java, Indonesia's most important island, with a population of 143 million, is just under twice the size of Tasmania.

If Australia had the same population density as Indonesia, we would have a population of a billion; if we had Java's population density, we would have 7.3 billion people – a population the same size as that of the entire world today.

Population, together with the plain facts of geography – Indonesia is a land of rich volcanic soils, mighty volcanoes and abundant rainforests – point to just some of the very tangible differences between our two countries.

Culturally, one important difference is in the sphere of language. The street sweeper in Jakarta speaks two Indonesian languages: Betawi (the local language) and the national language. An educated Indonesian speaks three or four languages: Indonesian; English; Javanese, Batak, Balinese or other regional language; and, if the speaker is of the older generation, Dutch.

Indonesians have a mischievous sense of humour. When I was Ambassador, a former Indonesian foreign minister noted at an important gathering that my wife was a decade younger than me. He said he was reminded of a story about an older Javanese man married to a younger woman.

A close friend said to this Javanese, 'Your wife is very young. I think you should

allow her to take a companion'. A year later, when the Javanese and his friend met up again, the friend enquired after the wife of the Javanese. He replied, 'She is very well. In fact she is expecting our first child'.

His friend then sheepishly asked him did his wife have a companion. 'Oh yes,' replied the Javanese. 'She is pregnant too.'

In the course of its history, a number of highly sophisticated kingdoms developed in Indonesia, all closely patterned on Indian models. The Buddhist Sailendras, who built the magnificent stupa at Borobudur, ruled Java between the eighth and ninth centuries. The Buddhist Srivijaya ruled south Sumatra from the sixth to the thirteenth century. The Hindu Majapahit kingdom, which existed from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, was the first to encompass the entire Indonesian archipelago.

Islam came first to the province of Aceh, in the north, and, through the influence of traders and preachers, became dominant across Indonesia by the seventeenth century. Because teachers of Islam integrated Islamic theology with the prevailing Buddhist, Hindu and animist beliefs, Islam in Indonesia developed in a way that was very different from the experience in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Islam in Indonesia was less strict in form and in practice, including dress. Over time, many Saudis have looked down on Indonesians – and many Saudis continue to look down on Indonesians – as 'second-class Muslims'.

For their part, their cultural and religious experience has given Indonesians a sense of history and of pride. This has been enhanced by success in fighting the Dutch, who were colonial rulers of Indonesia for some 350 years. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch swapped Manhattan, then called New Amsterdam, for the tiny, nutmeg-rich Indonesian island of Banda Run, which was held by the British. The decision was perhaps advantageous at the time, but historically it has proved a poor one – and a metaphor for the poor judgement the Dutch displayed as colonial masters. Life for Indonesians would almost certainly have been better if British rule of Java from 1811 to 1816, administered by the gifted young Stamford Raffles, had led on to longer-term British rule.

At the time it achieved independence, some seventy years ago, Indonesia faced a dismaying legacy in the wake of Dutch colonial rule: no political democracy; low standards of civil administration; weak legal institutions; little respect for the rule of law; widespread poverty; an education system that was restricted largely to the elite; and substantial corruption. Indonesia still has many problems but it has made enormous progress, especially in becoming a functioning democracy, spreading education, and reducing poverty.

Jumping forward to recent decades, Islam has become stronger in Indonesia, with militant Islam also emerging. There has been serious civil strife between Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas; we have witnessed the appalling bombings by Islamist terrorists in Bali and Jakarta; and some Indonesians have accepted the allure of fighting with ISIS. Recently there have been large-scale demonstrations against a respected governor of Jakarta, an ethnic Chinese Christian, Basuki Tjahaja

Purnama, known as Ahok, who now faces legal action for blasphemy.

Television, the internet, mobile phones and ease of travel have made Indonesians more aware of resentments in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has used its vast oil wealth to spread to Indonesia the pernicious Wahhabi form of Islam. The Saudis and others have helped fund an Islamic version of history that presents a litany of victimhood. In some Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (the *pesantren*), Western music is forbidden and all works of fiction except Islamic novels are banned. More Javanese now look to Mecca than to Merapi, central Java's sacred volcano. And more Indonesian women are wearing the hijab, and more the face-covering niqab or the burka. What should we make of this?

Benchmarked against other Muslim-majority countries, Indonesia is a beacon of tolerance and pluralism. Pakistan has virtually cleansed itself of non-Muslims. Saudi Arabia will not allow Christian churches; women are not permitted to drive, and a woman needs a male escort if she is to go to the bank; and a woman's testimony in court is treated as having half the worth of the testimony of a man. In Malaysia, Muslims are forbidden by law from converting out of Islam; a newly arrived Yemeni Muslim has more rights in Malaysia than an ethnic Chinese Christian who has lived there for a hundred years. None of these constraints apply in Indonesia.

There are broad reasons for some reassurance about Islam in Indonesia:

- Indonesia's Pancasila-inspired constitution provides that all citizens, irrespective of their religion, are equal before the law. The Pancasila philosophy rests on five principles: a belief in one God; humanity; national unity; democracy; and social justice.
- Successive Indonesian presidents, and the armed forces, have opposed radical Islam.
- Secular political parties have consistently dominated elections, and the two largest Muslim organisations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, oppose radical Islam.
- Women in Indonesia enjoy freedoms not found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, and many are prominent in business.

In its short history as an independent nation, Indonesia has shown that Islam is compatible with democracy, and with economic development, and is capable of peaceful coexistence with other religions.

But all this is now under challenge. Indonesia's political leaders have allowed extremists to seize the momentum. President Jokowi has too often seemed unwilling to intervene to protect vulnerable minorities against rising religious intolerance. And Indonesia lags behind in measures to counter radical Islam. The recent discovery of an Islamic State-linked terrorist plot, aimed at launching suicide bombings in Jakarta and Bali across the holiday period, is a chilling reminder of the gravity of the threat

Islamist extremists pose on our doorstep.

Successive Australian governments have worked hard in our national interest to develop close and friendly relationships with Indonesia. Paul Keating built on the work of Gareth Evans to establish a substantial relationship with President Suharto. John Howard developed an especially warm friendship with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull made it his business to develop a close friendship with President Jokowi. These efforts should be applauded, as should similar efforts on the part of many government ministers and military leaders.

Of course tensions will arise from time to time between neighbours with such different cultures. We have many interests in common with Indonesia but we also have different interests. Neither country should bend the knee to the other. The task of statesmanship in both countries is to manage differences with sensitivity and intelligence.

The greater task for Australian governments is to protect Australia's security and act firmly against all terrorism, including that inspired by Islam. All major political parties in Australia have supported strong measures against terrorism, irrespective of its origin. National security legislation has been strengthened, new offences have been created, surveillance and arrest powers have been extended and substantial additional resources have been allocated to intelligence agencies and to police forces. Our intelligence agencies and police have performed brilliantly to head off planned acts of terrorism here. Inevitably, though, public concerns remain.

Now there are calls to prohibit Muslim immigration to Australia.

We have every right to scrutinise thoroughly the claims of people wishing to migrate to Australia, to assess carefully whether they are likely to secure employment and to integrate. And, if we have legitimate doubts, we have every right to reject their claims. Equally, we have every right to set conditions for Australian citizenship. But it would be a retrograde and counterproductive policy to ban immigration to Australia by Muslims as a religious group.

What would doing this say about our principle of freedom of religion? What message would such a course of action send to Muslims living in Australia? How do we think neighbours with substantial Muslim populations would react – not just Indonesia, but India, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines? Do we want to become a pariah state like pre-Mandela South Africa? Banning immigration by members of any religious group would be an admission of a lack of confidence in our values. We should not for one moment countenance the kind of discrimination favoured by the Pauline Hanson One Nation Party or loosely advocated by President Trump in his election campaign.

On the other hand, we should not be timid about acknowledging that there are issues with Islam that worry Australians.

We are entitled to say that there are some unique problems. Every day Sunnis and

Shiites are murdering each other over who, in AD 642, was the rightful successor to the prophet Mohammed. Young ISIS fanatics are committing heinous crimes in Syria and Iraq in the name of Islam. In medieval times, Christianity perpetrated similar violence – beheadings, disembowelings, burning people alive in the name of religion. Over time, Christianity reformed itself. It also came to an accommodation with secular authority, accepting a separation of church and state. Islam is only slowly coming to that kind of reformation.

Islam is facing an identity crisis, in part because it has no hierarchy that determines doctrine or even an agreed methodology for interpreting scriptures. Most Muslims, like Christians, read verses of holy texts as analogies or metaphors, with a spiritual rather than a temporal message. For some time, however, a small, belligerent minority has been interpreting literally the confrontational language found in the Qur'an. In a very important statement two years ago, Egypt's current president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, told an audience of imams in Cairo that the Islamic world was being torn apart by its own hands; Islam, he said, is in need of a religious revolution.

Australia is not a central party in the Middle East but we are more than an interested bystander. Our citizens have been killed in Bali, New York and elsewhere, in the name of Islam. There have been Islam-inspired terrorist incidents here and many others planned.

The overwhelming majority of the approximately half a million Muslims in Australia are good citizens contributing to our society. We expect their leaders to denounce Islamist terrorism and to cooperate fully with authorities in dealing resolutely with that small number who seek to inspire or commit terrorism here, or to head overseas to join ISIS.

We expect our Muslim community to accept unconditionally that there is no place for sharia law in Australia. We expect Islamic schools to use public funds exclusively for education and not for political purposes. And we would like Muslim community leaders to privately discourage their women folk from wearing the face-covering burka or niqab; the face-revealing hijab is not an issue – in fact, much the same headwear is worn by some Catholic and Protestant clergy and by many Australian women to keep warm in winter – but clothing covering the whole face arouses mistrust and suspicion. It hardly promotes friendship among neighbours. Our message to Muslims should be the same as that to all: we will not tolerate those who want to mess with our values and our freedoms.

Now let me turn to the United States.

President Donald Trump is a different kind of American president. Nominally a Republican, Trump campaigned for office discarding sacred elements of Republican Party policy, among which support for the liberal international order and global trade liberalisation. He legitimised protectionist sentiment. He rejected established views about Putin's Russia, threatened conflict with China and appeared prepared to unravel support for the policy of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. His economic policies would reverse years of reform in the US budget. And he pledged to

discriminate against Muslims.

Trump easily lost the popular vote, by over two million, but, to summarise all too briefly, he won on the strength of superior and clever strategy, vigorous campaigning and forceful rhetoric appealing to disappointed and disaffected people, particularly in the rust-belt states of the US. The single strongest reason for his electoral win was that people believed he would strengthen the US economy and create more jobs. Hillary Clinton was rebuffed by an angry white lower-middle class who felt they had been overlooked for too long.

In historical terms, aside from the issue of nuclear weapons, the issues confronting Trump may be modest compared to those confronting George Washington in achieving independence, Abraham Lincoln in bringing the republic through a civil war, or Franklin Roosevelt in surviving a depression and giving leadership in a world war. Still, Trump confronts a seriously divided country and a challenging agenda.

Global poverty has been reduced in recent decades. The big winners are the middle class in developing countries: in China, followed by India and countries in Southeast Asia. In western countries, the big winners are the top 5%. Trump knows that in the US the middle class has gone backwards and the working class has taken a beating; he asserts that he can mend the system.

At the same time, Trump threatens the international architecture that the US was instrumental in creating.

There are resonances of Ronald Reagan about Trump – his capacity for simplification, his histrionic skills and his vision – but he does not have Reagan's coherent strategy, respect for allies and, especially, Reagan's great charm. Who can forget Reagan's compelling phrase 'It's morning in America'? Whereas the language of America's founders was lucid, measured, felicitous prose, marked by the Augustan virtue of elegance, Trump's language is coarse and imprecise – not as vulgar perhaps as that of Lyndon Johnson, but Trump's words show none of the lofty sentiment of Kennedy or the sophistication of Jefferson and Lincoln. An American president is entitled to full courtesy, but only to the respect his words and actions in office earn him.

President Trump's inaugural address gives a broad picture of his ambition. It will be some time, however, before we know the clear direction of his strategic policy and of his economic and trade policies, and how much of his ambition will be supported by Congress and the American people. He clearly believes that the US can remain for decades the strongest strategic power globally because of its vast investment in military firepower and its position as a global leader in technology and the creative industries. He discounts the views of those who see the US as in relative international decline, a country that has been losing its moral authority; nor does he heed those who believe that the primacy of US dominance is narrowing considerably as China and India gain greater weight and influence in a multipolar world. On this point, I should say that, while America will have to share greater space with a resurgent China, I lean to the view that the US will remain for many decades the

strongest strategic power globally.

There are reasons beyond Trump for us to be more sceptical of American policies and actions than in recent decades. Historians will give the US a severe report card on the lack of cultural and historical knowledge about countries into which it has sent its troops. President Obama, who incidentally will leave office with a high approval rating among Americans, has been criticised for reluctance to put troops on the ground into the seething cauldron of Syria. In view of what has happened in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq, his caution and prudence may well be vindicated by history.

After the Vietnam War, the distinguished American historian and confidant of presidents, Arthur M. Schlesinger, lamented that America's allies had too sparingly exercised their capacity, admittedly narrow, to rein in American messianism, a necessary role because, as he put it, American wisdom is limited. Today's transnational threats – nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organised crime, to say nothing of possible future disease pandemics – put a premium on cooperation by America with all other countries, but especially with its allies.

Australia's alliance with the US is robust, and our political and military standing in Washington is high and certainly high enough, for us to speak frankly with the Americans. If we believe that our ally risks threatening elements of the global order that are of value to us, we should not hesitate to speak up. We may have to do so.

Some voices here, including a former prime minister, are suggesting that at this time we should review our alliance with the United States. Let's be clear. Our alliance is not with any particular president, nor with any particular party or administration. The alliance is an expression of many values held in common, of core shared interests between our peoples – including investment and trade – and reflects the fact that the United States is the most important shaper of our strategic environment. America's presence has been a net positive in terms of peace in our region.

The alliance with the United States brings tangible advantages: access to strategic exchanges at the highest level, and with this a chance to be heard at the top table; access to American technology and equipment, which significantly strengthens our military; and the sharing of intelligence, which strengthens our national capacities. The Australia–US alliance does not diminish in any way our capacity to build substantial links with our regional neighbours, nor our capacity to disagree with the US (as we have often done on trade issues). It would be extraordinarily foolish to move away from the alliance and I believe any such move would be rejected by an overwhelming majority of Australians. There are powerful reasons why we should have a good relationship with the Trump Administration.

Thank you all very much.

And, finally, may I offer warm congratulations to all those citizens honoured today with an Order of Australia.

