

The Implications of the Abu Dhabi Document for Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the values of tolerance in the Abu Dhabi document, which are the basis for building religious moderation in Indonesia. The main problem highlighted in this article is the increasing intolerance and radicalism in Indonesia which can threaten the integrity and unity as well as the civilization of love and brotherhood. Furthermore, this issue does not only occur in society but also penetrate the educational environment. By using literature and document study methods, the author concludes that the application of the values of tolerance contained in the Abu Dhabi Document can prevent intolerance and radicalism that occur in Indonesia. The document serves as a reference in promoting the values of tolerance and also a moral and ethical basis to strengthen Indonesia's position as a country that upholds religious tolerance and moderation.

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Introduction

Indonesia is a nation whose wealth lies in its diversity of ethnicities, languages, cultures, customs, and religions (Finaka, 2018). Yet this very plurality has frequently become a source of conflict, intolerance, and division whenever it is exploited as a pretext for hostility (Lestari & Sa'adah, 2021), with religious differences in particular continuing to trigger friction between communities (Mufrida et al., 2025). In recent years, rising intolerance and radicalism have emerged as a serious threat to national unity; Widodo (2019) demonstrates that both domestic social tensions and the dynamics of international politics have contributed to the growth of radicalism that marginalizes Indonesia's socio-political life.

Empirical data reinforce the gravity of this trend: the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) recorded in 2018 that 198 Islamic boarding schools were affiliated with terrorist networks and placed under surveillance (CNN, 2022); a study by PPIM (2018) found that 37.77% of teachers exhibited intolerant tendencies and 41.26% held radical views; and BNPT (2023) reported

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the removal of 1,922 out of 2,670 pieces of digital content containing intolerance, radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. These findings confirm that the spread of these extremist ideologies has become a tangible threat to national life, one that has penetrated not only the wider society but also the younger generation and educational institutions.

Confronted with this reality, the Catholic Church carries a responsibility to take an active role in peacebuilding through the strengthening of religious moderation (Denar et al., 2025). This commitment traces back to the era of Soegijapranata and his enduring motto "100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian," which affirms that Catholic faith is fully compatible with national commitment—a moderate living-out of faith thus becomes the foundation for preserving unity, diversity, and shared life (Hatmoko & Mariani, 2022). A central point of reference for this strengthening of religious moderation is the Abu Dhabi Document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb, on 4 February 2019.

The document affirms human fraternity, religious freedom, and interreligious dialogue as the principal pillars for building a peaceful and just world, while emphasizing respect for human dignity, human rights, and the cultivation of mutually respectful relations amid religious and cultural difference (Abu Dhabi, 2019). It marks a historic milestone in interreligious dialogue, bringing the discourse on tolerance to a global audience, and its essential message underscores the importance of cultivating awareness of human fraternity and shared harmony as the foundation of world peace. Pope Francis and Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb thereby committed themselves to jointly advancing religious moderation, understood as the refusal to remain enclosed within self-justifying doctrine without openness to other truths beyond oneself—an orientation toward religious life that is inclusive, dialogical, adaptive, educational, and solution-oriented (Saifuddin, 2022). The Abu Dhabi Document identifies inclusivity and interreligious dialogue as the highest moral virtues that religions must embody (Abu Dhabi, 2019: 19), and functions as a call both to those who reject violence and blind extremism and to those who uphold the religiously grounded principles of fraternity and tolerance (Abu Dhabi, 2019: 4).

This vision resonates with a broader body of Church teaching that frames world peace as a moral responsibility rather than a mere political interest, achievable only through justice, respect for human dignity, and honest dialogue among nations and religious communities: *Pacem in Terris* emphasizes the upholding of human rights and the cessation of the arms race; *Nostra Aetate* underscores interreligious dialogue as the basis for harmony; *Gaudium et Spes* regards peace as the fruit of global social justice; the Abu Dhabi Document affirms concrete fraternity between Islam and Christianity against extremism; and *Fratelli Tutti* stresses universal fraternity and the rejection of modern warfare. Within Catholic tradition, religious moderation is rooted in the teachings of love, justice, and peace, expressed not only through tolerance toward adherents of other faiths but also through active engagement in interreligious dialogue and the strengthening of cooperation and mutual understanding among religious communities (NA 2).

The term itself derives from the Latin *moderatio*, meaning "restraint" or "the avoidance of excess"; the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) defines moderation as an effort to reduce violence and avoid extremism, so that religious moderation may be understood as a way of viewing, embodying, and practicing faith that places balance and fairness at its foundation, thereby avoiding excessive attitudes or views in religious life (Hatmoko & Mariani, 2022). This commitment has been reaffirmed through the Church's various pastoral and diplomatic initiatives, most notably Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which emphasizes universal fraternity and dialogue as the path toward a just and peaceful world, offering a guiding vision for a shared life grounded in fraternal harmony and peaceful coexistence (Songbes, 2023). The Church's presence amid cultural and religious plurality further compels it to embody an inclusive missionary character attentive to the realities of social life (Monteiro et al., 2024).

Prior scholarship has likewise affirmed the importance of dialogue and tolerance in religious life from various angles. Novalina et al. (2021) argue that the declaration *Nostra Aetate* provides the foundation for harmonious dialogue in conveying the love of God; Djuniasih and Kosasih (2019) find that tolerance is shaped by kinship ties, the role of religious leaders, and mutual respect; Eko and Panjaitan (2021) show that Pancasila and the Church's political ethics converge in placing the value of divinity as the basis for developing humanistic values; and Dewantara and Viktorahadi (2023) demonstrate that Catholic youth play a role in building cross-faith fraternity through dialogue, acceptance of difference, and engagement in social action inspired by the Abu Dhabi Document. What these studies have in common, however, is that none position the Abu Dhabi Document itself as the primary theological and ethical reference for examining religious moderation within the specific context of Indonesia's plural society—a gap that leaves the document's direct relevance to the Indonesian setting largely unexplored.

Building on this gap, the present study offers two points of novelty: first, it positions the Abu Dhabi Document as the principal reference in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia; and second, it treats the document as a moral and ethical foundation for strengthening Indonesia's identity as a nation that upholds tolerance, peace, and harmonious life amid diversity. On this basis, the study addresses three central concerns: the core message of the Abu Dhabi Document for religious moderation, its contribution to strengthening religious moderation, and the implementation of its principles within the Indonesian context. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the core message of the Abu Dhabi Document and to examine the implementation of its principles in strengthening the strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia.

Method

This study employs a qualitative method centered on a review of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source under analysis is the Abu Dhabi Document, which is examined in depth in order to extract the themes regarding its implications for supporting religious moderation in Indonesia. Beyond conducting a content analysis to unpack the text, meanings, values, and strategic messages embedded within the Abu Dhabi Document, the study also

draws on a range of secondary sources to substantiate and deepen the findings derived from the primary material (Johnson, 2022). These secondary sources comprise books, journal articles, and online publications relevant to the research theme (Smith, 2023).

Results

The Core Messages of the Abu Dhabi Document for Religious Moderation

The Abu Dhabi Document articulates six principal themes that constitute its central message for religious moderation. The first is human fraternity, which affirms the equality and dignity of every person. The document declares that all individuals are brothers and sisters equal in dignity and rights, regardless of religion, culture, or ethnic background. Furthermore, it insists on the necessity of respecting every individual and acknowledging their right to live in the dignity proper to them as creatures of God. Finally, it calls for global solidarity, urging societies to work together in addressing shared challenges such as poverty, injustice, and conflict. This solidarity is regarded as essential for building a more just and peaceful world grounded in genuine respect for human dignity (Abu Dhabi, 2019:15).

The second theme is interreligious dialogue and cooperation. The document underscores dialogue as the most effective means of building bridges of understanding and overcoming prejudice, holding it to be indispensable for achieving peace and harmony and urging its promotion at every level—local, national, and international. Alongside dialogue, the document encourages cooperation among religious communities in humanitarian projects aimed at enhancing social welfare, including emergency relief, educational programs, and health initiatives that engage various religious groups (Abu Dhabi, 2019:16).

The third theme is the rejection of violence and extremism. The document firmly repudiates every form of violence, terrorism, and extremism carried out in the name of religion, regarding such violence as a betrayal of religious values themselves, which ought instead to serve as instruments of peace. It calls on individuals and communities to promote peace through concrete action and cross-religious cooperation, expressed through peace education, anti-violence campaigns, and conflict mediation efforts (Abu Dhabi, 2019:16).

The fourth theme is respect for human rights. The document affirms the importance of upholding human rights, including the freedom of religion and belief, insisting that every person has the right to practice their religion and convictions freely, without intimidation or discrimination. This respect extends to women's rights and gender equality, deemed fundamental to building a just and inclusive society, and the document encourages the protection of these rights through education, government policy, and advocacy by non-governmental organizations (Abu Dhabi, 2019:18–19).

The fifth theme is justice and equality. The document calls for social and economic justice for all people, while addressing existing inequalities and disparities within society. It emphasizes that the fair distribution of resources and equal access to education, employment, and health services are essential to guarantee that every person has an equal opportunity to grow and contribute. Realizing this principle requires

inclusive social and economic policy reform, together with programs that support disadvantaged groups (Abu Dhabi, 2019:18–19)."

The sixth theme concerns education and interreligious understanding. The document promotes education that fosters peace, tolerance, and mutual religious understanding, stressing the urgency of cultivating religious awareness among the younger generation, instilling anew through sound education and adherence to true moral and religious teaching (Abu Dhabi, 2019:14). Education is regarded as the key to forming a generation that values diversity and peace, and the document encourages the development of curricula incorporating multicultural education and the values of religious moderation, together with broader efforts to raise public awareness of human fraternity and the importance of peaceful coexistence as conditions conducive to peace and harmony.

On the basis of these six principles, the Abu Dhabi Document merits recognition as a significant reference for the practice of religious moderation, since the application of these principles fosters a life that is peaceful, tolerant, non-violent, and inclusive of local cultural values and diversity (Abu Dhabi, 2019).

The Abu Dhabi Document's Support for Religious Moderation

The Catholic Church's commitment to and moral-theological teaching on religious moderation found concrete expression when Pope Francis met the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, on 4 February 2019. The encounter that produced the Abu Dhabi Declaration thus stands as both an exemplary model and a foundation for all believers seeking to live out religious moderation. In Indonesia, the government has established four principal tenets of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local culture.

National commitment teaches the importance of loyalty to the state and nation and of honoring the shared national values that unite all citizens, thereby helping to build unity amid diversity; it denotes fidelity and support for the state and for the foundational values that bind society together, such as Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution in Indonesia. Within the framework of religious moderation, national commitment means that every believer must be conscious of preserving national unity and integrity above the interests of any particular group, a commitment expressed in due regard for the nation's four pillars—Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019a).

Tolerance, the second tenet, denotes respect for diversity and constitutes the primary foundation of religious moderation. It encourages respect for differences in culture, religion, and belief, thereby enabling constructive discussion and mutual understanding among people of diverse backgrounds to foster a peaceful environment. Furthermore, tolerance entails honoring and valuing distinct worldviews. Within religious moderation, it means embracing diversity as an enriching element of communal life, requiring individuals to refrain from imposing their convictions on others. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation teaches that difference is not a cause for conflict, but an opportunity to enrich shared life. As one of its pillars, tolerance invites

everyone to see diversity as integral to a dynamic existence, framing such respect not merely as a moral obligation, but as a vital path toward social harmony.

The third tenet, non-violence, rejects violence committed within or in the name of religion, a stance essential for preventing interreligious conflict. Instead, religious moderation instead promotes peace and justice in society, insisting that there is no justification for physical or verbal violence in resolving conflict or difference. It teaches that problems are to be addressed through dialogue, deliberation, and other peaceful means. Non-violence likewise entails the rejection of extremism and radicalism carried out in religion's name ([Kementerian Agama RI, 2019b](#)).

The fourth tenet, respect for local culture, involves honoring long-standing local customs, traditions, and heritage. Sustaining harmony among religious communities so that Indonesia's national and social life may remain peaceful and tolerant requires a religious moderation that embraces local culture, since the practice of religious moderation is invariably bound up with culture, given that everything within a society is shaped by that society's own culture ([Isang & Dalmasius, 2021](#)). Respect for local culture thus enables religious moderation to value and enrich existing local traditions and religious customs, thereby strengthening local identity and fostering deeper interreligious cooperation. Within the Catholic Church, this accommodating stance toward local culture finds expression through inculturation, particularly in the liturgy; in theological scholarship this approach is developed through contextual theology, which integrates Catholic teaching with local culture and custom, so that Catholic faith becomes progressively inculturated even as local culture is in turn enriched by Catholic values.

The Abu Dhabi Document may thus serve as a reference point for the development of religious moderation, given its alignment with the vision of religious moderation advanced by the Indonesian government—an alignment reflected in five principal points of convergence. The first point is respect for diversity. The document holds that recognition of and respect for religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity are essential to creating peace and harmony, a position consonant with the principle of religious moderation that values difference and embraces it as a positive value, and one of particular importance for a plural society such as Indonesia in building a harmonious and peaceful life. The second point involves the promotion of interreligious dialogue. The document urges dialogue as a means of resolving difference and building cooperation, and of overcoming the prejudice and stereotyping that so often give rise to conflict. This emphasis strongly reinforces religious moderation in Indonesia by inviting people of different faiths toward mutual understanding and cooperation. The third is the rejection of violence and extremism. The document firmly repudiates violence and extremism committed within or in the name of religion, a commitment closely tied to religious moderation's own rejection of violence and radicalism, and one that in Indonesia may be realized through education, public campaigns, and inter-institutional collaboration to prevent the spread of radical ideology and violent acts committed under religious pretext. The fourth is respect for human rights. The document stresses the importance of honoring human rights, including religious freedom, affirming every person's freedom to choose, practice, and

express their faith without coercion or discrimination, a respect that is, within the Indonesian context of religious moderation, essential for creating a tolerant and inclusive environment. The fifth is respect for local culture. The document likewise encourages honoring the traditions and local culture of every community, a position consonant with the principle of religious moderation, according to which religion must accord with local culture without forfeiting its essential principles, and one that in Indonesia can help forge harmony between religious teaching and local custom.

These five points of convergence demonstrate that the Abu Dhabi Document substantively supports the principle of religious moderation, and the living out of its central messages is therefore of great importance for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. Indonesians ought to be guided to emulate the example set by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, in the practice of religious moderation. This involves cultivating the conviction that faith in any religion is never at odds with the spirit of nationhood and love of country, or a disposition of tolerance since holding fast to one's own faith need not entail the rejection of another's existence. It must likewise be instilled that faith in any religion impels love of neighbor and care for creation; the rejection of violence and extremism must therefore remain integral to religious life, together with a genuine appreciation for and accommodation of local culture, so that the practice of faith unfolds in harmony with cultural values and shapes an ever more civilized common life.

Implementing the Principles of Religious Moderation from the Abu Dhabi Document in Indonesia

The Abu Dhabi Document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" stands as an important guide for building peace, harmony, and cooperation among religious communities. In Indonesia, its relevance as a foundation for strengthening religious moderation calls for the synergy of multiple actors so that the values it embodies may take root within social life. The government bears a primary responsibility through the reform of religious education curricula so as to instill the values of tolerance, pluralism, and moderation from an early age. It is likewise called to provide formation for religious leaders so that they may model moderation, to strengthen regulation and law enforcement against acts of intolerance and discrimination, to encourage dialogue across religions and local cultures, to conduct public campaigns through mass and social media, and to support community initiatives that reinforce religious moderation through funding, training, and logistical assistance (BNPT, 2018).

Religious leaders serve as exemplars of moderate, tolerant, and inclusive conduct. The values of peace, respect for diversity, and rejection of violence and extremism must be embodied through preaching, teaching, and concrete action. Furthermore, active engagement in interreligious dialogue and conflict mediation constitutes an essential step toward strengthening harmony and realizing the values of the Abu Dhabi Declaration in Indonesia. Educational institutions hold a strategic role through the integration of education on religious and cultural diversity into the curriculum, accompanied by teacher training on implementing

religious moderation within the school environment. The development of peace education emphasizing nonviolent conflict resolution and mediation skills likewise constitutes an essential part of forming a generation that is tolerant, moderate, and capable of a harmonious life amid diversity.

Young people, including those within the Catholic Church, have an important part to play in building an inclusive and tolerant common life, a role expressed through willingness to learn about other religions and beliefs, participation in interfaith activities such as humanitarian projects, joint discussions, and social action, and the use of social media to disseminate messages of religious moderation, harmony, and respect for diversity (Nae & Jewadut, 2025). The mass media contribute to disseminating the values of religious moderation through accurate, objective, and non-provocative reporting, promoting content that fosters tolerance and respect for diversity while educating the public on the dangers of radicalism and extremism, thereby helping to reduce the potential for religiously based conflict (Djuniasih & Kosasih, 2019). Society at large likewise bears responsibility for embedding religious moderation through active participation in campaigns for tolerance, peace, and respect for human rights, and through the application of these values in everyday life, engagement which is expected to bring about a shared existence that is harmonious, inclusive, and peaceful (Munif et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The Abu Dhabi Document, also known as the "Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," constitutes a significant reference for cultivating a more moderate practice of religion in Indonesia. Its key principles—the recognition and respect for diversity, interreligious dialogue and cooperation, the rejection of violence and extremism, the upholding of human rights, justice and equality, and respect for local culture—bear particular relevance to the plural character of Indonesian society. The application of these principles within the Indonesian context stands to strengthen tolerance and foster greater harmony among religious communities.

Recommendations

Realizing the values of religious moderation calls for cross-sectoral cooperation. The Church can strengthen tolerance and mutual respect by convening interreligious dialogue forums at both local and national levels that foster constructive discussion. Additionally, involvement in social initiatives that promote justice and peace serves as a concrete expression of the values embedded in the Abu Dhabi Document. The government, for its part, has a role to play in encouraging the younger generation toward greater openness and appreciation of diversity through various interfaith activities. Within schools, inclusive religious education ought to be prioritized so as to cultivate a learning environment that is welcoming of religious and cultural diversity.

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