'The Varying State Approaches to Religious Diversity: Examining the Transition from Regulation to Inclusion'. Paper presented to the panel, State Perspectives on Religious Diversity: From Regulation to Reality, at the Second International Conference on Religious Moderation (ICROM) 2023 Managing Religious Diversity in Public Sphere, Jogjakarta, Indonesia, 24-26 August.

Distinguished individuals, esteemed attendees, scholars, and knowledge seekers, I would like to express my sincere greetings to all individuals present. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be present among esteemed individuals today as we engage in a scholarly exploration of the multifaceted and significant topic of state attitudes towards religious diversity. Our objective is to thoroughly examine the evolution from regulatory structures to the complex and diverse fabric of societal experiences.

In an era marked by unparalleled globalisation, the movement of people across continents, and rapid technological advancements, the subject of religious pluralism holds significant importance in shaping societal dynamics. This subject matter transcends geographical borders, cultural diversity, and historical contexts, exerting influence on nations with diverse political ideologies, ranging from secular liberal democracies to states that firmly embed religion within their constitutional framework.

The importance of effectively managing religious diversity should not be underestimated. The presence of a diverse range of beliefs and practices within a society can contribute to its cultural diversity and vibrancy. However, it is important to foster an inclusive environment to prevent tensions and conflicts from arising.

Our expedition will take us to Indonesia, a country renowned for its rich Islamic traditions that peacefully coexist with various minority religions. However, numerous challenges are present even in secular Western states, where the distinction between religion and governance seems to be clearly defined. Through the utilisation of a comparative framework, our objective is to elucidate the most effective practices and policies that possess the capacity to achieve optimal harmonisation of religious diversity.

Regulating Religious Diversity: Approaches and Challenges

The way a state governs religious affairs is intricately linked to its historical development and constitutional framework. Secular states, particularly those prevalent in Western Europe, typically adhere to the principle of maintaining a clear demarcation between religious institutions and the state. Within these contexts, there is a tendency to adopt a laissez-faire approach, which entails permitting the unrestricted exercise of religious freedoms while simultaneously imposing limitations on direct intervention by the state.

In contrast, the Pancasila philosophy in Indonesia adopts a more explicit position regarding religion. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is directly involved in the management of religious matters. As a result, there is a higher degree of religious regulation when compared to secular entities.

Nevertheless, a common thread among all states, regardless of their respective approaches, is the presence of inherent tensions that are central to religious governance.

The topic at hand is the delicate task of achieving a balance between the exercise of religious freedom and the limitations imposed by societal and legal considerations. The attainment of a balance between the preservation of religious freedom and the necessity to uphold social cohesion and safeguard national security continues to be a challenging objective that has yet to be fully achieved. Frequently, minority groups are burdened with the task of navigating the perception that their beliefs pose a challenge to prevailing values or the established societal structure.

The topic of discussion revolves around the comparison between centralisation and regional rule. The recurrent emergence of tensions between central and regional authorities often results in the inconsistent implementation of laws. The phenomenon is observable within the context of Indonesia, where the Ahmadiyah community has faced instances of discrimination despite the presence of constitutional safeguards.

The role of traditional institutions is a significant aspect to consider in various academic disciplines. In addition to state regulations, religious matters are significantly influenced by traditional institutions such as ulema councils and customary leaders. Their stances may not consistently coincide harmoniously with the policies of the nation.

Transitioning from Regulatory Frameworks to Practical Implementation: Addressing Discrepancies

The presence of these inherent tensions inevitably leads to discrepancies between the desired outcomes of progressive regulations and the practical challenges encountered in real-world implementation.

Indonesia, despite its constitutional commitment to safeguarding freedom of religion, faces ongoing challenges in addressing instances of discrimination against marginalised communities such as Shia Muslims and indigenous faiths.

In the United Kingdom, a country with well-established equality laws, the issue of anti-Muslim sentiment remains prevalent. Extremist groups, such as Britain First, engage in the active dissemination of Islamophobic ideologies.

Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, place significant emphasis on secularism yet have implemented policies such as the prohibition on religious headwear, specifically niqabs, which disproportionately impact Muslim women.

The Netherlands, while upholding the principle of freedom of expression, exhibits a tendency for its blasphemy laws to disproportionately affect minority communities.

The presence of these unsettling gaps serves to highlight the insufficiency of relying solely on legal safeguards. Authentic religious inclusion can be facilitated through the combination of cultural transformation and effective enforcement mechanisms.

Advancing Inclusive Diversity Management

The current state of our exploration leads us to the recognition of optimal strategies that cultivate an atmosphere conducive to religious pluralism.

Interfaith initiatives: Collaborative efforts aimed at promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among individuals of different religious backgrounds. At the local level, as

demonstrated by the organisations Muhammadiyah and NU in Indonesia, dialogue plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance and fostering mutual understanding, thereby cultivating an environment of harmony amidst diverse societal elements.

Legislative Safeguards: The implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action policies plays a pivotal role in enhancing the representation and inclusion of marginalised communities. The 2016 decree in Indonesia, which provides protection to indigenous faiths, serves as a suitable example.

Educational Transformation: The integration of religious literacy into educational systems serves to dismantle stereotypes and address prejudice that is targeted at minority groups.

The Synergy between State and Civil Society: The collaboration between governmental institutions and civil society organisations facilitates the harmonisation of top-down policies with the intricate dynamics of grassroots contexts. The Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group in the United Kingdom exemplifies the collaborative efforts of government entities, non-governmental organisations, and community leaders.

Striking a Balance between Autonomy and Oversight: The establishment of a harmonious equilibrium between regional autonomy and national supervision facilitates the development of customised solutions while simultaneously mitigating the risk of local authoritarianism targeting minority populations.

Thus, the intricacies associated with the management of religious diversity are brought into sharp focus. The establishment of inclusive religious governance is recognised as a fundamental element in fostering societal stability and promoting harmony. The aspirations of diverse faiths can thrive within inclusive public spaces because of diligent regulation, meticulous implementation, and steadfast collaboration between the state and society.'

It is imperative to acknowledge that the complex phenomenon of religious diversity does not lend itself to a universal solution. Every specific situation requires a customised strategy that is specifically designed to align with its unique historical development and socio-political factors. Nevertheless, through the facilitation of knowledge exchange and the adoption of successful strategies in various settings, we can establish a hopeful trajectory towards a future characterised by the peaceful coexistence of different religious beliefs. This will contribute to the creation of a collective human experience that is interconnected and mutually beneficial.

However especially in Europe and North America, there are structural challenges that add to the complexity of this subject:

Islamophobia and structural racism make managing religious diversity in Western contexts, such as Europe and North America, even more difficult. Several instances of how this phenomenon becomes evident are as follows:

The use of Islamophobic discourse by politicians and media outlets exacerbates the marginalisation of Muslim minority groups, thereby reinforcing and legitimising discriminatory attitudes and actions towards them. The 2016 U.S. presidential election exacerbated the prevailing anti-Muslim sentiment.

Surveillance policies such as the United Kingdom's Prevent strategy exhibit a disproportionate focus on Muslim communities, predicated on perceived associations with terrorism, thereby engendering a sense of resentment.

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in hate crimes targeting visible Muslim minorities, such as women who wear hijabs, Sikh men, and mosques, in both Europe and North America.

Muslim minorities encounter various obstacles in accessing employment, education, and other avenues of opportunity because of religious or racial discrimination. This impedes their ability to integrate into society and achieve upward social mobility.

In recent years, there has been a discernible trend of heightened stringency in migration policies specifically targeting Muslim migrants and refugees relative to other demographic groups. This hinders the ability of displaced populations to seek refuge.

Security practices such as airport profiling in the United States and the implementation of controversial citizenship tests in select European nations have been criticised for their potential discriminatory impact on Muslim individuals seeking to migrate.

Far right ethnonationalist organisations have garnered significant attention by advocating for policies that target the Muslim community, such as implementing immigration bans. This phenomenon perpetuates the acceptance and normalisation of xenophobic attitudes directed towards religious minority groups.

Although secular Western nations ostensibly uphold the principle of religious freedom, the practical implementation of this ideal is marred by pervasive Islamophobia and racism that are deeply ingrained within societal and institutional structures. Consequently, Muslim minorities are persistently marginalised and excluded. Addressing these biases is essential in facilitating authentic inclusivity.

In closing, managing diversity remains an urgent but complex challenge worldwide. While inclusive governance is critical for harmony, we must also tackle toxic prejudices that subordinate minorities.

Islamophobia and entrenched racism in Western secular democracies reveal gaps between principles and realities, fuelling the marginalisation of Muslim communities despite constitutional protections. Taming these prejudices is imperative.

At the same time, sharing best practices across contexts can optimise state regulation and implementation. Grassroots initiatives, anti-discrimination laws, education reform, and civil society partnerships provide pathways. Regional autonomy must be balanced with national oversight.

Essentially, fostering pluralism requires dismantling systems and mindsets of exclusion both within and beyond the state apparatus. Only then can we build public spheres where all faiths truly flourish with dignity and safety.

I thank you for the opportunity to share these reflections. I welcome your insights on governing religious diversity inclusively, be it here in Indonesia or in societies worldwide still struggling to live up to their egalitarian ideals. With vigilance, cooperation, and moral courage, a harmonious religious mosaic is within reach.