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Zack Petersen



Agus Nahrowi conducts conflict management training [CMT] in eight prisons across the country where convicted terrorists are being detained. (JG Photo)

## **My Jakarta: Agus Nahrowi, Prison Radicalization Reduction and Counterterrorism Official**

*Agus Nahrowi wakes up, gets dressed and goes to work just like everybody else. Except his workplace is within the country's jail system, and when he sits down to write a report, odds are it is on one of the most dangerous terrorists in Indonesia.*

*Here, Agus, the senior program officer at an international NGO that works to transform the way the world deals with conflict, talks about the recent arrest of terrorist suspect Abdullah Sonata, pesantrens and the fear of terrorism in Jakarta.*

### **Can you sum up your job for me?**

I'm the senior program officer at Search for Common Ground Indonesia. I'm responsible for a program that attempts to reduce radicalization within Indonesian prisons.

Under this program, we conduct conflict management training [CMT] in eight prisons across the country where convicted terrorists are being detained.

We also implement a media campaign that focuses on promoting pluralism, non-violence, peace, empowerment and positive choices.

### **Do you do a lot of counterterrorism work in Jakarta?**

I think my most important counterterrorism work is that which I've carried out in prisons. We've had 15 known terrorists take part in CMT.

We teach them how to deal with conflict in a more constructive way. We also train them how to manage their emotions and anger, develop empathy and improve their negotiation, mediation and peace-building skills.

I hope through this training they learn something.

### **What's your day like?**

My day is just like anyone else's. I work five days a week. I am busy with the implementation of CMT in the prisons and help other staff members run the media program and develop programs on the issue of terrorism disengagement.

On weekends, I get together with my family and I play futsal every Sunday.

### **Should Jakartans be worried about terrorists and bombings?**

Terrorists could be anywhere — London, New York, Delhi — so no one should spend their day worrying if a bomb is going to go off.

### **What do you think of the arrest of Abdullah Sonata?**

Sonata is very smart and very persistent. I'm glad he wasn't killed. From him we can gather information about his networks, and I'm particularly interested in knowing why after being released from prison he chose to go back and work as a terrorist.

### **What are Sonata's principles?**

Sonata perceives that Muslims in Indonesia are treated unjustly by the Indonesian government. Therefore, although he was imprisoned, he didn't feel any regret for what he did.

He believes it was right and in line with his understanding of jihad. Jihad is one of his strong principles.

### **Why does terrorism exist in Indonesia?**

I don't know why exactly. I think in the aftermath of 9/11 there was a lot of anger toward Muslims, plus the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, Palestine and other Muslim countries led Muslims around the world to react, particularly Muslims in Indonesia.

It doesn't mean that I agree that the only terrorists in Indonesia are Muslims.

In Indonesia's case, they do not train terrorists to kill innocent people, they train them for particular purposes, and target people and buildings based on religious and political reasons.

### **But weren't those people in the JW Marriott and the Ritz-Carlton hotels just having breakfast?**

They weren't their direct enemies. What I mean is the way they motivate the person who will be the suicide bomber is by taking advantage of certain religious values such as jihad verses in the Koran, to legitimize the bombing and to brainwash the person into carrying out the bombing.

And politically, targeting those hotels will attract international attention, so in this sense they don't think about the innocent people who become the victims of their political agenda.

### **Give me a common misconception about terrorism?**

Whenever people in Indonesia discuss terrorism, at least two things come up: bombs and jihadist Muslims. This leads to stereotyping, associating certain Muslims with terrorism.

Indonesian Muslims involved in jihad in Afghanistan, for example, are easily associated with the issue of terrorism in Indonesia.

From here, the basic understanding of terrorism itself becomes “fuzzy.”

With several bombings having taken place in Indonesia, people now think that all jihadists are associated with the bombings and therefore deserve to be called terrorists.

### **Why does it seem like terrorism thrives in pesantrens [Islamic boarding schools]?**

For me, a pesantren is a place where students [santri] acquire knowledge about Islam and skills that will be useful for life and the betterment of their communities.

They learn how to communicate and build vertical [God] and horizontal [human] relationships. I find it very difficult to accept that terrorism thrives in pesantrens.

Since terrorism is a belief, I tend to say terrorism might thrive among a few ex-santri or Muslims who understand Islamic teaching textually, but not in pesantrens as an institution.

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What it would need to be is an online version - hosted outside Indonesia - preferable with an office out side the country too.

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