

# The Role and Contribution of Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh (MPU) to Community of Aceh, Indonesia

**Nurul Haq Zahidah Lukman & Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairuldin**

Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Gong Badak Campus, 21300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia, wanfirdaus@unisza.edu.my

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## **ABSTRACT**

The fatwa institution is regarded as an important factor in spreading Islamic laws especially in Aceh, Indonesia. Based on law number 44 of 1999, Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) was formed in order to enhance the role of ulama. The MPU is ranked on par with other Aceh government organizations through the special autonomy granted to them. Its role is to establish a ruling/fatwa on all matters relating to governance, including different fields such as development, community building and economy. The question is whether the MPU's role is merely to establish fatwa. Are there other contributions given by the MPU to the community? To answer these questions, this study has set two objectives. Firstly, identifying the background and the history of MPU. Secondly, explaining the role and contribution of MPU to the Aceh community. To achieve these objectives, the data collection for this study is based on the bibliography of relevant documents discussing the study. The data obtained were then analyzed through the document analysis method. The findings revealed that the MPU was established in 1965 and in 2001, the MPU's role has been in line with other government organization. Meanwhile, the contribution made by MPU is not only establishing fatwa but also includes construction of school halls and religious lectures organized for the public.

**Keywords:** MPU, Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama, MPU role, fatwa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ulama or Muslim scholars have great influence and play a big role in Islamic society. In Aceh, for example, the influence of ulama began as Islam arrived in Aceh in 1292 AD (Aceh, 1971:6). The implementation of Islamic laws has been integrated into the practice of the people of Aceh. As ulama are individuals who understand and practice Islamic law, they are directly referred to by the local community.

Generally, ulama serves as advisor to the sultan and the people. Each fatwa issued by the ulama are used as guidance to the sultan in running the government and to the community in living life as a Muslim (Amiruddin, 2003:7). Moreover, in Aceh where its people adhere to the tenets of Islam, the advices of ulama are certainly needed.

Based on this statement, the Aceh government has established a fatwa institution named Ulama Consultative Council (MPU) in order to enhance the role of ulama. MPU is an institution in the Aceh government formed under a special autonomy to Aceh. The statement of the Aceh's autonomous state was enshrined in Law No. 44 of 1999 regarding the Aceh District Province Privileges Article 1:

Autonomy of Aceh Special Region is a special autonomy as described in Law no. 22 of 1999 on regional government.

Based on the law stated, Aceh has a sovereign right to administer a government of its own constitution. Therefore, MPU was established in Aceh government as a government organization specializing in the fatwa field. The question is whether the MPU's role is merely to establish fatwa. Are there other contributions given by the MPU to the community? To answer these questions, this study has set two objectives. Firstly, identifying the background and the history of MPU. Secondly, explaining the role and contribution of MPU to the Aceh community.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Data collection method in this study is document analysis. According to Moleong (2007), this method of data collection has more value as most of the data is contained in sources in document form. Relevant documents were obtained to get a clear picture of the history, role and contribution of MPU. The documents were collected in the form of books and related studies.

The results from data collection of these documents were then analysed by content analysis method. Marican (2005:170) and Lebar (2009:146) stated that content analysis method is used to explain the documents studied systematically. Through this method, an interpretation can be explained from a written content in text form. Therefore, this study uses the content analysis method to look at the role and contribution of the MPU to the community.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

MPU was established during Indonesia's political conflict between the military, the Muslims and the Indonesia Communist Party (Sufiyan, 2016:109) The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement initiated by the Indonesia Communist Party of its insurgency was witnessed all over Indonesia. The Aceh Regional Commander had tried to take immediate action to eliminate the disturbance happening. They sought the views of three ulama in determining the law against this movement (Amiruddin, 2012:132). The three scholars were Teungku Hj. Abdullah Ujong Rimba as Chief of Syar'iyah Court, Teungku Hj. Hasan as Head of Aceh Islam Department and Drs. Hj Ismuha, Rector of Ar-Raniry Islam State Institute (IAIN) (Ismuha, 1983:1).

According to the three scholars, the problem addressed was serious and a meeting gathering the scholars should be held to discuss the matter. This suggestion was agreed by the military. Then, in November 1965, a committee named Ulama Consultative Committee of Aceh Region was formed (Zubair, 2010:35). The discussion was held in December of the same year and was attended by 57 Muslim scholars from all over Aceh (Sufyan, 2016:110). Apart from discussing the case filed by the military, the meeting also called for a body of clerics. As a result from the consent of all attendees, the Ulama Consultative Council was formed on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1966 through Aceh Chief of Defence (Ihsan, 2014:47).

Then, the MPU's presence is further strengthened by District Regulation No. 1 of 1966 on the Basic Guidelines of Ulama Consultative Council. In 1968, its name was changed to Indonesian Ulama Council of Aceh Province. This change was made to coordinate the ulama institutions under the central government. However, in 1999, the name was changed back to the original MPU (Elidar Sari, 2012:22). This was due to the birth of Law No. 44 of 1999 on Maintenance of Aceh Province Privileges which explains in Article 9 paragraph 1 that:

"The region forms a body whose members consist of ulama".

After going through some legal procedures, the MPU officially became an independent body in 2001. The MPU is not bound by the government but cooperates with them in the government system. The MPU's position is further strengthened by Law No. 11 of 2006 which declares the MPU as a body parallel to the Aceh government. Thus, the MPU's task is to organize the administration and development of Aceh particularly in the development of Islam law. This is in accordance to Article 139 which states that:

"MPU functions to establish fatwa which is one of the considerations in regional administration in the areas of governance, development, society construction and economy."

MPU is then regulated in Code No 2 of 2009. The exclusive code regarding the MPU in Article 4 has stated the roles of MPU which are:

- a. Giving consideration to the policy in areas including governance, development, economy, social culture and community.
- b. Provide advice and guidance to the society based on the teachings of Islam.

The MPU has carried out its role according to the code as per their given authority.

## **1. Issuing fatwa**

As a state that implements Islamic law, the fatwa institution is an important element in the governance. Article 4 (1) of Code 2 of 2009 clearly states that the MPU's role is to provide guidance and advices to the regional executive body in formulationg and implementing

management of government affairs. Therefore, the MPU has a role of issuing fatwa to regional government, especially in the development of Islamic law.

## **2. Guidance to the public**

The role of MPU is not only limited to providing guidance and advices to the governor, but also in guiding the people to the Islamic way of life. MPU implements the Islamic law by establishing and supervising the practice of religion of the public. Establishment of the practice can be done by teaching, advising, giving sermons, education, holding question and answer session in mosques, through electronic media, printing and so on (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh, 1970).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study findings, MPU was established on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1966. In 1968, its name was changed from Ulama Consultative Council to Indonesian Ulama Council of Aceh Province. After law no. 44 of 1999 on Maintenance of Privileges of Aceh Region, the name was changed back to MPU.

History explained that the MPU was established to provide advises, guidance and fatwa to the community. This role then expanded through many methods and contribution in developing the community based on Islamic laws. In conclusion, the MPU does not solely function as institution that establishes fatwa only.

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## **CORRESPONDING AUTHOR**

Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairuldin

Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Gong Badak Campus, 21300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

Tel: 09-6688076. E-mail: wmkfirdaus@gmail.com /wanfirdaus@unisza.edu.my

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