



## Intolerance in the Fatwa on the Prohibition of Interfaith Greetings: Its Impact on Islamic Family Law and Social Harmony

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### Abstract

The *fatwa* on the prohibition of inter-religious greetings issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) in English Indonesian Theologian Council has caused controversy in the context of inter-religious relations in Indonesia. This study aims to evaluate the impact of the *fatwa* on Islamic family law and social harmony, focusing on the intolerance caused by interfaith interactions. Using a qualitative approach, this study conducted a content analysis of the text of the Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* and literature related to *maqashid al-syariah* and Islamic family law. Data were obtained through a documentation study of Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwas*, books, articles, and academic publications. The analysis technique involved identifying the main themes in the *fatwa*, comparing them with *maqashid al-syariah* principles, and evaluating their impact on multicultural family relationships and social harmony. The results show that this *fatwa*, although aimed at protecting Islamic identity, has the potential to cause tension in family relationships that have members with different religious backgrounds and undermine social harmony. The research emphasizes the need for open dialogue between scholars, academics and the community to find a more inclusive and tolerant solution. A more moderate approach is hoped to be adopted to create interfaith harmony and maintain harmony in Indonesia's multicultural society.

**Keywords:** Fatwa, Interfaith greetings, *Maqashid al-syariah*, Family balance, Multi-religious harmony.

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## Introduction

This study addresses some important shortcomings in the Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* that prohibits Muslims from giving greetings to adherents of other religions. This *fatwa*, which originated from *fatwa* Commission VIII of the Indonesian Theologian Council with Number 02/Theologian-MUI/VIII/2024, issued on 31 May 2024, provides guidelines on interfaith relations. Specifically, the decree provides in Letter Point "B" and Numbers (1) and (3) regarding "Interfaith *Fiqh* on Greetings", which states: 1) Integrating interfaith greetings under the label of tolerance is not allowed, and 2) Specialized prayers of other religions performed by Muslims are also prohibited. In studying family dynamics in multicultural societies, religious *fatwas* are often neglected in the discourse (Reddy & van Dam, 2020; Huda et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). In addition, in dealing with the issue of religious diversity and promoting social harmony, *maqashid* is needed as the answer (Gede Agung et al., 2024). In addition, the urgency to achieve justice and harmony in a plural society like Indonesia also requires *fatwas* that are able to answer the challenges and opportunities that arise from Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwas* (Dahlan et al., 2021; Wojciechowska, 2024).

*Maqashid al-syariah* is a fundamental concept in Islamic law that refers to the main purpose of implementing *sharia*, as explained by Al-Qaradhawi (2017) that *maqashid al-syariah* includes three main objectives: justice (*adl*), benefits (*maslahah*), and protection of religion (*hifzh al-din*). Justice in the context of *maqashid al-syariah* relates to the fulfilment of societal rights and obligations, ensuring each individual is treated fairly and equally (Ahyani & Slamet, 2021). For example, Gautier et al. explain that *sharia* justice includes criminal law and social justice in distributing wealth and opportunities (Gautier, 2020). Benefits focus on achieving the common good for mankind, safeguarding the public interest and avoiding harm (Solehudin & Ahyani, 2024; Yunus 2024). Meanwhile, (Hassan et al., 2022) add that beneficence encompasses consideration of benefits broader than individual interests, including society's health, security and welfare. Protection of religion (*hifzh al-din*) focuses on preserving religious beliefs and identity (Wahid & Rahim, 2024). Indonesian Theologian Council's *fatwa* prohibiting interfaith greetings aims to protect Islamic identity, which aligns with the *maqashid al-syariah* principle. However, in the context of the Indonesian Civilisation Law Concept, this prohibition needs to consider the balance between protecting religious identity with social justice and tolerance to maintain harmony in a multicultural society (Prasetyo & Amaral, 2024).

Lathifah et al. (2022) stated that religious protection includes maintaining religious purity and protecting people from teachings that can threaten their beliefs. Regarding the Indonesian Theologian Council's *fatwa*, the *maqashid al-syariah* principle is essential for analyzing its impact on social justice, public benefit, and religious preservation. For example, Palilati (2022) points out that this *fatwa* could be considered an attempt to preserve Islamic identity. Still, it also has the potential to ignore the principle of benefits

in interfaith interactions. Indonesian Theologian Council's *fatwa* banning interfaith greetings emphasises the protection of Islamic identity, although these risks increasing interfaith tensions (Itmam & Aouich, 2024, (Timur, Umam, and Aulia, 2024).

The *fatwa* is based on the view that interfaith greetings can obscure Islamic identity and contradict the principles of Islamic teachings (Sholeh, 2024a, pp. 28-29). For example, critics of the *fatwa* argue that the prohibition of interfaith greetings could be considered a form of social exclusion that goes against the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect in Indonesia's multicultural society (Koburtay et al., 2023; (Hamdani, 2023). Meanwhile, (Gede Agung et al., 2024) also argue that the *fatwa* on interreligious greetings tends to ignore the social and humanitarian aspects of interreligious interactions that have become part of the social culture in Indonesia. On the other hand, (Das, 2022) supports this *fatwa* by stating that this prohibition is a form of protection for religious purity and religious identity, which he believes must be maintained in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia. In addition, Alif K. Sahide et al. suggested the need for more inclusive dialogue and a review of *fatwas* in the context of current social dynamics (Sahide et al., 2020). So the reasons for conducting this study include: 1) Previous research often focuses only on legal or theological aspects without examining the impact of *fatwas* on social dynamics in multicultural families, particularly how this affects communication between family members with different religious backgrounds. 2) There is a lack of analysis on how the *fatwa* aligns with *maqashid al-syariah* principles, with many studies failings to assess whether the *fatwa* supports broader *syariah* objectives such as social justice and general welfare. 3) Existing research rarely investigates the challenges and opportunities in building interfaith harmony after issuing the *fatwa*. 4) There are limitations in exploring how the *fatwa* balances religious protection with general social justice.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative method with content analysis of Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* texts and literature related to *maqashid al-syariah* and Islamic family law. Data were obtained through documentation study of *fatwa* texts, books, articles, and academic publications. The analysis technique includes identifying the main themes in Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwas*, comparing them with *maqashid al-syariah* principles, and evaluating their impact on interfaith relations and social harmony (Arfa & Marpaung, 2016).

## Result and Discussion

### The Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) on Interfaith Greetings

A *fatwa* issued by the *Fatwa* Commission VIII of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) Number 02/Ulama-MUI/VIII/2024 on 31 May 2024 provides guidance on interfaith relations, particularly about interfaith greetings. The *fatwa*, in Letter Point "B" and Numbers (1) and (3) on "Interreligious Fiqh on Greetings," states that: 1) Integration of interreligious greetings under the label of tolerance is not allowed, and 2) Specialized prayers of other religions performed by Muslims are also prohibited. This Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* prohibits interfaith greetings, such as saying "Selamat Idul Fitri in English, Happy EID Mubarak" to followers of other religions, because such actions can obscure Islamic identity and contradict the principle of exclusivity of Islamic teachings. In the Indonesian Theologian Council's view, interfaith greetings can damage

the purity of the Muslim faith and contradict Islamic teachings that emphasize the separation between Muslims and non-Muslims in the context of religion.

From the perspective of *maqashid al-syariah*, the prohibition of interfaith greetings in the Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* can be seen as an effort to maintain Islamic identity (*hifzh al-din*). It aims to ensure that Muslims are not influenced by the teachings of other religions that could potentially disturb their beliefs (Dahlan et al., 2021). This *fatwa* could worsen social relations between religious communities. However, while this *fatwa* focuses on protecting Islamic identity, there is debate about its impact on social tolerance and interfaith justice in Indonesia's multicultural society. Some argue that while maintaining the purity of faith is essential, Islam also teaches the principle of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence with people of other religions. Therefore, while this *fatwa* aims to safeguard Islamic identity, the social impact of implementing this *fatwa* needs to be considered in the context of the wider society. In addition, some public figures and academics argue that the Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* could lead to misunderstandings and damage the image of Islam as a welcoming and inclusive religion. For example, some moderate scholars and community leaders reminded that Islam teaches the principle of *ukhuwah insaniyah* (brotherhood among humans), which should guide Muslims to maintain harmony with all parties, regardless of religious differences.

From a *maqashid al-syariah* perspective, this *fatwa* reflects an attempt to preserve the Islamic identity (*hifzh al-din*) and maintain the purity of faith. However, this *fatwa* can also be seen as a step that ignores *maslahah* (benefits), a broader public interest that includes harmonious relations between religious communities. According to (Al-Qaradhawi 2017), this is the view that *maqashid al-syariah* is the target of texts and laws. So, this *fatwa* shows an effort to avoid the fitnah that is thought to arise from interfaith interactions, but in a way that can ignore the values of justice and tolerance in a pluralistic society (Syofrianisda, 2017; Harahap et al., 2024).

MUI's *fatwa* prohibiting interfaith greetings can be analysed through the *maqashid al-syariah* framework, focusing on the principles of justice (*adl*), benefit (*maslahah*), and protection of religion (*hifzh al-din*). From the perspective of justice (*adl*) (Satria Effendi M. Zein et al., 2010), this *fatwa* may fall short as it risks damaging interpersonal relationships between religious communities and ignores the right to interact with mutual respect and compassion, which is an essential aspect of social justice. Thus, the *fatwa*'s narrow focus on religious purity may limit potential social benefits and ethical engagement (Solehudin et al., 2024). Regarding protecting religion (*hifzh al-din*), the *fatwa* aims to safeguard Islamic identity and prevent the mixing of teachings deemed damaging to faith through interfaith interactions. However, this protectionist approach may not fully consider the value of dialogue and tolerance, which can enrich religious understanding and promote a more inclusive society. Overall, although the Indonesian Theologian Council *fatwa* is rooted in the principle of *hifzh al-din* to preserve Islamic beliefs, it poses a challenge to *maslahah* and *adl* by potentially damaging social relations and ignoring the values of justice and tolerance in multicultural societies. The *fatwa*'s emphasis on protecting religious identity must be balanced with the larger *maqashid al-syariah* objectives of promoting social harmony and encouraging constructive dialogue between religious communities.

## A Challenge to Islamic Family Law and Social Harmony

This *fatwa* challenges efforts to create inter-religious harmony. By banning interfaith greetings, this *fatwa* can be seen as a setback in efforts to build tolerance and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. The ban has the potential to widen the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, which could worsen social relations and hamper efforts to achieve social harmony in a multicultural society (Widiastuti et al., 2022; Eranfeno et al., 2024).

The Indonesian *Fatwa* Commission's *Ijtima* Ulama VII issued guidelines on interfaith relations, focusing on the issue of interfaith greetings. The guidelines also emphasise the importance of collaboration in social and state matters, despite religious differences, and avoiding insulting other religions (Gusnawaty et al., 2022; Sholeh, 2024b). However, on the other hand, this *fatwa* also provides an opportunity to promote dialogue on the principles of *maqashid al-syariah* and how Islamic law can be applied in the context of religious diversity more constructively and inclusively (Ahyani & Slamet, 2021; Widiastuti et al., 2022). This *fatwa* can also be a starting point for establishing new ways of dialogue and interaction with non-Muslims that remain harmonious with Islamic teachings (Tahir, 2022; Adnan et al., 2024; Tomalin, 2024; Alwi et al., 2024).

Indonesian Theologian Council's *fatwa* on interfaith greetings teaches that tolerance is about greeting each other and understanding and respecting differences more deeply. This is both a challenge and an opportunity to explore the deeper meaning of tolerance, making it a step towards more sustainable social harmony in Indonesia. The ban can, therefore, be understood as part of an effort to protect the Islamic faith and identity from external interference that could threaten their religious integrity (Taragin-Zeller, 2024; Ahyani, 2024; Ahyani et al., 2024).

In Islam, *maqashid al-syariah* emphasizes the importance of considering the broader interests of the Muslim community. This includes ensuring that decisions and actions fulfil individual needs and benefit the Muslim Ummah. The Ministry of Religious Affairs supports interfaith greetings as beneficial for maintaining harmony, as reflected in the rising Religious Harmony Index (KUB) (Ridwan, 2024). Cholil Nafis, Indonesian Theologian Council Chairman for Da'wah, emphasized the importance of complying with the Indonesian Ulema *Fatwa* Commission's *Ijtima'* regarding the prohibition of interfaith greetings. He highlighted that in Islamic teachings, greetings are considered a prayer and a form of worship, so it is essential to follow the *fatwa* to maintain the sanctity of Islamic practice. Nafis emphasized that greetings should conform to Islamic law standards and avoid elements from other religions to protect the purity of worship and adherence to religious principles (Rizqo, 2024).

## Conclusion

Indonesian Theologian Council's *fatwa* on interfaith greetings has a significant impact on Islamic family law, especially in the context of multicultural families involving members with different religious backgrounds. This prohibition has the potential to create tension in family relationships and hinder the creation of social harmony between religious communities. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the application of *maqashid al-syariah* in a more inclusive and tolerant Islamic family law framework. As part of the effort to maintain religious integrity, Islamic family law must accommodate the values of pluralism and mutual respect between religions without compromising the basic principles of Islam. A more flexible and moderate approach to applying this *fatwa* can create a more harmonious environment, both in the family context and in a multicultural

society. Further dialogue and understanding between scholars, families and communities is needed to find solutions that support the harmony of Islamic families and maintain interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

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