

Significance of the Australia–Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program to Overcome Public Misperception

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Abstract:

This research aims to analyze the existence of the Australia–Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program (AIMEP) as a form of Australia’s consistency as the only Western country that positions Islam and young Australian–Indonesian Muslim figures as a strategic aspect of its public diplomacy, marked by 20 years of holding the AIMEP. This study is library research using qualitative methods and historical and political approaches. Data collection techniques involved document review, interviews, and literature studies. The results of this study indicate that AIMEP is not only an instrument of public diplomacy between Australia and Indonesia, but more than that, it is an effort to bridge differences through inter-civilizational dialog – where AIMEP has contributed significantly in efforts to overcome public misperception caused by political, religious, social, cultural, and economic differences. This study can help the development of international relations scholarship in the Indo-Pacific region, Islamic studies and international relations, and public diplomacy studies. Specifically, this research strengthens the study of dialog-based public diplomacy and inter-civilizational dialog. Previous studies only discuss the AIMEP as Australian public diplomacy toward Indonesia without attempting to review a two-stage process of how the AIMEP has become a flagship program in fostering better understanding between Indonesian and Australian Muslims, and through this process, a stronger relationship between Indonesia and Australia. In addition, there are no previous studies that specifically use the theory of inter-civilizational dialog and dialog-based public diplomacy to discuss the fact that the exchange program is designed not only to provide participants with an opportunity to experience their neighboring country first-hand but also to disseminate information about their interactions and responses to their home communities.

Keywords: Australia-Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program, public diplomacy, inter-civilizational dialog, Islam, Muslims.

澳洲–印尼穆斯林交流計畫對於克服公眾誤解的意義

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摘要：

本研究旨在分析澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫的存在，作為澳洲作為唯一將伊斯蘭教和年輕的澳洲印尼穆斯林人物作為其公共外交戰略方面的西方國家的一致性的一種形式，其特色是澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫舉辦20年。這項研究是使用定性方法以及歷史和政治方法的圖書館研究。資料收集技術涉及文件審查、訪談和文獻研究。這項研究的結果表明，澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫不僅是澳洲和印尼之間公共外交的工具，更重要的是，它是透過文明間對話彌合分歧的努力澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫在克服公眾誤解方面做出了重大貢獻。政治、宗教、社會、文化和經濟差異所造成的。本研究有助於印太地區國際關係學術、伊斯蘭研究與國際關係、公共外交研究的發展。具體來說，本研究加強了基於對話的公共外交和文明間對話的研究。先前的研究僅將澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫作為澳洲對印尼的公共外交進行討論，而沒有嘗試回顧澳洲印尼穆斯林交流計畫如何成為促進印尼和澳洲穆斯林之間更好理解的旗艦計畫的兩個階段過程，並透過這一過程增強印尼之間的關係和澳洲。此外，以往也沒有專門用文明間對話和對話型公共外交理論來討論交流項目的目的不僅僅是為參與者提供親身體驗鄰國的機會。還傳播有關他們與其家鄉社區的互動和反應的信息。

关键词： 澳大利亞-印度尼西亞穆斯林交流計畫、公共外交、文明間對話、伊斯蘭教、穆斯林。

1. Introduction

It is a fact that the Australian and Indonesian people too often face the condition of not knowing each other, even between the Muslim communities in the two countries. The two countries have several things in common, from shared beliefs and values to common interests.

Unfortunately, the public in both countries often does not know much about each other. Most of the public discourse in Australia and Indonesia often focuses on the differences between the two countries, especially regarding cultural and religious differences, economic structure and development, population size, historical background, and other social problems. Media strengthen this condition that sometimes only reports obstructive events during the relationship between Australia and Indonesia. In short, the relationship between Australia and Indonesia in terms of the differences, where the most significant difference is religion, rather than looking at the similarities between the two countries (Fealy, 2018).

This research seeks to explain and analyze how these differences influence the formation of public perceptions, images, and stereotypes in the two countries toward each other, which governments seek to bridge through policies and actions. In this regard, the two countries use various public diplomacy instruments to improve relations to move forward together. One of these programs is the Australia–Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program (AIMEP), launched in 2002.

Leonard (2002) explains: “Public diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it involves interaction with government and non-governmental individuals and organizations. Furthermore, public diplomacy activities often present many differing views represented by private American individuals and organizations additionally to official government views.”

Based on the statement above, public diplomacy is different from traditional one because it does not only involve interactions with the government but also with individuals and non-governmental organizations. Meanwhile, Cull (2008) stated that there are five elements of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international news broadcasting. Specifically, exchange diplomacy is an actor’s effort to manage their international environment by sending their citizens abroad and reciprocally accepting citizens from abroad for a period of study and/or acculturation. Although one could think of it as a one-way process, the reciprocal elements that occur in the exchange process will allow for a two-way communication process, so it tends to make this element of public diplomacy a concept of mutuality, in which both parties benefit (Scott-Smith, 2009).

In particular, public diplomacy has also demonstrated the ability to play an essential role in strengthening and achieving the national interests of countries as an instrument of foreign policy through soft power. In this context, one of the critical tasks of public diplomacy is to build dialog and international relations. In other words, public diplomacy assumes that dialog is supreme in achieving a country’s foreign policy goals by emphasizing the importance of two-way communication and not just sending one-way messages to other parties. The use of dialog also allows public diplomacy to develop instruments to capture feedback and persuade foreign publics. Another characteristic of dialogue-based public diplomacy is the character of justice, assuming that dialog can lead to a more just world. Therefore, dialog between civilizations can be considered a dialog, multicultural, and justice-oriented approach in international relations. Dialogue between civilizations can also affect the identity of actors from

different levels and lead to the formation of a new identity and a new understanding of oneself and other parties, which will ultimately redefine the interests and goals of a country (Riordan, 2005). This dialog-based public diplomacy is not limited to the government level but also includes dialog between individuals, groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the context of the connection between public diplomacy and inter-civilizational dialog, Bassam Tibi presents an argument seen as a form of his contribution to efforts to overcome conflicts between civilizations through inter-civilizational dialog. According to Tibi, unlike other civilizations, Western and Islamic civilizations have a more significant potential for conflict. The politicization of religion and the negative impact of globalization exacerbate the potential for conflict between these two civilizations. To overcome this conflict, civilization must end the "war of ideas" develop a dialog between civilizations based on mutual respect, and uphold the shared values, including democracy and human rights (Tibi, 2012).

This research analyzes how the AIMEP became an exchange program launched by the Australian government to conduct its public diplomacy by positioning Islam and young Australian–Indonesian Muslim leaders as a strategic aspect. The consistency of the AIMEP, which has been running for two decades, can measure Australia's commitment and seriousness in this regard. Today, the AIMEP has more than 300 alumni from both countries who actively continue to contribute in their respective fields. Meanwhile, for Indonesia, the presence of young Indonesian Muslim leaders involved in the AIMEP is essential as part of Indonesia's efforts to counter Western perceptions that as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is not a threat or a breeding ground for extremism.

2. Initiation of AIMEP by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australia–Indonesia Institute

The AIMEP is an exchange program based on the values of mutual respect and hospitality between the Australian and Indonesian public. The AIMEP has become a program on people-to-people relations (Williams, 2022). The AIMEP itself started after the incident in the US on 11 September 2001, when the world media criticized Islam on a large scale, which then led to a backlash against extremist Islam. In Australia, this created a reaction of fear, shock, and suspicion toward Muslims, which then became the cause of misunderstandings regarding Islam and Muslims.

Under the umbrella of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Australia–Indonesia Institute (AII), AIMEP's primary objective is to support increased people-to-people relations between Australia

and Indonesia. The chairman of AII at that time, Philip Flood, who was also the former Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, realized that Indonesia's largest Muslim population in the world could cause misperceptions among the Australian public. Philip Flood also understood that the public in Australia could view Islam in Indonesia the same way as Islam in the Middle East while at the same time not having an understanding that Islam in Indonesia was moderate Islam. On the other hand, many Indonesian Muslims do not understand well the multi-cultural and multi-religious life adhered to in Australia. Negative coverage in Indonesian media about interreligious relations in Australia, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims, is a cause for concern. This condition gave rise to the view among senior Australian diplomats in Jakarta and prominent Australian Indonesianists that not well-informed incidents can provide a misleading picture of Muslim life in Australia (Fealy, 2022).

Philip Flood then discussed with Virginia Hooker, an Indonesianist, academic, and researcher of Islam in Indonesia and Southeast Asia from the Australian National University (ANU), the condition of Islam in Indonesia in general and especially regarding the low level of Australian public knowledge regarding Islam in Indonesia. Virginia Hooker later became a member of the AII Council, whose task was to design an exchange program that could strengthen Indonesian Islamic knowledge in Australia and vice versa, which would also provide an understanding to the Indonesian public regarding the existence of Islam in Australia. Thus, the purpose of this exchange program is to create a better understanding through person-to-person relationships (Hooker, 2022).

Virginia Hooker with Merle Ricklefs, a leading expert on Indonesian Islam in Australia and Director of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, and Philip Knight, a former diplomat and senior figure in the Victorian Muslim community, designed an exchange program aimed at young Muslim leaders in Indonesia, both male and female. Virginia Hooker and Phillip Knight, who were also members of the AII Board at the time, then put forward a proposal for a Muslim exchange program, which was quickly approved and funded by AII (Hooker, 2022).

AII itself, as an institution established to strengthen relations between the peoples of Australia and Indonesia, believes that initiating inter-religious and inter-civilization programs will help form greater mutual understanding and provide long-term contributions to the interaction between Muslim leaders in the two countries through ongoing contact between Australian and Indonesian Muslims, the groups that have the best potential to participate in such a program are those that can make a long-term difference and become new leaders in the future. Through this exchange program, selected participants will benefit from hands-on experiences in Australia and Indonesia

and can incorporate their experiences into their programs and share their experiences with other Muslims. Moving on from this view, the AIMEP became an exchange program between young Australian and Indonesian Muslim leaders, which is also a form of interfaith and inter-civilizational dialog (Fealy, 2022).

Regarding the details of the exchange program and strengthening the strategy in promoting this new exchange program, Virginia Hooker then discussed it with an Indonesian Muslim scholar, Azyumardi Azra. The initiation of this exchange program also received support from Nurcholish Madjid, who then promoted this new exchange program through Paramadina University. Contact details for further information regarding this exchange program are under the management of the Australian Cultural Attache at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. Prime Minister John Howard then officially announced the initiation of AIMEP during a visit to Jakarta in 2002, which was a sign of the important religious diplomacy placed in the government-to-government relations between the two countries. The first AIMEP visits also occurred at the end of that year (Hooker, 2022).

There were over fifty applicants when this exchange program was launched in 2002, and to date, there are over 500 applicants each year. One of the most difficult aspects of the candidate selection process is the very high quality of the applicants, so it becomes very competitive in trying to find the most appropriate candidate with the goals to be achieved through this exchange program.

In September 2002, AIMEP's first select delegates from Indonesia landed at Melbourne Airport and were welcomed by Philip Knight. Two years later, in 2004, the first AIMEP delegation of selected participants from Australia visited Indonesia. In 2005, the AII Council recognized AIMEP as a regular program and a major component of the interfaith program under AII's management. This also shows AII's commitment to ensuring the future sustainability of AIMEP. In August 2006, after four years of co-managing the AIMEP with Philip Knight and Rowan Gould, Virginia Hooker handed over the role of directing and administering the AIMEP to Philip Knight and Rowan Gould.

Currently, the management of AIMEP is run through a partnership managed by Australia-Indonesia Connections (AIC, 2022), a Melbourne-based consultancy led by Rowan Gould and Brynna Rafferty-Brown, who have contributed to leading, refining, and expanding the program to a high standard extraordinary, so that it was later recognized as one of AII's flagship programs. The success and excellence of AIMEP were even copied and used as a model for the development of other people-to-people exchange programs run by DFAT, including the launch of the Australia-ASEAN Muslim Exchange Program (AAMEP) in 2019, which

aims to connect Muslim leaders from Australia and the ASEAN region, particularly from Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, and the Philippines.

3. Young Australian–Indonesian Muslim Figures as the Central Point of the AIMEP

AIMEP is an exchange program that particularly positions young Australian and Indonesian Muslim leaders as a strategic aspect of its program. This agrees with AII's principle that the selected people who will represent Australia and Indonesia in this exchange program and get new experiences abroad, be open-minded and curious, and have the opportunity to have a long career as opinion leaders in their respective countries. These young Muslim leaders represent a strategic demographic for Australia and Indonesia as they can play a constructive role in the bilateral relationship for many years (Fealy, 2022).

The opening of equal opportunities for men and women to participate in the AIMEP also indicates that it does not discriminate against gender. In this regard, the AIMEP participant selection process was conducted carefully to ensure the achievement of the most possible representation. The AIMEP upholds the principle of gender equality, where women make up half of the ten Indonesian participants selected each year and never less than two out of five participants from Australia. The representation of young Australian–Indonesian Muslim leaders in this exchange program is also seen as quite capable of representing their community, which would contribute to the development and dynamics of Australia–Indonesia relations in the future (Gould, 2022).

The AIMEP also encourages applications from all Muslim communities in both countries, including Muslim minorities. AIMEP Indonesia participants come from various organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam (Persis), Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia/DDII), Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI), and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), as well as from madrasas, academic universities, various civil society organizations, the business sector, and the media. There has also been great geographic and ethnic diversity among the participants. Similarly, Australian participants reflect the immense heterogeneity of the country's *ummah*. Participants were drawn from Eastern European, Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian, and Southeast Asian backgrounds, and their doctrinal mix was also diverse. Overall, the AIMEP has an excellent track record of bringing together Muslims from very different origins and perspectives and allowing them to socialize and develop a closer understanding of each other (Fealy, 2022).

Through the 20 years of AIMEP, 290 selected participants have taken part in this exchange program, with 70% or 202 participants coming from Indonesia and 30% or 88 participants coming from Australia. A detailed description of the selected AIMEP participants, both from Indonesia and Australia, can be seen in Figure 1.

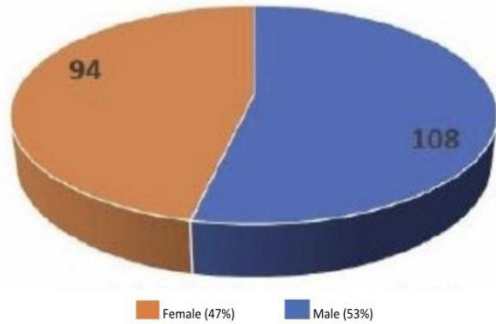


Figure 1. Number of AIMEP participants from Indonesia (Primary data processed by the researchers)

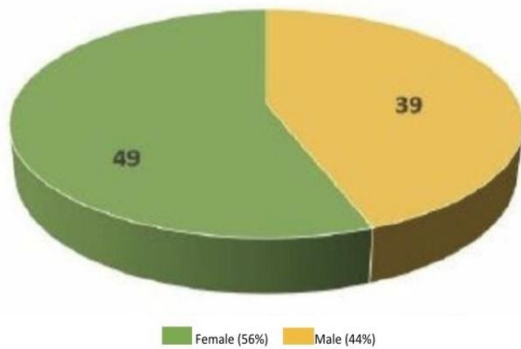


Figure 2. Number of AIMEP participants from Australia (Primary data processed by the researchers)

Based on Figures 1 and 2, the number of AIMEP participants from Indonesia was 202, with 108 males (53%) and 94 females (47%). AIMEP participants from Australia totaled 88 people, with 39 males (44%) and 49 females (56%). The number of AIMEP participants from Indonesia is greater than the number of AIMEP participants from Australia because the involvement of Australian AIMEP participants only started in 2004 and the number of delegates sent from Indonesia each year is greater than that of participants from Australia.

The AIMEP participants from Indonesia and Australia have diverse professional backgrounds grouped as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Professional background of AIMEP participants from Indonesia and Australia (Primary data processed by the researchers)

AIMEP Participants from Indonesia	AIMEP Participants from Australia
a. Academics/lecturers	a. Teachers
b. Members/leaders of mass organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis, etc.), including the General Secretary of Muhammadiyah, Prof. Abdul Mu'ti	b. NGO workers/activists in various fields, including Muslim organizations, youth, sports, ZISWAF, etc.
c. Members of the House of Representatives	c. Reporters

- | | |
|--|---|
| d. Ministry staff | d. Psychologists |
| e. Civil servants | e. Writers |
| f. Researchers | f. Police servants |
| g. Writers | g. Advocates/lawyers |
| h. NGO activists | h. Civil servants |
| i. Teachers | i. Academics |
| j. Professionals such as doctors and journalists | j. Priests |
| k. NGO workers/activists, including SWAP, youth, gender, and interfaith dialog | l. Professionals from various fields, including IT, artists, consultants, accountants, risk management, and businessmen (entrepreneurs) |
| m. Content creators | l. Nurses |
| n. Celebrities (such as Oki Setiana Dewi) | |

Table 1 shows that the selected AIMEP participants, both from Indonesia and Australia, came from a variety of professional backgrounds, such as university educators and academics, scholars, activists, religious leaders, lawyers, artists, journalists, interfaith activists, politicians, businessmen, and many others representing various aspects of many Muslim communities as well as religious and belief groups. In Indonesia, Abdul Mu'ti, General Secretary of PP Muhammadiyah, the largest modernist Muslim organization in Indonesia with more than 30 million members, was one of the earliest AIMEP participants. Several current alumni have also become successful writers, senior academics, and artists, and many have been involved in the world of politics and bureaucracy. One of the participants, Oki Setiana Dewi, is an Islamic film actress and well-known preacher and media figure in Indonesia (Gould, 2022). Meanwhile, the region of origin of the AIMEP participants from Indonesia and Australia is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4.

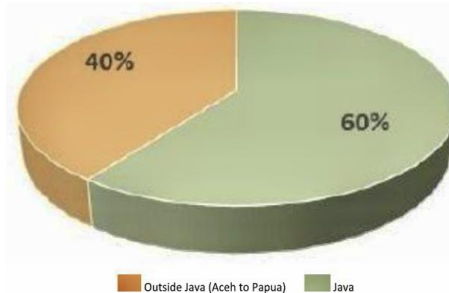


Figure 3. Region of origin of the AIMEP participants from Indonesia (Primary data processed by the researchers)

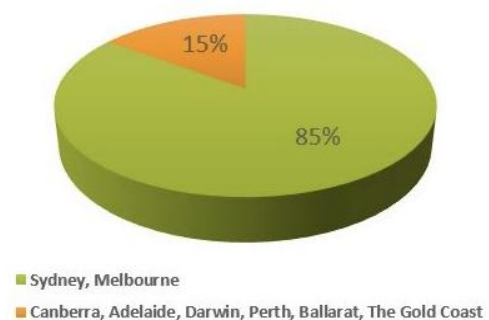


Figure 4. Region of origin of the AIMEP participants from Australia (Primary data processed by the researchers)

Figure 3 shows that most AIMEP participants from Indonesia came from Java Island (60%) while the remaining (40%) came from various regions of Indonesia from Aceh to Papua. AIMEP participants from Australia (as seen in Figure 4) were dominated by participants from two cities, Sydney and Melbourne (85%), and the remaining 15% combined several regions such as Canberra, Adelaide, Darwin, Perth, Ballarat, and the Gold Coast.

4. Dialogue-Based Public Diplomacy and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue as the Main Pillar of the AIMEP

The AIMEP provides regular opportunities for selected participants from both countries to visit Australia and Indonesia for two weeks. The visiting activities include meetings and dialogs with academics, community organizations (including youth and women organizations), religious leaders, schools, media, and government representatives. There are also sporting and cultural activities, visits to important institutions, and, importantly, the opportunity to interact with Australians and Indonesians in everyday life (Mu'ti, 2022).

Among many activities contained in the AIMEP, the main focus lies in emphasizing the importance for selected participants from both countries to have the opportunity to see their neighbors up close. Selected participants will witness first-hand how issues of religious, cultural, and political diversity are handled differently in each country, by prioritizing significant opportunities to learn together and exchange ideas through two-way dialog. Through the AIMEP, the selected participants also had the opportunity to deepen their awareness of the diversity of Islam by meeting people who have a different perspective from theirs. This includes opportunities for important face-to-face meetings and contacts that are not possible through regular visits. In short, through various visits, dialogs and other supporting activities, the selected participants are expected to be able to directly experience the diversity, culture, and traditions of each country, which in the end will allow the selected participants to return to their communities and share with their communities what they have seen and learned (Hakim, 2022).

Table 1 shows the types of activities carried out by selected AIMEP participants from Australia and Indonesia.

Table 2. Types of AIMEP activities (Primary data processed by the researchers)

Forms of AIMEP activity	Activity details
Inter-civilizational dialog and interfaith dialog	Interact and exchange dialog ideas with academics, educators, community organizations (including youth and women's organizations), NGO activists, religious leaders, the

Observation of social and religious activities	media, government representatives, and other important community leaders. Observing and directly experiencing various social and religious events that occur in Australian and Indonesian society in the context of everyday life.
Visits and cultural activities	Visits to important institutions relevant to the topic of discussion, including sports and cultural activities.

Based on Table 2, the AIMEP activities are categorized into three forms: 1) dialog, 2) observation, and 3) visits and cultural activities. In conducting these various activities, diplomatic activities occur that not only involve the government but also involve multi-track diplomacy, which emphasizes the involvement and active participation of civil society, youth, the private sector, universities, and educational institutions, including religious and belief groups. The dialog activity is a manifestation of inter-civilizational and inter-faith dialog that includes three parts: 1) dialog with the Muslim community, 2) academic and diplomatic dialog and 3) multicultural and inter-religious dialog.

Selected Indonesian AIMEP participants who travel to Australia usually visit three cities: Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra. This in-person visit to Australia aims to raise greater awareness of Australia's multicultural society. Meanwhile, the AIMEP program aimed at selected participants from Australia focuses on efforts to build a greater understanding of the nature of mainstream Islam in Indonesia. In this regard, selected participants from Australia will visit Indonesia and participate in various activities in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Makassar. In these cities, AIMEP Australia participants will conduct a series of dialog activities with several organizations and individual figures, observations, and various visiting activities, which will also include visits to historical and cultural sites.

Nevertheless, for a program such as AIMEP, it is difficult to define indicators of program success in the short term. Even so, there are key factors that can be seen through program feedback according to AIMEP participants, which are reflected in the perceptions that were built before and after participating in the program. Table 3 contains the highest description of the perceptions that the participants had.

Table 3. Perceptions of Australian and Indonesian AIMEP participants (AIC, 2021)

Perceptions of Australian AIMEP participants toward Indonesia	Perceptions of Indonesian AIMEP Participants toward Australia
Indonesia is very similar to the Arab countries, India or Pakistan.	Most believe that in Australia there are only white people and Christians.
Do not have any knowledge of Indonesian culture, cultural	Not having sufficient knowledge that there are

elements such as wayang or traditional Indonesian dances and music originating from Hindu heritage, or about Borobudur and Prambanan Temples.	many mosques in Australia and that there are also places of worship for other religions, such as synagogues and Hindu temples.
Do not understand that there are different religious groups in Indonesia, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, and there are also progressive and conservative groups.	Believing that it is quite difficult to find halal meat.
Not understanding that the role of women in Indonesia is strong and even has many female leaders.	There is a view that there are no members of Parliament who are Muslim. Not having enough information, it turns out that interfaith dialog is very actively conducted in Australia.
Do not have adequate knowledge regarding the existence of Islamic boarding schools and the strength of Islamic studies in Islamic schools in Indonesia.	Did not know that in Australia, there is no Ministry of Religion. Nor does it understand that the government does not limit certain religious groups such as Shia, Ahmadiyah, or other sects because the state does not control religious expression.

Based on Table 3, in general, before participating in the AIMEP, participants from Australia and Indonesia had limited perceptions or understanding of each other. Meanwhile, after participating in the AIMEP, a positive perception was built. What became a positive perception for participants from Australia toward Indonesia was that they were very impressed with Indonesia's diversity, tolerance in terms of different interpretations of Islam and other different religions, a strong position and access for women in religious leadership, as well as access and the role of women in the mosque. Meanwhile, the positive perceptions of the participants from Indonesia toward Australia relate to the multicultural Australian society, the freedom of Australian Muslims to practice their faith in peace, strong democratic traditions, and freedom of religion and expression.

Another major impact is the creation of a strong and close-knit network among AIMEP alumni through the existence of the AIMEP Alumni Forum, which is an important forum as a manifestation of the goodwill and friendship between Australia and Indonesia (AIMEP ALUMNI FORUM, 2017; Syukur, 2022). Based on the feedback provided by alumni, 95% stated that the impact they had after participating in the AIMEP was that they were amazed to learn about their neighboring country and called the AIMEP a "life-changing" experience. After the AIMEP ended, many Indonesian AIMEP alumni returned to Australia to continue their studies, while some of the Australian AIMEP alumni also returned to Indonesia for holidays or for social projects, such as volunteering after the Aceh tsunami or the Yogyakarta earthquake (Gould, 2022).

5. AIMEP's 20-Year Significance in the Australia–Indonesia Relationship

It is a fact that the Australian and Indonesian publics too often face conditions of not knowing each other, even between Muslim communities in the two countries. The two countries have several things in common, from shared beliefs and values to common interests. Unfortunately, the public in both countries often does not know much about each other. This condition is then strengthened by the existence of the media, which sometimes only reports obstructive events that occur during relations between Australia and Indonesia (Hudson & Anwar, 2021).

If for decades, Indonesian Islam has only been an academic study in educational institutions and universities such as ANU, and then the existence of the AIMEP program seeks to go beyond this. This exchange program not only seeks to understand cultural dynamics through scientific studies or only seen through the foreign policies of Australia and Indonesia but also makes this happen through cooperation between various parties, which enables Australia–Indonesia relations to be improved to a people-to-people level (Hooker, 2022).

Thus, the AIMEP as a public diplomacy instrument that makes young Australian–Indonesian Muslim figures a strategic aspect has significance, especially because it involves a large dialogical element in the priorities of various AIMEP program activities. Specifically, AIMEP's 20-year significance in the Australia–Indonesia relationship can be analyzed into two groups: (1) strengthening people-to-people relations and (2) the realization of dialog between civilizations (the inter-civilizational dialog).

5.1. Significance of AIMEP in Strengthening People-to-People Relations

As a response to the emergence of non-state actors in international issues, the practice of diplomacy has also experienced expansion, especially in terms of diplomatic activities that have become more flexible, that is, they can be carried out by anyone, anywhere, and in any form. This is what underlies the emergence of the concept of multi-track diplomacy, where the fourth path is private citizenship, namely efforts to realize peace through personal involvement. In this case, every individual in a country will contribute and participate in development and peace activities. Citizens can do this through citizen diplomacy, exchange programs, private voluntary organizations, NGOs, and various interest groups (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). One example of the implementation of this fourth multi-track diplomacy is the youth exchange program, which is seen as capable of achieving diplomacy down to the grassroots level.

The AIMEP, which is an instrument of Australia–

Indonesia public diplomacy, shows the important role of individuals as non-state actors in international relations. The AIMEP is an exchange program that specifically forms the basis for Australia to conduct its public diplomacy by positioning Islam and the Australian–Indonesian community, in this case, young Muslim figures as a strategic aspect, is used by Australia to instill a positive perception of the Australian state. Meanwhile, from the Indonesian side, even though the Indonesian government was not directly involved in initiating the AIMEP, the existence of young Indonesian Muslim figures involved in the AIMEP has made a significant contribution to Indonesia’s public diplomacy efforts toward Australia. These young Australian–Indonesian Muslim figures, who later became AIMEP alumni, continue to make active contributions in their respective fields. The existence of these alumni plays an important role because each of them has a community base and shares a professional network that will contribute to the development and dynamics of Australia–Indonesia relations in the future.

Thus, the existence of young Muslim figures, a strategic aspect of AIMEP, is the essential asset of this exchange program based on the view that building communication and harmony between groups, even between religions, can be achieved in various ways. People-to-people is one potential way because dialog can be conducted informally so that the main goal of transferring knowledge to each other can be realized. Information that is only obtained through the media and the internet is not enough to explain. Meeting, having dialog, and experiencing Muslim life directly in a place will be better able to provide comprehensive knowledge. It is hoped that the experience of one person will spread to others. The AIMEP opens up new networks, both for participants and the wider community. Communication links, even if only carried out by individuals, are important for the relations between countries. In other words, diplomatic relations may experience ups and downs according to the orientation of the government, but sociocultural relations will continue to last (Umam, 2022).

Apart from AIMEP, there are several programs aimed at encouraging people-to-people relationships, especially between young Australians and Indonesians. DFAT, for example, has education programs at the school level (BRIDGE Program, Schools Exchange Small Grants Program) and tertiary level education (Australia Awards and New Colombo Plan), as well as the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP), which is targeted at youth aged 21 to 25 years (Williams, 2022). These programs have not captured the full potential of these person-to-person relationships for various reasons. The Australia Awards program, for example, which focuses on bringing Australians to Indonesia and Indonesians to Australia, apparently does not provide optimal opportunities for networking

among award recipients or with the wider hosting public. Indonesian students, for example, often do not develop meaningful relationships with the local population during their stay in Australia, although they may develop some personal relationships.

This may also be due to cultural barriers and a lack of interest among Australians and Indonesians. Contrast this with the US Fulbright scholarship program, which deliberately seeks to integrate networking opportunities and publicity support into its program, while maintaining an alumni association with a closed online database. Second, these programs tend to frame Australia–Indonesia exchange programs through a dichotomous view of bilateral relations. They measure success through capacity building among Australians and Indonesians on the assumption that these two categories of people are always viewed differently from each other and rarely seen as an opportunity to enrich the nature of the bilateral relationship between the two countries (Tanu, 2014). In other words, there has not been a structured way for the two communities to interact and network with each other, which would allow for cross-program collaboration that could involve the wider youth community, who would contribute to the future development of Australia–Indonesia relations.

On the basis of the enormous advantages that AIMEP has compared to other programs containing public diplomacy and exchange diplomacy, it is deemed necessary to develop several potential opportunities for AIMEP in the future. One possible opportunity is to expand programs that enable greater efforts to strengthen person-to-person relationships, including through organizing various programs that allow alumni to get involved, for example, in the form of monthly meetings, both online and offline, and with a hybrid online model and offline in the future. DFAT then also funded a similar program aimed at ASEAN countries over the past few years, namely the Australia-ASEAN Muslim Exchange Program (AAMEP), where in 2019 AAMEP was held offline and in 2022. Currently, AAMEP has 45 alumni from five countries, namely Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines. One interesting aspect of AAMEP is that it allows Muslim communities in minority countries such as Thailand and the Philippines to meet. In the future, it is hoped that these two exchange programs can be further integrated so that alumni from AIMEP and AAMEP can meet and collaborate (Fealy, 2022).

5.2. Significance of AIMEP as an Embodiment of Dialogue between Civilizations

In the context of Australia–Indonesia relations, the two countries have various forms of public diplomacy toward each other, which are carried out, for example, through cultural, educational and media activities. The advantage of AIMEP compared to other forms of public

diplomacy lies in the opportunity to carry out a two-way dialog in which it allows the public to be involved, and exchange ideas and views, to bring up new, more positive perspectives, which in turn will open up various opportunities for collaboration. In other words, the existence of AIMEP during Australia–Indonesia diplomatic relations is seen as very relevant in efforts to contribute as a form of dialogue between civilizations. The AIMEP encourages the opening of opportunities for public meetings among all types of groups in Australian and Indonesian society so that there are also opportunities to discuss and explain values and goals and expressions of these values and goals (for example in print media, social media, and public life) between the two countries.

Dialogue enables selected participants of AIMEP to interact and exchange ideas with academics, community organizations (including youth and women's organizations), religious leaders, schools, media, and government representatives. Through this series of inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogues, it is hoped that the AIMEP participants from Australia and Indonesia will have the opportunity to learn from each other, express opinions, and gain new, more positive perspectives on various issues that have surfaced, both regarding Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as well as Australia–Indonesia relations in general (Chopra, 2022).

In this case, exchange programs such as AIMEP, which involve young Australian and Indonesian Muslim leaders, will be able to contribute to good relations between Australia and Indonesia in the future through a series of dialog activities carried out, implying a shared meaning and desire to continue to spread the universal values of existing religions to promote humanity, solidarity, and pluralism. No more stereotypes and discrimination against other groups. Stereotypes arise because of individual and group beliefs that see people who are different in race and religion, which then leads to discrimination. From there arises prejudice which is an attitude, opinion, or feeling of liking (favorable) or not liking (unfavorable) which is formed without certain knowledge, reasons, and thoughts. Stereotypes that appear either openly or hidden, of course, have an impact on discriminatory behavior, which in the end will increasingly give rise to feelings of being different from one another (Blaxland, 2021).

In this context, the AIMEP has significant contributions as a form of dialog to resolve conflicts based on political, social, and economic differences. This is possible because the dialogue between civilizations can be considered as a deliberate attempt to redefine “self” and “others”, where in principle, an invitation to dialogue requires acceptance of the existence of other parties based on equality (dialogue from an equal position), cultural diversity, the spirit of cooperation, efforts to establish friendship and solidarity, and the creation of a common understanding

between the parties involved.

6. Conclusion

This study found that the launch of AIMEP in 2002 was not only an instrument to bridge differences and overcome public misperceptions based on political, religious, social, cultural, and economic differences, but more importantly, it had a contribution and significance in building a positive image of Australia and Indonesia, namely through dialogue-based public diplomacy and inter-civilization dialogue carried out by young Muslim leaders from both countries.

The significance of AIMEP compared with other forms of public diplomacy lies in the following:

1) As an exchange program, the AIMEP is designed not only to provide selected participants with the opportunity to gain direct experience of life in their neighboring countries but also to enable the participation of various ethnic, social, and cultural groups (Muslim and non-Muslim).

2) The AIMEP shows the essential role of individuals as non-state actors in international relations, where building people-to-people relations is one potential way of informal channels to realize the primary goal of transferring knowledge to each other.

3) There is an opportunity to carry out a two-way dialog that makes it possible to involve the public and exchange ideas and views to give rise to new, more positive perspectives, which, in turn, will open up various future opportunities for collaboration.

Thus, at the public level in both countries, it is necessary to continue to develop an understanding that the essential element that determines the success of public diplomacy based on dialog and dialog between civilizations lies in the involvement of people at the grassroots community level in efforts to create and support the ongoing process based on the understanding that it is more effective to practice dialog in a bottom-up rather than top-down structure. Specifically, for the AIMEP program, maximizing the role of young Australian–Indonesian Muslim leaders will be a crucial tool for success because they can become "opinion leaders" whose function as disseminators and main transmitters of information in particular communities or perform the role of "multipliers" and having a crucial role related to the future of a country.

From the perspective of policymakers – namely the Australian and Indonesian governments – considering that public diplomacy is based on dialog and dialog between civilizations as part of diplomacy often carried out in the context of lip service or normative conversations, every party involved is challenged to make it more practical. This study proposes that the Australian Indonesian government should set more realistic targets and indicators of success. It is also essential to increase sustainable alumni involvement, considering that through their network, it is possible to conduct various collaborations to optimize the

significant role of AIMEP alumni as a bridge for people-to-people relations between Australia and Indonesia.

In the end, based on the contribution and significance contained in exchange programs like AIMEP, this study underlines the potential for AIMEP to adapt into a model of public diplomacy based on dialogue and dialogue between civilizations, which can be carried out between countries or other regions in the world – in the context of the meeting of the West and Islam – for example, between countries in the Middle East and countries in Europe, America, or Africa.

7. Limitations and Further Study

One thing to criticize and explore further is that dialog-based public diplomacy and dialog between civilizations is a long-term process and cannot solve all problems immediately. In other words, public diplomacy based on dialog and dialog between civilizations cannot produce immediate results but requires a comprehensive effort involving dialog at the government level and between individuals, groups, and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to continue this process consistently so that, finally, it will achieve the goals expected in the future.

In this regard, further research is necessary regarding the significance of AIMEP as a model of public diplomacy and a form of dialog between Australian–Indonesian civilizations, especially to determine the level of success of the implementation of this exchange program. Indicators of target achievement and further academic analysis are necessary to state how appropriate AIMEP is as a public diplomacy model for inter-civilizational dialog between Australia and Indonesia, especially in the meeting of the West and Islam.

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