

Indonesian Ulama's Peace Advocacy in the Palestine-Israel Conflict Following the October 7, 2023 Attack

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of Indonesian ulama in advocating peace in the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Employing a qualitative approach with a library research design, the study analyzes academic literature, official statements of Islamic organizations, and public communications of ulama related to the conflict. Data analysis was conducted through initial coding, thematic analysis, and theory-driven interpretation guided by Johan Galtung's peace-violence triangle, John Paul Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid, and Brewer et al.'s concept of bridging social capital. The findings reveal that Indonesian ulama function as multi-level peace actors intervening in the dimensions of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Their roles are structured across leadership levels: top leadership through MUI's political diplomacy; middle-range leadership through NU's transnational engagement and Muhammadiyah's humanitarian diplomacy; and grassroots leadership through solidarity mobilization by religious communities. Furthermore, ulama effectively mobilize bridging social capital within institutional, political, public, and intellectual spheres to enhance humanitarian advocacy and global peace diplomacy. Conceptually, this study contributes an integrated model of ulama engagement in networked peacebuilding across local-global scales. Practically, it recommends strengthening government and Islamic organization collaboration in religious diplomacy and peace literacy to foster a more just and humane international order.

Keywords: Indonesian Ulama, Peace Advocacy, Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, Bridging Social Capital, Palestine-Israel Conflict.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menganalisis peran ulama Indonesia dalam advokasi perdamaian pada konflik Palestina-Israel pasca-serangan 7 Oktober 2023. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan, melalui seleksi sumber akademik, dokumen organisasi keagamaan, serta pernyataan publik ulama yang relevan. Analisis data dilakukan melalui initial coding, thematic analysis, dan theory-driven interpretation menggunakan kerangka peace-violence triangle Johan Galtung, peacebuilding pyramid John Paul Lederach, dan konsep bridging social capital Brewer et al. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ulama Indonesia berperan sebagai multi-level peace actors yang mengintervensi dimensi kekerasan langsung (direct), struktural (structural), dan kultural (cultural violence). Peran tersebut terstruktur dalam tiga level kepemimpinan: top leadership melalui diplomasi politik MUI; middle-range leadership melalui jaringan internasional NU dan diplomasi kemanusiaan Muhammadiyah; serta grassroots leadership melalui mobilisasi solidaritas publik oleh komunitas keagamaan. Selain itu, ulama memobilisasi bridging social capital pada ruang institusional, politik, publik, dan intelektual untuk memperluas legitimasi internasional dan daya jangkauan advokasi kemanusiaan. Kontribusi konseptual studi ini terletak pada perumusan model terintegrasi mengenai peran ulama dalam networked

peacebuilding global. Secara praktis, penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan kolaborasi pemerintah-ormas Islam dalam diplomasi keagamaan dan literasi perdamaian untuk mendorong tatanan internasional yang lebih adil dan berkeadaban.

Kata Kunci: *Ulama Indonesia, Perdamaian, Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, Bridging Social Capital, Palestina-Israel.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 triggered the most significant escalation in the contemporary history of the Palestine-Israel conflict, resulting in a dramatic rise in Palestinian civilian casualties in Gaza (Mhadhbi, 2024). This humanitarian crisis generated global responses, particularly from Muslim-majority countries that emphasized the urgency of ending violence and restoring humanitarian stability (Zaenuddin, 2023). Indonesia as a home to the world's largest Muslim population and without formal diplomatic ties to Israel, reaffirmed its political and moral support for Palestine through humanitarian diplomacy and faith-based peace advocacy.

In this context, Indonesian ulama, as authoritative religious figures, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, mobilizing humanitarian action, and advocating for peace and justice for Palestine. Major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have consistently called for an immediate cessation of violence and urged a just and lawful resolution to the conflict (Afandi, 2023b; Patoni, 2023). However, academic studies examining the concrete contributions of Indonesian ulama to global peace advocacy, particularly in the aftermath of the post-October 7 escalation, remain limited in both peace studies and non-state diplomacy scholarship.

The role of ulama is often reduced to symbolic expressions of solidarity, overlooking their capacity as transnational peace actors engaged in faith-based diplomacy. For this reason, this study focuses on analyzing the contributions of Indonesian ulama in advocating for peace after the 7 October 2023 attack, both through religious organizations and through individual interventions in speech and writing. To examine these contributions, this study applies Galtung's peace theory, Lederach's Peacebuilding Pyramid, and Brewer, Higgins & Teeney's concept of bridging social capital.

Johan Galtung's peace theory distinguishes between negative peace (the absence

of direct violence) and positive peace (the presence of justice and harmonious social relations) (Galtung, 1969). He also introduced the Violence Triangle, consisting of direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). John Paul Lederach, through the Peacebuilding Pyramid, highlights the importance of a multilevel approach involving three categories of peace actors: top leadership (political elites, religious leaders, public figures), middle-range leadership (religious scholars, academics, NGOs), and grassroots actors (local leaders and community-based organizations) (Lederach, 1997).

Meanwhile, Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney conceptualize religion as a form of bridging social capital operating across four strategic social arenas: the intellectual sphere, the institutional sphere, the market sphere, and the political sphere. These arenas are essential for enabling religious organizations to facilitate transitions from negative to positive peace, and to move from pastoral engagement toward constructive political involvement (Brewer, Higgins, & Teeney, 2010).

Existing scholarship on the Palestine-Israel conflict and the role of religious leaders is extensive. One of the most influential studies is by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, who analyzes the transformational potential of religious leadership in the conflict, particularly through initiatives in interreligious dialogue and nonviolent action. His article, *“Religious Leaders in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Violent Incitement to Nonviolence Resistance,”* outlines the challenges and opportunities faced by religious leaders as they attempt to position religion as a force for peace rather than a justification for violence (Abu-Nimer, 2011). This study provides an important analytical framework for understanding how ulama and other faith leaders can mobilize peaceful narratives and present religion as a key driver of nonviolent advocacy.

Mudore, in his study *“Peran Diplomasi Indonesia dalam Konflik Israel-Palestina,”* demonstrates that Indonesia has long taken an active role in efforts to resolve the conflict, particularly during its tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Indonesia has acted in multiple capacities: facilitator, mediator, initiator, and diplomatic actor, aimed at advancing conflict resolution processes (Mudore, 2019). Meanwhile, Zidni et al., in *“Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as a Non-State Actor Mediator: A New Approach to Israeli-Palestinian Peace,”* argue that NU's engagement as a non-state actor has introduced an alternative model of mediation within the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Their findings suggest that NU holds significant potential to facilitate a more inclusive and comprehensive peace process by utilizing religious authority, transnational networks, and socio-cultural legitimacy (Zidni, Zuhdi, Machmudi, & Syauquillah, 2024).

Muttaqin, in his study *“Konsistensi Muhammadiyah dalam Mendukung Kemerdekaan Palestina,”* examines the Palestine-Israel conflict through the lens of Muhammadiyah’s long-standing commitment to supporting Palestinian independence. He argues that Muhammadiyah’s adherence to *Islam berkembang* and its alignment with Indonesia’s constitutional mandate are expressed through consistent organizational decisions, public statements, leadership engagement, and humanitarian assistance directed toward Palestine (Muttaqin, 2024). In the context of the digital era, Setia and Rahim’s *“The Nahdlatul Ulama's Contribution to Peacemaking in a Digital Era”* highlights how NU strategically utilizes online platforms to disseminate messages of peace and tolerance and to promote open interfaith dialogue. Their study demonstrates how religious leaders and faith-based organizations are innovating to reach broader audiences and cultivate critical public awareness through digital means an increasingly vital component of contemporary peace advocacy (Setia & Rahim, 2024).

Contesa, Tanti, and Benli, in their study *“Peacebuilding Pyramid: The Role of Religious Leaders in Post-Civil War Peace Efforts in Southern Sudan,”* argue that within the framework of the peacebuilding pyramid, religious leaders play a critical role in sustaining peace in South Sudan following the 2013 conflict. Their contribution spans the top, middle-range, and grassroots levels, demonstrating how faith-based leadership influences political elites, mediates community relations, and mobilizes local constituencies for reconciliation (Contesa, Tanti, & Benli, 2024). Qurtubi and Pahmi, in *“A Study on the Role of Ulama in Reducing Socio-Religious Conflicts,”* examine the role of ulama in mitigating socio-religious tensions in Indonesia. Their findings highlight the significance of religious scholars in conflict prevention through doctrinal guidance, media engagement, and community involvement. Another key contribution identified in their work is the ulama’s role in countering radical ideologies while fostering tolerance and mutual understanding among diverse societal groups (Qurtubi & Pahmi, 2025).

Based on the review above, the author did not find any study that fully parallels the present research. The existing works share partial similarities such as focusing on the Palestine-Israel conflict, the role of religious leaders, or peace advocacy, but none

integrates these elements into a single, comprehensive analysis. To date, no study has simultaneously examined the Palestine-Israel conflict, the role of Indonesian ulama, the impact of the October 7, 2023 attack, and faith-based peace advocacy in one unified framework. Therefore, this research occupies a distinct scholarly position and fills a critical gap in the existing literature.

This study offers a novel contribution by integrating three influential peace theories, typically used separately, to analyze the role of religious actors in global conflicts, thereby enriching scholarship on faith-based peace diplomacy. Practically, the study proposes a model of Indonesian ulama's peace advocacy that can serve as a strategic reference for religious organizations and government institutions seeking to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian diplomacy for Palestine, across the dimensions of policy, international solidarity networks, and public mobilization.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as its primary methodological design. Creswell notes that qualitative research focuses on understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This framework is particularly relevant for examining how Indonesian ulama advocate for peace in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attack within the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Data selection followed specific inclusion criteria: (1) reputable academic publications (journal articles, books, conference proceedings); (2) official documents issued by major religious organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI); and (3) verified public statements by ulama disseminated through credible mass media or institutional communication channels between October 2023 and December 2024. Exclusion criteria were established to minimize source bias by omitting anonymous opinion pieces, unverified materials, extreme political propaganda, and news reports lacking journalistic balance. Data collection and screening were conducted through academic databases, organizational archives, and systematic media monitoring.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, initial coding was used to identify meaning units related to the positions, narratives, and actions of ulama concerning peace advocacy. Second, thematic analysis was applied to cluster these codes into substantive

themes reflecting the roles of ulama in violence prevention, humanitarian diplomacy, and cross-actor solidarity building. Third, theory-driven interpretation was conducted by mapping the findings onto Galtung's peace-violence triangle (negative/positive peace; direct, structural, and cultural violence), Lederach's Peacebuilding Pyramid (top, middle-range, and grassroots leadership), and Brewer et al.'s bridging social capital framework (institutional, political, public, and intellectual domains). Research credibility was ensured through source triangulation and consistency in coding, while dependability was maintained by systematically documenting the analytical process as an audit trail. Thus, the interpretation of findings is grounded in valid data and meets academic standards of rigor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Palestine-Israel Conflict After the October 7, 2023 Attack

The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 Israelis and the abduction of more than 250 individuals, accompanied by the launching of thousands of rockets into Israeli territory (Burke, 2024; Mehvar, 2024). Israel responded by declaring war, initiating extensive aerial bombardments, and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of reserve troops under the military operation "Operation Iron Sword," which sought to dismantle Hamas' military and administrative capabilities (Bordas, 2024; Gradstein, 2023). A full blockade on energy, food, and essential services in Gaza was imposed, followed by a ground invasion beginning on 27 October 2023.

The large-scale Israeli offensive resulted in the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including educational, religious, and medical facilities. By June 2024, more than 37,000 Palestinians had been killed, most of them women and children, while tens of thousands were injured, and over 60% of housing units were severely damaged (Al Jazeera, 2023; UNHR-OHC, 2024b). Hospitals such as Al-Shifa and the Indonesia Hospital were also targeted, despite the lack of conclusive evidence supporting claims that these facilities were used for Hamas' military operations (UNHR-OHC, 2024a). The conflict subsequently expanded into Lebanon, Iran, and Yemen, signalling broader regional escalation.

In Gaza, more than 90% of the population was repeatedly displaced, facing increasingly dire humanitarian conditions. By October 2024, the death toll had surpassed

40,000, including thousands of children orphaned by the continuous military operations (UNRWA, 2024). The situation underscores the transformation of the conflict into a deep humanitarian catastrophe, with long-term implications for regional stability and the lives of the Palestinian population.

Indonesian Ulama's Peace Advocacy

Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI)

On 22 October 2023, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued a *Humanitarian Declaration for Palestine*, which articulated a collective moral stance and involved religious leaders as well as Islamic organizations in urging an immediate cessation of hostilities and the protection of human rights for the Palestinian people. MUI asserted that the situation in Palestine constitutes a form of global injustice that must be promptly ended. The Council reaffirmed its support for Palestinian independence as part of the commitment to realizing a just and civilized humanity. It also called for the immediate implementation of UN resolutions, particularly the two-state solution. Furthermore, MUI urged the United Nations to halt the war and bring Israel before international courts, while similarly pressing member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take firm action (Attar, 2023).

On 8 November 2023, MUI issued *Fatwa* No. 83 of 2023 concerning support for the Palestinian struggle. This *fatwa* underscores the obligation of Muslims to support Palestinian independence, including allowing zakat distribution to aid the Palestinian cause. It also prohibits any form of support for Israel, either directly or indirectly. The Indonesian government, the OIC, and the UN were urged to stop the war and impose sanctions on Israel. In addition, Muslims were advised to refrain from consuming or using Israeli products or those affiliated with entities supporting Israeli aggression in Palestine (Komisi Fatwa, 2023).

MUI continued to campaign for the boycott of Israeli products and affiliated corporations (Junaidi, 2024a). This *fatwa* is believed to have significantly influenced consumer behavior, with several regions in Indonesia reporting a noticeable decline in the purchase of Israeli-linked goods (Ardi, 2024). Economic boycotts, considered a mechanism for weakening Israel's economic capacity, may be categorized as a religious obligation for Muslims, especially if such measures meaningfully contribute to opening

pathways toward peace between the conflicting parties (An Noor, 2024).

The *fatwa* has exerted considerable economic pressure on companies dependent on global supply chains. It has also strengthened the development of alternative economic ecosystems among Muslim consumers and industries, thereby reducing reliance on products linked to Israel. Socially, the *fatwa* has contributed to increased public solidarity with Palestine, manifested in growing humanitarian advocacy efforts (Zunaidi & Maghfiroh, 2024).

MUI's advocacy for Palestinian independence has not diminished. In early 2025, Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, Head of MUI's Division for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation, stated that the defense of Palestinian independence will remain unwavering for as long as Palestine remains under occupation. He emphasized that all measures to support Palestinian liberation must continue to be strengthened (Junaidi, 2025).

During the *7th Ijtima Ulama Forum*, Sudarnoto stressed that the Palestine-Israel conflict has intensified trends of Islamophobia, particularly in Western countries. He reminded the Indonesian government to uphold its long-standing commitment to Palestinian independence. Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Fatwa Commission, Asrorun Ni'am, asserted that genocide or the occupation of any nation constitutes a violation and betrayal of the principle of self-determination and stands in contradiction to international law (Junaidi, 2024b).

Nahdlatul Ulama

Amid the escalating Palestine-Israel conflict, the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) issued seven official statements outlining its position. These statements expressed deep concern over the intensifying violence, called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, urged the international community to take decisive action, and appealed to the UN Security Council to refrain from taking a partisan stance. PBNU also warned against instrumentalizing religion to fuel hostility and hatred, instead promoting compassion, fraternity, and justice as the moral foundation for resolving the conflict. Additionally, NU members were encouraged to perform *ṣalāt ghaib* and pray for the victims (Patoni, 2023).

On 27 November 2023, PBNU initiated and convened the R20 ISORA (R20 International Summit of Religious Authorities), an international platform bringing together global religious leaders to discuss the role of religion in addressing violence in

the Middle East and broader threats to the international order. The summit also functioned as a space for peace advocacy and interreligious collaboration. Yahya Cholil Tsquf, PBNU Chairman, emphasized that this forum was not merely symbolic; rather, it aimed to urge religious leaders to actively mobilize their constituencies and influence policymakers to help halt the ongoing conflict (Indiraphasa, 2023).

One month after the escalation, NUcare-LAZISNU launched a solidarity initiative to support Palestinians in Gaza. Muslimat NU played a significant role in mobilizing humanitarian aid. By 4 May 2024, Muslimat NU had delivered three rounds of assistance through NUcare-LAZISNU. the first contribution of IDR 716.5 million on 6 November 2023, the second contribution of IDR 2.27 billion on 20 December 2023, and a third contribution of IDR 2 billion on 4 May 2024 (Ulya & Ramadhan, 2024).

One year after the escalation, Yahya Cholil Tsquf reaffirmed PBNU's stance that all forms of violence must be halted immediately. He urged both Israel and Palestine to prioritize de-escalation as an urgent step to prevent broader global repercussions (Indiraphasa, 2024).

Muhammadiyah

As one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah took an active stance in response to the rapidly escalating Palestine-Israel conflict, particularly following the 7 October 2023 attack. Muhammadiyah issued seven official statements addressing the crisis, expressing deep concern and condolences for the civilian casualties and injuries. The organization called for immediate political and diplomatic measures by the United Nations to halt hostilities, urged Israel to refrain from exploiting the war to pursue annexation or territorial aggression, and requested the Indonesian government to take a proactive role in safeguarding efforts to support Palestine. Indonesian society was also urged to remain vigilant against misinformation and instead focus on providing material and moral assistance to the Palestinian people. Muhammadiyah reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to the Palestinian cause and expressed readiness to send humanitarian aid and volunteers, particularly to assist vulnerable groups such as women and children (Afandi, 2023b).

Humanitarian fundraising efforts were coordinated through Muhammadiyah's official philanthropic body, *the Amil Zakat, Infak, and Sedekah Institution* (LAZISMU).

As of 23 October, LAZISMU had raised IDR 1.7 billion in donations, a figure described as provisional, with fundraising efforts continuing beyond moments of acute crisis. Even prior to the 2023 escalation, Muhammadiyah had implemented various programs in education, healthcare, and economic empowerment for Palestinian communities during periods of relative stability (Afandi, 2023a).

Separately, prominent Muhammadiyah preacher Adi Hidayat underscored the importance of boycotting Israeli products and those affiliated with Israel. Referring to MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023, he urged Muslims to exert economic pressure by withholding support from companies tied to Israeli interests. He emphasized that such economic measures could meaningfully weaken Israel's capacity to sustain its military actions. In addition, he called on Muslims to support Palestinians through prayer and continued contributions to humanitarian relief (Purwanto, 2023).

Individual Statements and Other Institutional Initiatives

Said Aqil Siradj argued that the Palestine-Israel conflict will perpetually recur due to Israel's unresolved territorial boundaries. He emphasized that Israel remains the only modern state without clearly defined borders, largely because of its continued expansionist practices into Palestinian territories. Said also urged the Indonesian government to play a more active diplomatic role in helping de-escalate tensions between the two sides, while expressing respect for Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs for her persistent efforts to advocate peace in the conflict (Ashri, 2023).

Quraish Shihab, founder of the Center for Qur'anic Studies (PSQ), organized a public forum titled *"Our Role in Supporting Palestine"*. The event was a collaboration between PSQ and the Istiqlal Mosque and brought together prominent religious leaders and national figures, including Prof. Dr. Nasaruddin Umar (Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque), KH. Ulil Abshar Abdalla (PBNU Executive), Abdul Kadir Jailani (Director-General for Asia-Pacific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Savic Ali (Founder of Islami.co/NU Young Leader), Kalis Mardiasih (Gender Activist), Adrian Perkasa (Historian/Academic), Habib Husein Ja'far (Millennial Preacher), and Faried F. Saenong (PSQ Expert Council) (Siaran Pers, 2024).

The forum underscored that, according to Quraish Shihab, the oppression faced by Palestinians represents a grave threat to global humanity. Support for Palestine, he stressed, must not be grounded merely in religious affinity but in a moral imperative to

defend human rights and the self-determination of an occupied people. Speakers highlighted the importance of religious diplomacy, historically informed public education, and synergy between civil society and government institutions in advancing effective advocacy (Siaran Pers, 2024).

The panelists also emphasized the strategic contribution of diverse societal sectors in strengthening global solidarity for Palestine, from social media campaigns and economic boycott movements that have demonstrably pressured pro-Israel corporate networks, to broader knowledge dissemination aimed at countering propaganda and misinformation. Support for Palestine was framed as an integral component of universal humanitarian struggle, prompting calls for the public to engage in concrete and sustained efforts to promote peace and international justice (Siaran Pers, 2024).

Based on the data presented above, the author identifies several codes that serve as units of meaning. These include calls for a ceasefire, condemnation of human rights violations, coordination of humanitarian assistance, religious scholars' diplomatic engagement in international forums, and public discussions or forums on justice for Palestine. These codes were subsequently organized into three (3) overarching themes: (1) the prevention and cessation of direct violence, (2) humanitarian diplomacy and structural justice advocacy, and (3) the strengthening of cross-actor social solidarity.

Advocacy for Ending Direct Violence and Advancing Structural and Cultural Justice

The activism of Indonesian religious scholars reflects a dual commitment: advancing *negative peace* by rejecting direct violence, and pursuing *positive peace* by asserting structural and moral justice for Palestine. The official statements of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) calling for an end to aggression, along with its diplomatic engagement with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), function as interventions against both *direct violence*, such as Israel's military assault, and *structural violence*, particularly the humanitarian blockade. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) issued resolutions emphasizing human dignity, linking forms of *cultural violence* to dehumanizing narratives directed at Palestinians. Muhammadiyah foregrounded civil rights advocacy and medical relief as strategic responses to entrenched structural harm.

Galtung distinguishes *direct violence* as physical acts that result in injury or death.

Interventions targeting direct violence must break chains of physical escalation, diminish the capacity or intention of actors to commit violence, or reduce the likelihood of armed confrontation. Ceasefire appeals, religious decrees (*fatwas*), and mediated dialogue operate precisely within these domains. Religious leaders attempt to reshape intentions (through normative deterrence), constrain the legitimacy of violent operations (legitimacy constraints), and reopen channels of communication that may prevent further escalation. In this sense, their actions theoretically and functionally satisfy the criteria for intervening in direct violence.

Advocacy for policy reform, demands to lift the blockade, and humanitarian mobilization directly target *structural violence* by altering conditions that perpetuate long-term suffering, particularly access to services, legal protections, and economic resources. Within Galtung's framework, structural violence refers to systemic arrangements, policies, and power relations that restrict basic rights (healthcare, education, livelihood, and security) without the presence of an identifiable perpetrator. The Gaza blockade, restrictions on water, electricity, and logistics, and discriminatory policies against Palestinian civilians exemplify structural violence, as they generate ongoing deprivation and *silent suffering* through indirect, preventable deaths.

The measures taken by Indonesian ulama and Islamic organizations constitute interventions against structural violence through Policy Change and Legal Pressure. Diplomatic demands and regulatory advocacy are directed at altering oppressive structures, the policies of the Israeli authorities, by pushing for humanitarian corridors, easing trade restrictions, or revising security measures that disproportionately target civilians. When the blockade is loosened, access to medical treatment, education, food, and mobility increases, thereby reducing structural harm.

Within the clause of *Humanitarian Accessibility*, humanitarian campaigns, donations, medical deployment, and civilian evacuation improve institutional access for affected populations. These measures restore survival capacities, reduce malnutrition, address delayed treatment, and prevent indirect fatalities caused by collapsed public infrastructure. Meanwhile, the clause *Changing Global Power Structure* is reflected in ulama-led advocacy campaigns that help generate international pressure and delegitimize oppressive regimes, shifting the balance of power in global discourse.

Public discussions, theological narratives against dehumanization, and interfaith

dialogues are strategies that directly target *cultural violence* by dismantling moral justifications for violence and constructing cultural legitimacy for sustainable peace. Galtung defines cultural violence as symbolic, religious, ideological, or knowledge-based frameworks that render violence acceptable, necessary, or inevitable. In the Palestinian context, religious extremism that glorifies violence, narratives that portray Palestinians as disposable enemies, and global media biases function as cultural foundations that normalize conflict.

In this framework, public forums, anti-dehumanization religious discourses, and interfaith initiatives led by Indonesian religious scholars constitute cultural peacebuilding through the deconstruction of violent legitimacies. Public platforms offer counter-narratives that challenge ideological grounds used to justify military aggression. When scholars assert that the conflict is not a religious war and condemn identity-based hatred, they undermine the moral basis previously used to rationalize oppression.

Humanizing the “enemy” and reconstructing a moral foundation for peace becomes possible through theological narratives that affirm human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*) and universal humanitarian ethics. These narratives restore the enemy as a moral subject, not an expendable object, an essential step in dismantling the *enemy image* that fuels unrestrained violence. Interfaith dialogue programs create spaces of interaction that transcend sectarian boundaries, increasing acceptance, trust, and shared identity. Such efforts erode stereotypes that reinforce cultural conflict while building a shared normative ground for peaceful coexistence.

Peacebuilding Processes of Indonesian Ulama within a Multi-Level Peace Actors Framework

Within Lederach’s framework, *top leadership* refers to actors who possess high formal authority, national legitimacy, and the capacity to shape strategic political decisions. In the Indonesian context, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) and nationally recognized religious scholars clearly occupy this tier. MUI maintains direct institutional channels with the state and is frequently consulted in public policy concerning religious issues. Prominent ulama also wield moral and social authority that extends beyond formal political structures, enabling them to influence both elite decision-makers and broader public opinion.

Their role aligns with Lederach's description of *strategic peace intervention* at the upper level. MUI's political legitimacy in peace advocacy is demonstrated through its official statements, ceasefire appeals, and religious rulings condemning violence. Its advocacy for ending the blockade, calling for compliance with international law, and reinforcing humanitarian diplomacy exerts pressure on policymakers. Religious authorities often function as credible mediators and bridge-builders, especially within identity-based conflicts such as the Palestinian issue. Such alternative diplomatic channels become particularly valuable when formal diplomatic routes reach an impasse.

In Lederach's model, *middle-range leadership* comprises actors who may not hold high political office but possess extensive networks, public trust, and strategic access across social layers. Large organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah represent this category most prominently in Indonesia. They serve as nodal connectors linking religious authorities, humanitarian institutions, academics, media, and civil society, thereby playing a pivotal role in conflict transformation.

These organizations operationalize religious norms into concrete programs, such as delivering humanitarian assistance to Gaza, mobilizing public fundraising, and running international campaigns for civilian protection. Their network-based policy advocacy includes demands to lift the blockade and uphold fundamental rights within the broader humanitarian crisis. They also strengthen cross-institutional alliances (domestically and globally) to expand technical resources, information channels, and international support.

With strong institutional capacity and a large social base, NU and Muhammadiyah occupy an intellectual and organizational space that allows them to formulate systematic anti-violence narratives while continuously distributing humanitarian and technical assistance. In this sense, middle-range leadership constitutes a strategic bridge between elite decision-making (top leadership) and grassroots mobilization, making it a central pillar of Lederach's holistic peacebuilding architecture.

At the grassroots level, the primary actors are local communities and civil society networks engaged directly in everyday social dynamics. In the context of solidarity with Palestine, these groups facilitate social healing and strengthen public empathy through educational initiatives, humanitarian actions, and solidarity campaigns. They exemplify *community-based peacebuilding*, grounded in citizen needs and rapid field-based responses.

The defining feature of the grassroots level is its structural closeness to the public, allowing actors to absorb real aspirations and transform them into moral and humanitarian movements. Local religious leaders, ranging from village kyai to small-scale spiritual guides, patiently educate communities on the ethical imperatives of peace and humanity for Palestine. Their sustained social interaction forms the social foundation that supports the legitimacy of top leadership and enhances the implementation capacity of middle-range leadership programs.

Utilizing Bridging Social Capital to Strengthen Humanitarian Advocacy and Global Peace Diplomacy

The concept of *bridging social capital* emphasizes the expansion of networks across diverse social groups to mobilize resources and political influence more effectively. In the context of peace advocacy, Indonesian ulama and Islamic organizations activate four interrelated social spheres: the intellectual, institutional, market, and political domains.

The *intellectual sphere* functions as a site for producing transnational moral discourses, populated by nationally recognized ulama, academics, and religious scholars. Bridging occurs through the issuance of fatwas and public statements that articulate narratives of justice and humanitarian protection. Public forums on non-violent jihad, global solidarity, and anti-dehumanization efforts further expand this sphere. It serves as the epistemic foundation of peace action, providing religious legitimacy for nonviolent advocacy and anchoring policy orientations around the protection of human life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). Through the exchange of normative ideas and epistemic networking, this domain widens cross-national solidarity.

The *institutional sphere*, represented by NU, Muhammadiyah, the Muslim Elders, and various zakat and humanitarian agencies, translates moral legitimacy into operational programs. These include cross-border humanitarian transfers conducted through legal and structured channels, the delivery of medical and rehabilitation aid, and transnational collaborations among Islamic civil society organizations for global human rights advocacy. Within this sphere, moral commitments are operationalized into concrete interventions, ensuring that peace efforts move beyond symbolic gestures toward fulfilling the essential needs of affected populations. Institutional networks thus reinforce

the resilience and survival of Palestinians living under protracted conflict.

The *market sphere* provides mechanisms for collective economic pressure by mobilizing Muslim consumers, business communities, and halal-based MSME networks to boycott Israeli and Israel-affiliated products. Communities are also encouraged to develop alternative supply chains grounded in the Islamic economy and promote ethical consumption. This arena represents a form of non-military influence that constrains aggressors through economic means. Bridging occurs when consumers, businesses, and religious organizations collaborate in coordinated transnational economic pressure, an emerging form of *economic jihad* that is deliberate, structured, and ethically justified.

The *political sphere* is used to engage policy advocacy and public diplomacy, led by MUI and other national religious figures. Bridging is manifested through official calls for ceasefire and an end to the blockade, diplomatic coalitions with OIC member states, the UN, and global human rights bodies, and efforts to strengthen Indonesia's stance within international pro-Palestine forums. This sphere connects religious authority with state power, producing structural effects in foreign policy. It demonstrates that ulama function not only as spiritual leaders but also as peace diplomats who influence geopolitical configurations.

The integration of these four spheres indicates that the actions of Indonesian ulama and Islamic organizations do not operate in isolation. Rather, they construct a multi-sectoral ecosystem of solidarity across knowledge, institutions, economics, and policy. Consequently, religiously grounded advocacy for Palestine transforms from a moral appeal into a coordinated, multilevel strategy capable of reshaping power structures and amplifying the global humanitarian agenda.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that Indonesian ulama play a strategic role in global peace advocacy through three principal contributions. First, ulama actively intervene across the spectrum of violence outlined in Galtung's framework: direct violence through calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and humanitarian diplomacy; structural violence through the provision of essential services and policy advocacy; and cultural violence through the promotion of humanitarian discourse and the rejection of dehumanizing narratives. This multidimensional engagement reflects a shift in the role of ulama, from being merely moral authorities to becoming transformative actors who

advance *positive peace*.

Second, the application of the Peacebuilding Pyramid illustrates that ulama operate across interconnected top-middle-grassroots layers. MUI functions as a key actor in top-level diplomacy, NU and Muhammadiyah serve as middle-range interlocutors within transnational networks, while grassroots religious communities articulate public solidarity and contribute to preventing radicalization. This cross-level connectivity enhances the effectiveness of Indonesia's religious diplomacy in the global arena.

Third, ulama mobilize bridging social capital across four domains: institutional, political, public, and intellectual, thereby expanding international support and strengthening the legitimacy of humanitarian advocacy. The effectiveness of their engagement lies not only in religious authority but also in their ability to build networks that link diverse identities, states, and actors within a peace diplomacy framework.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that the Indonesian government institutionalize ulama-led diplomatic channels within foreign policy, especially concerning global humanitarian issues. Middle-range diplomacy should be strengthened through regulatory support and resource allocation for transnational networks led by Islamic organizations. Peace literacy and anti-dehumanization principles should be integrated into national education policies and the digital public sphere.

Islamic organizations and broader religious communities should be encouraged to expand global partnerships to enhance sustainable humanitarian response (humanitarian resilience). Research-based diplomacy, including the production of academic counter-discourses to cultural violence, must be further developed. Cross-level coordination should be reinforced to ensure that advocacy efforts remain systemic rather than reactive.

This study offers a new analytical model for understanding Indonesian ulama as multi-level peace actors, integrating the theories of Galtung, Lederach, and bridging social capital with empirical data. This model may be replicated to analyze the role of religious actors in other global conflict settings.

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