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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA MUSLIM EXCHANGE PROGRAM (AIMEP) AS AN EFFORT 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 AIMEP. This study is library research with qualitative methods and uses historical and political approaches. Data collection techniques were carried out through 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 is an effort to bridge differences – through the inter-civilizational dialogue – where AIMEP has contributed significantly in efforts to overcome public misperception caused by political, religious, social, cultural, and economic differences. This study can be used for the development of international relations scholarship in the Indo-Pacific region, Islamic Studies and International Relations, as well as Public Diplomacy Studies. Specifically, this research supports and strengthens the study of Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue. Previous studies only discuss the AIMEP as Australian public diplomacy towards Indonesia without attempting to conduct a review of a two-stage process of how 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 Dialogue and Dialogue-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.

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Keywords: *Australia-Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program (AIMEP); Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy; the Inter-Civilizational Dialogue; West and Islam*

澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 作为克服公众误解的努力的意义

本研究旨在分析澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 的存在, 作为澳大利亚作为唯一将伊斯兰教和年轻的澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林人物作为其公共外交的战略方面的西方国家的一致性的一种形式, 其特点是 持有 AIMEP 20 年。 本研究是采用定性方法的图书馆研究, 并使用历史和政治方法。 数据收集技术是通过文件审查、访谈和文献研究进行的。 这项研究的结果表明, AIMEP 不仅是澳大利亚和印度尼西亚之间公共外交的工具, 而且更重要的是通过文明间对话来弥合分歧, AIMEP 在克服公众误解方面做出了重大贡献 政治、宗教、社会、文化和经济差异造成的。 本研究可用于印太地区国际关系学术、伊斯兰研究和国际关系以及公共外交研究的发展。 具体来说, 本研究支持并加强了基于对话的公共外交和文明间对话的研究。 先前的研究仅将 AIMEP 作为澳大利亚对印度尼西亚的公共外交进行讨论, 而没有尝试对 AIMEP 如何成为促进印度尼西亚和澳大利亚穆斯林之间更好理解的旗舰计划的两阶段过程进行审查, 并通过这一过程建立更牢固的关系 印度尼西亚和澳大利亚之间。 此外, 以往也没有专门运用文明间对话和基于对话的公共外交理论来讨论交流项目的目的不仅仅是为参与者提供亲身体验邻国的机会。 还传播有关他们与其家乡社区的互动和反应的信息。

关键词: 澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) ; 基于对话的公共外交 ; 不同文明间对话 ; 西方与伊斯兰教

Introduction

It is a fact that the Australian and Indonesian public are too often faced with 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 that develops in Australia and Indonesia often focuses on the differences that the two countries have, especially regarding cultural and religious differences, economic structure and development, population size, historical background, and other social problems. This condition is then strengthened by the existence of the media which sometimes only reports on

negative events that occurred in the course of the relationship between Australia and Indonesia. In short, the relationship between Australia and Indonesia is often seen in terms of the differences they have, rather than looking at the similarities between the two countries, where the biggest difference between the two countries is religion (Fealy, 2018).

This research seeks to explain and analyze how all these differences influence the formation of public perceptions, images, and stereotypes in the two countries towards each other, which the governments of the two countries then seek to bridge through policies and actions. In this regard, the two countries are trying to carry out various public diplomacy instruments aimed at achieving improvements in relations between the two countries so that they can move forward together.

One of which is pursued through the Australia-Indonesia Muslim Exchange Program (AIMEP) which was launched in 2002.

In the book *Public Diplomacy* by Mark Leonard, it is explained that (Leonard, 2002):

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 in addition to official government views.

Based on the statement above, it can be understood that public diplomacy is different from traditional diplomacy because it does not only involve interactions with the government but also with individuals and non-governmental organizations. Meanwhile, Nicholas J. Cull stated that there are five elements of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international news broadcasting (Cull, 2008). Specifically, exchange diplomacy is stated as 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 this can be conceptualized 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 the party running the exchange will benefit (Scott-Smith, 2009).

In particular, public diplomacy has also demonstrated the ability to play an important role in strengthening and achieving the national interests of countries, as an instrument of foreign policy through the use of soft power. In this context, one of the most important tasks of public diplomacy is to build dialogue and international relations. In other words, public diplomacy assumes that dialogue is important in efforts to achieve 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 dialogue also allows public diplomacy to develop instruments to capture feedback as well as persuade foreign publics. Another characteristic of the idea of dialogue-based public diplomacy is the character of justice. It is assumed that dialogue can lead to a

more just world. Therefore, dialogue between civilizations can be considered a dialogue, multicultural, and justice-oriented approach in international relations. Dialogue between civilizations can also affect the identity of actors from different levels and can lead to the formation of a new identity, and a new understanding of oneself and other parties which will ultimately be able to redefine the interests and goals of a country (Riordan, 2005). This dialogue-based public diplomacy is not limited to the government level but also includes dialogue between individuals, groups, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

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

This research specifically analyses how AIMEP became an exchange program launched by the Australian government to carry out its public diplomacy by positioning Islam and young Australian-Indonesian Muslim leaders as a strategic aspect. Australia's commitment and seriousness in this regard can be measured by the consistency of the AIMEP, which has been running for two decades. Currently, AIMEP already has more than 300 alumni from both countries who are continuing to make active contributions in their respective fields. Meanwhile, for Indonesia, the presence of young Indonesian Muslim leaders involved in AIMEP is important 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.

1. The Initiation of AIMEP by the Department of Foreign Affairs and

Trade (DFAT) and the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII)

AIMEP is an exchange program based on the values of mutual respect and hospitality between the Australian and Indonesian public, AIMEP has started a program that focuses on people-to-people relations (Williams, 2022). AIMEP itself was initiated after the 9/11 incident in the US in 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 DFAT and AII, AIMEP was then initiated with the main objective of supporting 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 the fact that Indonesia is a country with the largest Muslim population in the world has the potential to cause misperceptions among the Australian public towards Indonesia. Philip Flood also realized that there was a possibility that the public in Australia would view Islam in Indonesia the same 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, it is also believed that many Indonesian Muslims do not understand well the multi-cultural and multi-religious life that is adhered to in Australia. Negative coverage in the Indonesian media about inter-religious relations in Australia, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims is a cause for concern. This condition at the same time gave rise to the view among senior Australian diplomats in Jakarta and prominent Australian Indonesianists that an incident that was not well-informed had the potential to be used to give 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), to discuss the condition of Islam in Indonesia in general and especially regarding the low level of Australian public knowledge regarding Islam in Indonesia. Virginia Hooker was later appointed as a member of the AII Council whose task was to design an exchange program that was expected to strengthen Indonesian Islamic knowledge in Australia and vice versa would also provide an understanding to the Indonesian public regarding the existence of Islam in Australia. Thus, the purpose of this exchange program specifically is to create better understanding through person-to-person relationships (Hooker, 2022).

Virginia Hooker then together with Merle Ricklefs who is also 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, as well as provide long-term contributions to the interaction between Muslim leaders in the two countries, through ongoing contact between Australian and Indonesian Muslims. It is also believed that the groups that are seen as having the best potential to participate in such a program are those that are expected to make a long-term difference, as well as become new leaders in the future. Through this exchange program, selected participants will benefit from hands-on experiences in Australia and Indonesia, and are expected to incorporate their

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

Regarding the details of the exchange program as well as 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 allowed the promotion of this new exchange program through Paramadina University. Meanwhile, 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 start 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 took place at the end of that year (Hooker, 2022).

There were over fifty applicants when this exchange program was launched for the first time in 2002, and to date, there are over 500 applicants each year. One of the most difficult things about 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 AIMEP with Philip Knight and Rowan Gould,

Virginia Hooker handed over the role of directing and administering AIMEP to Philip Knight and Rowan Gould (Hooker, 2017).

Currently, the management of AIMEP is run through a partnership managed by Australia-Indonesia Connections (AIC), 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 in particular from Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, and the Philippines.

2. Young Australian-Indonesian Muslim Figures as the Central Point of AIMEP

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

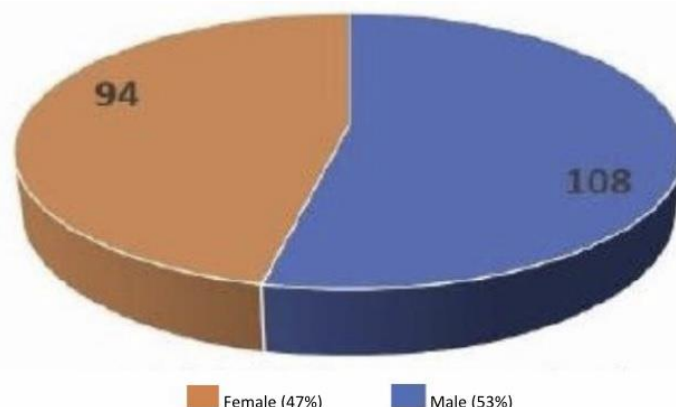
The opening of equal opportunities for men and women to participate in AIMEP also indicates that AIMEP does not discriminate against gender. In this regard, the AIMEP participant selection process was carried out with great care to ensure that the widest possible representation was

achieved. AIMEP upholds the principle of gender equality, where women make up half of the ten Indonesian participants who are 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 is certainly expected to contribute to the development and dynamics of Australia-Indonesia relations in the future (Gould, 2022).

AIMEP also encourages applications for applicants from all Muslim communities in both countries, including from 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, academics universities, various civil society organizations, the business sector, and the media. There has also been great geographic and ethnic diversity of participants. Similarly, Australian participants reflect the immense heterogeneity of the country's *ummah*. Participants have been drawn from Eastern European, Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian, and Southeast Asian backgrounds and their doctrinal mix has been also diverse. Overall, 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).

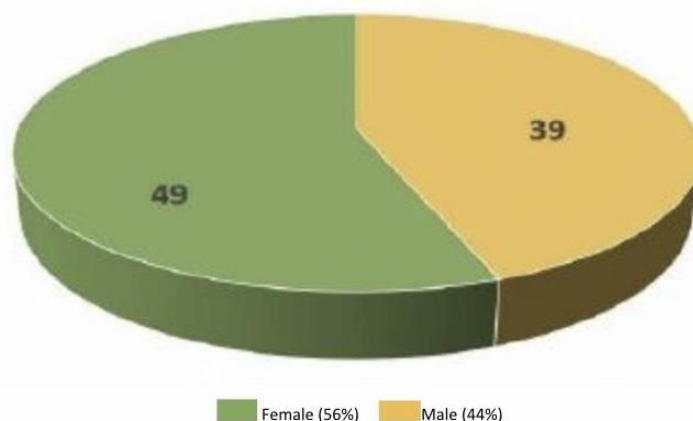
Through the 20 years of AIMEP, a total of 290 selected participants have taken part in this exchange program with a composition of 70% or 202 participants coming from Indonesia and 30% or 88 participants coming from Australia. A detailed description of the selected AIMEP participants, both from Indonesia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

Indonesia



Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

Figure 2 Number of AIMEP Participants from Australia



Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

Based on diagrams 1 and 2, it can be explained that the number of AIMEP participants from Indonesia was 202 people with details of 108 males (53%) and 94 females (47%). While AIMEP participants from Australia totaled 88 people with details of 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,

Figure 1. Number of AIMEP Participants from

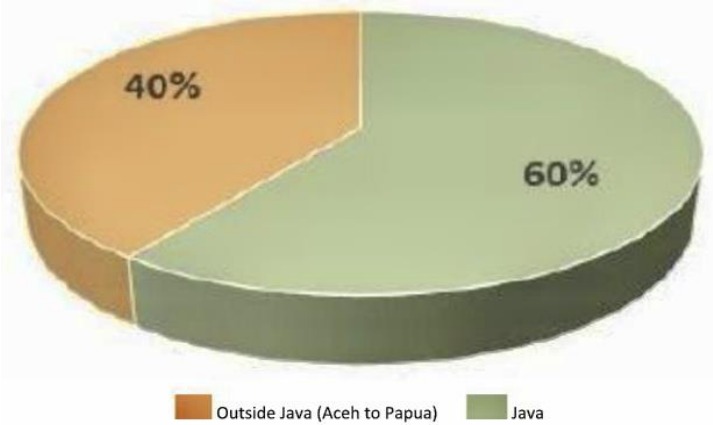
which can be grouped as below:

Table 1. Professional Background of AIMEP Participants from Indonesia and Australia

AIMEP Participants from Indonesia	AIMEP Participants from Australia
a. academics/lecturers b. Members/leaders of mass organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis, etc.) including the General Secretary of PP Muhammadiyah KH Prof. Abdul Mu'ti c. Members of the House of Representatives d. Ministry staff e. Civil Servants f. Researcher g. Writer h. NGO activist i. Teacher j. Professionals such as doctors, journalists k. NGO workers/activists including swap, youth, gender, interfaith dialogue l. Content creators m. Celebrities (such as Oki Setiana Dewi)	a. Teacher b. Reporter c. Psychologist d. Writer e. Police f. Advocate/lawyer g. NGO workers/activists in various fields including Muslim organizations, youth, sports, Ziswaf, etc h. Civil Servants i. Academics j. Priest k. Nurse l. Professionals from various fields including IT, artists, consultants, accountants, risk management, and businessmen (entrepreneurs).

for example coming from 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, which is 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. There was also one of the participants, Oki Setiana Dewi, who is an Islamic film actress and well-known preacher and media figure in Indonesia (Gould, 2022). Meanwhile, the region of origin of AIMEP participants from Indonesia and Australia can be illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 3. Region of Origin of AIMEP Participants from Indonesia

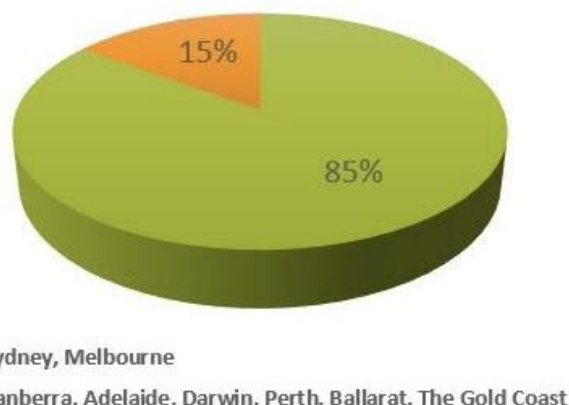


Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

Figure 4. Region of Origin of AIMEP Participants from Australia

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

Table 1 above shows that the selected AIMEP participants, both from Indonesia and Australia, came from a variety of professional backgrounds,



Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

From Figure 3, it can be seen that the majority of AIMEP participants from Indonesia came from Java Island (60%) while the remaining (40%) came from various regions of Indonesia from Aceh to Papua. While AIMEP participants from Australia (as seen in diagram 4) were dominated by participants from two cities, Sydney and Melbourne (85%), and the remaining 15% was a combination of several regions such as Canberra, Adelaide, Darwin, Perth, Ballarat, and the Gold Coast.

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

Every year, AIMEP provides an opportunity for selected participants from both countries to visit Australia and Indonesia for two weeks. The visiting activities included meetings and dialogues with academics, community organizations (including youth and women's organizations), religious leaders, schools, the media, and government representatives. There are also sporting and cultural activities, visits to important institutions, and most importantly the opportunity to interact with Australian and Indonesian people in the context of everyday life (Mu'ti, 2022).

Among the many activities contained in

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, of course by prioritizing significant opportunities to learn together and exchange ideas through two-way dialogue. Through AIMEP, 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, dialogues, 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).

The types of activities carried out by selected AIMEP participants, both from Australia and Indonesia, can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Types of AIMEP Activities

Forms of AIMEP Activity	Activity Details
The inter-civilizational dialogue and interfaith	Interact and exchange dialogue ideas with academics, educators, community organizations (including youth and women's organizations),

19

3

dialogue	NGO activists, religious leaders, the media, government representatives, and other important community leaders.
Observation of social and religious activities	Observing and experiencing directly 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 that are relevant to the topic of discussion, including carrying out sports and cultural activities.

includes three parts, (1) dialogue with the Muslim community, (2) academic and diplomatic dialogue, as well as (3) multicultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Selected Indonesian AIMEP participants who travel to Australia usually visit three cities – Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra. This in-person visit to Australia is aimed at raising 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 pay a visit to Indonesia and take part in various activities in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Makassar. In these cities, AIMEP Australia participants will carry out a series of dialogue 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 like 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. The following is the highest description of the perceptions that participants had:

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Source: Primary data processed by the researcher

Based on Table 2, it can be explained that AIMEP activities are categorized into three forms, (1) dialogue, (2) observation, as well as (3) visits and cultural activities. In carrying out 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 dialogue activity is a manifestation of inter-civilizational and inter-faith dialogue which

Table 3. Perceptions of Australian and Indonesian AIMEP Participants before Joining AIMEP

Perceptions of Australian AIMEP Participants towards Indonesia	Perceptions of Indonesian AIMEP Participants towards Australia
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Indonesia is very similar to Arab countries, India or Pakistan.	Most view that in Australia there are only white people and Christians.
Do not have any knowledge regarding Indonesian culture, cultural elements such as wayang or traditional Indonesian dances and music originating from Hindu heritage, or about Borobudur and Prambanan Temples.	Not having sufficient knowledge that there are 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 many 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 very strong and even has many	There is a view that there are no members of Parliament who are Muslim. Not having enough information, it turns out that

women leaders.	interfaith dialogue is very actively carried out in Australia.
Do not have adequate knowledge regarding the existence of Islamic boarding schools and how strong Islamic studies are 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.

Source: AIMEP Participant and Alumni Feedback Document, Australia-Indonesia Connections (AIC), 2013-2021.

Based on Table 3, it can be stated that in general, before participating in the AIMEP both participants from Australia and Indonesia had limited perceptions or understanding of each other. Meanwhile, after participating in the AIMEP, a positive perception that was built. What became a positive perception for participants from Australia towards 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 towards 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 (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 doing social projects, such as volunteering after the Aceh tsunami or the Yogyakarta earthquake (Gould, 2022).

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

It is a fact that the Australian and Indonesian public are too often faced with conditions of not knowing each other, even between Muslim communities in the two countries. The two countries have several things in common, starting from shared beliefs and values to shared 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 negative events that occur in the course of 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, 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, AIMEP as a public diplomacy instrument that makes young Australian-Indonesian Muslim figures a strategic aspect has significance, especially because it involves quite 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 of analysis (1) strengthening people-to-people relations and (2) the realization of dialogue between civilizations (the inter-civilizational dialogue).

4.1. The 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 which 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. Things that can be done are through citizen diplomacy, exchange programs, private voluntary organizations, NGOs, and various interest groups (Diamond & Mc. Donald, 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.

AIMEP, which is an instrument of Australia-Indonesia public diplomacy, shows the important role of individuals as part of non-state actors in international relations. AIMEP is an exchange

program that specifically forms the basis for Australia to carry out 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 as an effort 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 AIMEP, the existence of young Indonesian Muslim figures involved in AIMEP has made a significant contribution to Indonesia's public diplomacy efforts towards Australia. These young Australian-Indonesian Muslim figures, who later became AIMEP alumni, also 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, it can be stated that the existence of young Muslim figures who are a strategic aspect of AIMEP is the most important asset of this exchange program. This is based on the view that building communication and harmony between groups, even between religions, can be done in various ways. People-to-people is one potential way because dialogue can be carried out 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 dialogue, 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. AIMEP opens up new networks, both for participants and the wider community. Communication links, even if only carried out by individuals, are important for relations between countries. In other words, diplomatic relations may experience ups and downs according to the orientation of the government, but socio-cultural 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 a variety of 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 relationships of a personal nature.

This may also be due to cultural barriers and a lack of interest among Australians in Indonesians. Contrast this with the US Fulbright scholarship program which deliberately seeks to integrate networking opportunities and publicity support into their 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.

Based on 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 consisting of 5 countries, namely Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines. One interesting thing about 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 each other and collaborate (Fealy, 2022).

4.2. The Significance of AIMEP as the Embodiment of Dialogue Between Civilizations

In the context of Australia-Indonesia relations, the two countries have various forms of public diplomacy towards 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 dialogue in which it allows the public to be involved, and exchange ideas and views, to be able to bring up new, more positive perspectives, which in turn will open up various opportunities for collaboration. In other words, the existence of AIMEP in the course of Australia-Indonesia diplomatic relations is seen as very relevant in efforts to contribute as a form of dialogue between civilizations. 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) in 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, as well as 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 dialogue activities carried out, implying a shared meaning and desire to continue to spread the values of 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, AIMEP has contributions and significance as a form of dialogue 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 seeks to create a common understanding between the parties involved.

5. 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 than that 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 to other forms of public diplomacy lies in:

- 1) As an exchange program, 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 various ethnic, social, and cultural groups (Muslim and non-Muslim) to be reached.
- 2) AIMEP shows the important role of individuals as part of non-state actors in international relations, where building people-to-people relations is one potential way because dialogue can be carried out through informal channels so that the main goal of transferring knowledge to each other can be realized.
- 3) There is an opportunity to carry out two-way dialogue which allows the public to get involved, and exchange ideas and views, to be able to give rise to new, more positive perspectives, which in

turn will open up various opportunities for collaboration in the future.

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

From the perspective of policymakers - namely the Australian and Indonesian governments - considering that public diplomacy based on dialogue and dialogue between civilizations as part of a country's diplomacy is often seen as only being 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 needs to set more realistic targets and indicators as a measure of success. It is also important to increase sustainable alumni involvement, considering that through the alumni network, it is also possible to carry out various collaborations in the future so that the significant role of AIMEP alumni as a bridge for people-to-people relations between Australia and Indonesia can be optimized.

In the end, based on the contribution and significance contained in exchange programs like AIMEP, this study underlines the potential for AIMEP to be adapted 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.

Limitations and Further Study

One thing that can be criticized and explored further is the fact that dialogue-based public diplomacy and dialogue between civilizations is a long-term process and should not be seen as a solution to overcome all problems at one time. In other words, public diplomacy based on dialogue and dialogue between civilizations cannot be expected to produce immediate results – but requires a comprehensive effort involving dialogue at the government level as well as between individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations, etc. Therefore, what must be done is to continue this process consistently, so that in the end it will achieve the goals expected in the future. In this regard, further research is needed regarding the significance of AIMEP as a model of public diplomacy as well as a form of dialogue between Australian-Indonesian civilizations, especially to see the level of success of the implementation of this exchange program. Indicators of target achievement and further academic analysis are needed, so that it can be stated how appropriate AIMEP is as a public diplomacy model that can be implemented as an effort for inter-civilizational dialogue between Australia and Indonesia, especially in the meeting of the West and Islam.

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采访

[1] 2022 年 3 月 15 日采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚研究所 (AII) 所长 Greg Fealy。

[2] 2022 年 4 月 1 日采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 发起人 Virginia Hooker。

[3] 澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流项目

(AIMEP) 主任 Rowan Gould 访谈, 2022 年

[4] 采访 H.E. 澳大利亚驻印度尼西亚大使彭妮·威廉姆斯女士, 2022 年 10 月 21 日。

[5] 2022 年 3 月 24 日采访印度尼西亚驻澳大利亚堪培拉大使馆代表。

[6] 2022 年 2 月 16 日采访印度尼西亚共和国外交部公共外交司 Alfian Amiruddin。

[7] 澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 校友论坛主席 Yanuardi Syukur 访谈, 2022 年 5 月 6 日。

[8] 2022 年 7 月 13 日采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 校友 Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim (院士兼印度尼西亚乌里玛对外合作与国际关系委员会主席)。

[9] 2022 年 7 月 28 日采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 校友 Abdul Mu'ti (院士兼穆罕默德迪亚中央执行委员会秘书长)。

[10] 2022 年 10 月 14 日, 采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流计划 (AIMEP) 校友 Zacky Khairul Umam (印度尼西亚大学阿卜杜拉赫曼瓦希德和平与人文中心和伦敦大学亚非学院研究员)。

[11] 采访澳大利亚-印度尼西亚穆斯林交流协会校友塔斯尼姆·乔普拉 (Tasneem Chopra) (跨文化顾问、演讲者、广播员、澳大利亚勋章/OAM 社区服务奖章/OAM 社区服务、多元化和包容性领导力奖获得者以及 2013 年澳大利亚穆斯林成就奖获得者) 计划 (AIMEP), 2022 年 10 月 22 日。