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**The Arrival and Spread of the *Tablighi Jama'at*
In West Papua (Irian Jaya), Indonesia**

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Singapore

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the spread of the Tablighi Jama'at network in West Papua, the Easternmost province of Indonesia and perhaps the most remote of all provinces in the country. It traces the early arrival of the Muslim missionary movement and looks at the methods that were used in its initial propagation and conversion of new members and supporters. The paper also considers the question of whether the Tabligh has been able to convert new pious Muslim followers among the ethnic Papus of West Papua, or whether it remains a predominantly closed missionary network that focuses primarily on the recent migrants from Java, Sumatra, Madura and other parts of Indonesia who arrived and settled in the province as a result of the transmigration program.

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The Arrival and Spread of the *Tablighi Jama'at* In West Papua¹ (Irian Jaya), Indonesia

I. Introduction: To Boldly Go Where No Man Has Gone Before: The *Tablighi Jama'at* Unending Search for New Frontiers

This paper sets out to examine the short history of the *Tablighi Jama'at* – a world-wide transnational missionary movement that has been described by Masud, Medcalf² et al as probably the world's biggest transnational Muslim movement for faith renewal – in West Papua, the easternmost province of present-day Indonesia; and how it managed to expand its network of activities there.

Elsewhere we have previously looked at the development of the *Tabligh's* vast network of mosques, religious schools, missionary centres and itinerant missionary networks in Java, Madura, Malaysia and Thailand;³ and we have noted both the determination and resilience of the movement when it comes to expanding the magnitude and scale of its activities across the world, with scant regard for geo-political limitations and/or the logic of national territorial loyalties.

¹ We would like to thank Toha Ruddin of Universitas Muhamadiyah Surakarta (UMS) for his assistance during the course of the fieldwork that was done in West Papua between 21st to 29th December 2009. During the course of our fieldwork we visited and conducted research in Jayapura, Sentani, Entrop, Timika, Wamena and the Belian valley. We would also like to thank Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono of the Masjid Serambi Mekah Entrop, Ustaz Maulana Abu Bakar, Ustaz Irfan Ahmad, Ustaz Ahmad Suandy of Jayapura and Entrop; as well as Elias Nur of Wamena for their help with our research. The research for this paper was self-funded.

² For more on the *Tablighi Jama'at* and its transnational network, see: Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Brill, Leiden. 2000; Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982. and *Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs*. ISIM Papers IV, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), Leiden, 2002

³ For more on the *Tabligh's* activities across Southeast Asia, see: Farish A. Noor, *Pathans to the East! The Historical Development of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in Kelantan, Trengganu and Patani and its transnational links with the South Asia and the Global Islamist Revivalist Movement*. In the *Journal of Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 27. No. 1. Duke University Press. 2007; *The Tablighi Jama'at as a Vehicle for (Re)Discovery: Conversion Narratives and the Appropriation of India in the Southeast Asian Tablighi Jama'at Movement*; in: Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea eds.), *Islamic Connections: Studies of Muslim South and Southeast Asia*, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), National University of Singapore, ISEAS Press, 2008; *The Arrival and Expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at network in Madura and its links with the Islamic parties*, Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), 2009. (Unpublished); *The Tablighi Jama'at in the Southern Provinces of Thailand Today: Networks and Modalities*. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Working papers series no. 174, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009, and; *The Spread of the Tablighi Jama'at Across Western, Central and Eastern Java and the Role of the Indian Muslim Diaspora*. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Working papers series no. 175, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009

In the case of Indonesia, the *Tabligh's* initial arrival via Medan and Jakarta way back in 1952⁴ marked its initial moment of landfall, after which it rapidly embarked on a grand project of extending the scope of its activities and presence across all of Indonesia. Today the *Tabligh* is a visible presence across all of Java and Madura as well as Sumatra, and has expanded its network to the outer island provinces including Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara and the Moluccas. It is safe to say that there is practically no spot left in Indonesia where the *Tabligh* has not established itself, and yet what is truly remarkable about this process of expansion and entrenchment is how the *Tabligh* has managed to embed itself successfully everywhere while using the same standardised modalities of conversion time and again, accounting for both its unity in dispersion and the consistency of its identity despite local differences in culture, language, ethnicity and histories. This paper therefore sets out to test this thesis by looking at how the *Tablighi Jama'at* eventually expanded the scope of its activities to West Papua, and will end with some observations about how successful this process of transplantation was and what the future holds for the *Tabligh* in terms of its long-term prospects in West Papua, which has to be the most isolated and remote part of the great Indonesian archipelago today.

II. West Papua: History and research conditions

West Papua⁵, or Irian Jaya as it is sometimes still referred to by Indonesians, is the easternmost part of Indonesia and certainly the most remote by far. Its landmass is almost entirely made up of mountain ranges and forest, and remains virtually impenetrable. Transport and communication across Papua is done by boat or light aircraft as there are no major roads that cut across the territory. Formerly part of the Dutch Empire it was administered separately and was thus not part of the Republic of Indonesia when it unilaterally declared its independence in August 1945. The Dutch had planned to cede West Papua to the rest of Papua New Guinea in 1964, but as soon as the Dutch departed Papua was integrated forcibly by the Indonesian Republican army with the tacit consent of the United States and Australia. A referendum was

⁴ Re: Yusron Razak, *Jamaah Tabligh: Ajaran dan Dakwahnya*; Disertasi dalam bidang Ilmu Agama Islam, Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universiti Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, 2008.

⁵ The name 'Irian Jaya' was imposed on the region formerly known as West Papua when the Indonesian army annexed the province after the departure of the Dutch colonial forces in 1964. The name has never been accepted by the ethnic people of Papua themselves, and the province was restored its name West Papua in 2001 by President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

scheduled to be held in 1966 but foreign observers noted that the Indonesian army and security forces played a key role in rigging the referendum process to ensure that the vote would swing in favour of integration with the rest of Indonesia. Following this forceful annexation that was later legitimized via questionable means, West Papua was renamed *Irian Jaya*.

Under the rule of Presidents Sukarno and Suharto West Papua was opened up to foreign capital penetration on a scale that was unprecedented. The Freeport mining zone was created with the collaboration of fifteen countries, and the Freeport authorities have been given a free hand to exploit the mineral resources of the territory. Agriculture has suffered accordingly and even during Dutch times attempts to introduce commercial crops to Papua (rubber, coconut, palm oil) had by and large failed.

The indigenous population of West Papua (generally known as Papus⁶) are ethnically similar to their neighbours in Papua New Guinea and their numbers have been diminished as a result of military conflict as well as poor living conditions. Thanks to a transmigration process that was initiated in the 1970s tens of thousands of Indonesians from Java, Madura, Sulawesi and other parts of Indonesia have been allowed to migrate to Papua and settle there. This has reduced the number of ethnic Papus who feel that they have become a marginalized community in their own land. Added to that are endemic social and health problems that have been made worse by rapid rural to urban migration and changing lifestyles: Alcoholism and HIV/AIDS remain the main problems facing ethnic Papus with the HIV rate in places like Timika being among the highest in the whole country.

Resentment against the role that Jakarta has played in the uneven development of West Papua as well as the role of foreign mining companies contributed to the

⁶ Though of the same Austro-Malenesian genetic stock, the tribes of West Papua are distinct from each other and jealously guard and retain their cultural and linguistic differences. There are in fact more than two hundred ethnic tribes in the province, of varying numbers. Some tribes number in the hundreds while others number in the tens of thousands. Most of the tribes remain in the highland interior or in the swampy deltas such as the Asmat who live around Agats. Their economy remains rooted in agrarian cut-and-burn practices, and most of the tribes remain semi-nomadic and adhere to their own traditional tribal (*adat*) laws and customs that include practices such as polygamous marriages and extended tribal family units.

emergence and rise of the *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM, Free Papua Movement) in 1964.⁷ Over the past four decades relations between the Papus and the Indonesian central government have been a case of ups and downs, with occasional periods of sustained systematic violence on the part of the Indonesian armed forces and the OPM. In November 2001 the OPM leader Theys Eluay was found murdered in a car close to the capital of Jayapura and the OPM claimed that he had been killed by Indonesian security forces. Several attempts by successive Indonesian Presidents have been made towards appeasement, with both Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and Megawati Sukarnoputri offering limited autonomy to the Papus (save for areas such as economy, the judiciary and the police force) though rejecting all claims for independence. Megawati Sukarnoputri attempted to placate the demands of local Papu leaders in late 2001 by offering Papuans eighty per cent of the revenue earnings from local mining operations to help develop the region further. It was also during her period of rule that Irian Jaya reverted to its original name, West Papua.

⁷ The *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM, Free Papua Movement) was formed almost as soon as the Indonesian annexation began, and it has focused mainly on the struggle for Papuan independence and the restoration of traditional land and inheritance rights for the ethnic Papus of West Papua; describing the annexation of West Papua as an instance of foreign (ie. Indonesian) imperialism in Papu territory. The Indonesian government has consistently regarded the OPM as a terrorist organization and a threat to national security, insisting that Papua was destined to be part of Indonesia by virtue of the fact that it was under Dutch colonial rule. This, however, was merely a contingent fact of history and it ought to be noted that historically the only part of West Papua that had any substantial ties with the other kingdoms and principalities of the Indonesian archipelago was Fak Fak, that was bound to the Sultanate of Ternate. Despite the formation of the OPM, the cause of Papuan independence has been slow and hindered by several local as well as external factors: Firstly the nature of Papu tribal society means that there has never been a central leadership structure that unites the Papu tribes in the first place. The native peoples of Papua have historically remained antagonistic towards each other with little communication between the different tribes and ethnic groups (*suku*), a fact that is borne by the presence of around two hundred language groups among them. The geography of Papua has also been a factor that has hindered attempts at unification as the various tribes tend to live apart from each other, each one being confined to a valley or delta of its own and kept apart by the mountain ranges and rivers of the territory. Secondly, the cause of Papu independence has received little or no support from the international community, with countries like the United States and Australia in particular keen to work with the Indonesian government in its efforts to develop the region economically. Until now the visible presence of foreigners in West Papua is seen most in the Freeport-Timika commercial mining zone, where a sizeable expatriate community resides, protected by private contracted security personnel and the Indonesian army and police force. The West Papus have not been able to highlight their concerns on an international level, and whatever support they have received from their fellow Papus in Papua New Guinea has been symbolic, extending mostly to the offer of refuge and safety for fugitives of the OPM fleeing to East Papua. Thirdly, the ethnic Papus have been decimated by the combined forces of poor health care, outdated customs and traditions, foreign capital penetration and rapid urbanization; with diseases like Malaria and HIV/AIDS adding to the loss of their number. Transmigration of ethnic Javanese, Madurese, Bugis and Sumatrans to the urban centres of West Papua have further alienated the Papus and contributed to their marginalization in their own territory; while racial prejudice against the ethnic Papus remains commonplace among the new trans-migrants, which we observed throughout our research there.

Despite these moves, unrest remains a problem and was evident during our period of field research. One week before beginning work in Papua the popular leader of the OPM Kelly Kwalik was killed by security forces while they were trying to apprehend him in his home in Timika. (Kelly Kwalik was shot in the leg but died soon after due to a severed artery and massive blood loss.) During our fieldwork in West Papua there were moments of tension as the representatives of the OPM and members of Kelly's family was unable to decide whether he would be laid to rest in Timika or Jayapura. Though the body of the slain leader was brought to Jayapura, requests for a burial there were refused and he was finally buried in Timika. The representatives of the Indonesian police centred in Jayapura insisted that the killing of Kelly Kwalik was according to the law and that his death was accidental, and not planned.⁸

On several occasions during our fieldwork travel was interrupted due to security conditions in the Province: On one occasion a demonstration in support of the OPM leader Kelly Kwalik held in Jayapura led to reprisals by the police who shot into the air and dispersed the crowd by force. Nonetheless no fatalities occurred. Travel and movement across the province was also interrupted due to security conditions, and it was not possible for us to travel from Jayapura to Vamino across the border in Papua New Guinea as no driver would take us along the Jayapura-Vamino road.⁹ There was also at least one incident of violent conflict during our stay in West Papua, when two Indonesian police officers were ambushed and killed in the Freeport-Timika area by insurgents. By and large however the conditions in the towns we visited and worked in – Jayapura, Entrop, Sentani, Wamena, Timika and Marauke – were safe though tense at times. On no occasion, however, were we faced with any problems while doing fieldwork and we were not asked to apply for travel permits (*Surat Jalan*) while travelling across the region.

⁸ Re: 'Dibilang Langgar HAM, KAPOLDA Tidak Bimbang' in *Cendrawasih Pos*, 21 December 2009. The commander (KAPOLDA) of the Indonesian police at Jayapura insisted that there was no violation of human rights in the case of the killing of Kelly Kwalik as the police had been ordered to arrest him. The shooting of Kelly was meant to immobilize him to facilitate his capture, and not to kill him. The police chief insisted that the police regretted the death of Kelly Kwalik, if only because they wanted to bring him into custody for further questioning.

⁹ Though the Jayapura-Vamino road that hugs the northern coast of West Papua was open, no traffic was seen moving in either direction due to the fear of bandits and possible raids by the OPM. Our driver informed us that criminal activity along the Indonesian-Papua New Guinea border had increased significantly and that a car was stopped and raided the week before we arrived, while another car was attacked leading to one fatality the week before that.

During the course of our fieldwork (21st to 29th December 2009) we traveled to Timika, Sentani, Entrop, Jayapura and Wamena. Travel from Timika to Jayapura and Jayapura to Wamena was done by light aircraft. We also conducted research in the Belian valley area centred around Wamena, traveling by land to Jiwika and Wesaput. All travel was self-funded.

Considering its remote location and distance from the other major population centres of Indonesia (West Papua is located two time zones to the East of Java and the distance between Jakarta and Jayapura is the same as the distance between London and Baghdad, the flight there taking a total of eight hours) West Papua is the most isolated part of Indonesia today and the most difficult province to travel to/in. It was therefore necessary to ascertain to what extent the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement had been able to make its presence felt there, if any, and what role it had to play in the Islamisation of this, the most obscure part of the republic of Indonesia.

III. The arrival of the *Tablighi Jama'at* and its role in the Islamisation of West Papua.

Islam has never had a strong and visible presence in West Papua. During colonial times due to the importance of seaborne and riverine transport, almost all of the major commercial centres were located along the Western coastline of West Papua and centred in places like Pulau Biak and Fak Fak. Historically the western part of West Papua had some links with the Sultanate of Ternate, and it was the Sultan of Ternate that granted the Dutch VOC authorities to colonise the region for commercial purposes.

The only centre of commercial activity of significance during the Dutch era was Fak Fak, where there remain some houses and stores (*gedung*) dating back to the Dutch colonial era. Fak Fak is also the only place in West Papua where there is a small yet visible presence of Muslims of Indian and Arab stock; most of them being descendants of Indian and Arab Muslim traders who had come to the Dutch East Indies and settled there in the mid to late-19th century. Fak Fak today, however, is very much isolated and no longer plays the same important role as it did as the

premier export zone for products from and to West Papua. As such the Indian and Arab Muslim community there has diminished in number as well as importance.

From the mid-1960s, as soon as West Papua was annexed by Indonesia, the province has been opened up for foreign capital penetration as well as foreign missionary work, notably by Christian missionaries of both the Catholic as well as Protestant churches. Missionary activity remains visible in West Papua today, as is foreign (re. Western) NGO activity that focuses on self-help and health awareness campaigns targeted primarily at the ethnic Papus who suffer the most from the endemic problems of alcoholism and HIV/AIDS.

Islam's presence in West Papua is the result of the massive transmigration program that was initiated from the 1970s in an attempt to deal with the problem of overpopulation in places like Java, Madura and Sumatra. With the influx of migrants from Java, a majority of whom happened to be Muslims, the urban landscape in the small towns and settlements of West Papua began to change, as well as the religious demographic balance. Today towns like Jayapura are almost entirely Muslim with a visible overwhelming Muslim majority in places like Entrop and Sentani as well.

However it has to be noted that the transmigration process that was initiated and aided by the Indonesian government was not meant to have any Muslim/Islamic missionary connotations or agenda, and that this was never a conscious effort to 'Islamise' West Papua. Islam's belated visible arrival to West Papua was the result of massive transmigration and the changing social landscape that emerged as a result of this mass settlement of Muslims from other parts of Indonesia.

Compared to the presence and activities of Muslims in West Papua, Christian missionary groups – be they Indonesian or foreign – are far more visible and active. Since the colonial era efforts have been made by Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, to convert the local population of West Papua with some success, though mainly confined to the few urban settlements that dot the coastline of the island. In the interior of Papua missionary activities continue and it is important to note that Christian missionaries operate their own flight services (the Missionary Air Flight Service, MAF) that connect the major towns of Papua with the rural hinterland.

Missionary flights by MAF are the only flights that land at the smaller airstrips deep in interior Papua until today, along with rescue missions flown by the Indonesian armed forces.

The Muslims of Papua on the other hand have hitherto not been visibly active in their attempts to convert the Papus to Islam, though in the urban settlements of Jayapura, Timika, Marauke etc there are small groups of Papus who have also converted to Islam.¹⁰ From the 1960s Indonesia's major Islamic movements have also made their presence felt in West Papua with both the *Nahdatul Ulama* and *Muhamadijah* opening branches, schools and clinics across the island. Though it ought to be noted that the schools, clinics and branches of the NU and *Muhamadijah* were focused primarily on Indonesian Muslims who had migrated to West Papua from places like Java, Madura and Sulawesi. Again, proselytising efforts by both the NU and *Muhamadijah* vis the Papus were scant and irregular at best.

The same applies for the internal domestic politics of West Papua, which showed a clear delineation of party-political and ideological loyalties between the Papus and trans-migrants. While many of the ethnic Papus were either supporters of the OPM and local tribal leaders, the mainstream Indonesian political parties were focused mainly on the trans-migrant populations in the urban centres. Up to 2008, the most visibly popular party in Papua was the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan* (PDI-P) led by former President Megawati Sukarnoputri. (Megawati's concessions to the Papuans, as we have noted above, contributed significantly to the rise of support for the PDI-P in West Papua). As of the elections of 2009 however, the pole position enjoyed by the PDI-P has been handed over to the *Partai Demokrat* of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) who managed to win over many of the seats formerly held by the PDI-P in West Papua. By contrast, neither the Muslim nor Christian parties of Indonesia have managed to score significant gains in the province, and even mainstream Islamic parties such as the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS) and *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (PKB) that is affiliated to the NU have not won any substantial number of votes or seats in the province.

¹⁰ Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

Elsewhere we have written about the arrival and spread of the *Tabligh* across Java and Madura, (Noor, 2009, 2008¹¹) and noted how the patterns and modalities of the *Tabligh's* expansion has been consistent throughout Indonesia as with the case of the rest of Southeast Asia too. To some extent, the case of the arrival and subsequent development and expansion of the *Tablighi Jama'at* across West Papua follows the model of *Tabligh* expansion elsewhere almost down to the last detail. The *Tabligh's* arrival in West Papua was relatively late, with the first delegation being despatched from Jakarta to Papua via Ternate *by boat*. This delegation first stopped at Ternate to do missionary work for two months before arriving in Jayapura in mid-1988 and stayed in Papua for a total period of four months, touring all the major settlements of Papua by boat and air. It was led by Dr. Nur, a member of the *Tabligh* who was also a doctor and a lung specialist with his own clinic in Jakarta. The *Tabligh's* choice of Dr. Nur turned out to be the right one, for as the present-day leader of the *Tabligh*, Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono noted:

“Dr. Nur was a real doctor... He was well respected, a polite and educated man. In those days when a doctor came to Papua, then everyone was impressed, especially when the doctor was an Indonesian. You see, most of the medical staff and personnel here then were missionaries who came from America or Australia, so everyone thought that all doctors were white people! But Dr Nur was a Javanese, and Indonesian, and so he was very popular with the locals when he arrived. All of the people wanted to see him, they kept asking for ‘Dr Nur, Dr Nur’ and they even went to see him when they were not sick! (Laughs) That was how respected he was.”¹²

The *Tabligh's* first base of operations was the Masjid Agung As-Salihin of Jayapura, but it was a mosque that was used by all the Muslims of Jayapura, from different

¹¹ Re: Farish A. Noor, *The Spread of the Tablighi Jama'at Across Western, Central and Eastern Java and the Role of the Indian Muslim Diaspora*. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Working papers series no. 175, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009; and Farish A. Noor, *The Arrival and Expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at network in Madura and its links with the Islamic parties*, 2008. (Unpublished)

¹² Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

political and religious streams. For the members of the *Tabligh* this was problematic for the simple reason that the mosque was often crowded and the locals did not understand why the *Tablighis* (who were new arrivals in Papua and unheard of until then) wished to live and work in the mosque that was meant to be open to all.

One year later in late 1989 a second delegation was despatched to West Papua by the *Markaz Agong Kebun Jeruk* in Jakarta, led by an Indian Muslim by the name of Maulana Imam Nurudin. The second delegation continued the work of the first, which was to ascertain the extent to which West Papua was ripe and fertile (*subur*) for the work of the *Tablighi Jama'at* there. This second delegation led by Imam Nurudin stayed for several months and was made up of twelve *Tablighis* who were both local Indonesians and Indian (South Asian) Muslims. Like the delegation of Dr. Nur their primary task was to recruit new converts and to seek ways and means to find a permanent base for the *Tabligh* in the province. Again, the delegation reported the problem of not having a permanent base to call their own, as noted by Imam Abdullah:

“We had another problem because we did not have a real base in Jayapura or in all of Papua at that time. (*“Nggak ada markaz yang benar-benar dimiliki kita”*) At the time our only base was the Masjid Agung in Jayakarta, which was also the *Jamaah masjid* for the town. And so there were all sorts of people there and from all backgrounds, mixing together. (*“Orangnya rame disana dan semuanya campur-campur”*.) Moreover because it was the only big jamaah mosque for Friday prayers, the people didn’t like it when the *Tablighis* were staying there. They didn’t give us any problems, but they didn’t understand why we were living in the mosque (*“Ngapain tinggal di masjid? Tinggal di losmen aja bisa kok.”*) So for the first few years our activities were hindered by the fact that we did not have any place where we could live, operate, co-ordinate our movements and send our delegations to. At times such as during eid celebrations we were almost

forced out of the compound of the *Masjid Agung* as the mosque was overcrowded with people who wanted to use it too.”¹³

During this initial stage of arrival and contact, the *Tabligh* were far from aggressive in their missionary efforts. Most of the time was spent trying to woo new members and converts to their cause, and to normalise their presence in Jayapura, notably their visible presence as itinerant settlers in the main mosque of the provincial capital.

In time the *Tabligh* began to attract a small number of local converts and adherents, though as Imam Abdullah noted, almost all of them were employed in other work and duties and as such could not be called upon to serve as full-time committed members of the *Tabligh*. It should also be noted that almost all of the new converts were themselves trans-migrants who had settled in the towns and urban settlements, and they were overwhelmingly of Javanese, Madurese or Bugis origin. The conversion of ethnic Papus was small at best due to the fact that the *Tabligh* had yet to venture into the hinterland and that the ethnic Papus were a relatively small presence in the newly developed urban centres.

By the 1990s the *Tabligh* was present in almost all of the urban settlements of West Papua, but without a base to call their own. The *Tabligh*'s fortunes took a turn for the better when, in 1998, one of the older local members – Haji Baduh Taufik, a transmigrant merchant who had come from Hujung Padang – left to the *Tabligh* a patch of land in the settlement of Entrop as part of his *waqf*. Haji Baduh's *waqf* land was then used and built up by the *Tabligh*, using local donations from local members, to build the first true *markaz* of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in all of West Papua, the *Masjid Serambi Mekah* on Jalan Sekoci Kelapa Dua, Entrop.

Next to the *Masjid Serambi Mekah* was built the first *Pondok Pesantren* of the *Tabligh* in West Papua, the *Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum*. Henceforth all of the *Tabligh*'s activities at the *Masjid Agung* in Jayapura were transferred to the *Masjid Serambi Mekah* in Entrop which came to serve as the *Markaz Besar* of the *Tabligh* in the province.

¹³ Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

The Masjid Serambi Mekah of Entrop is currently under the guidance and supervision of Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsano, himself a transmigrant from Central Java (Magelang) who had migrated to Papua in 1974 and who had joined the *Tabligh* as a part-time member since 1988. Ustaz Imam Abdullah is also the head teacher of the *Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum*. Both the *masjid* and the *pesantren* make up the nerve centre of all *Tabligh* activities across the province and the *pesantren* is served by a small group of younger *Tablighis* who serve as the teachers there, including Ustaz Maulana Abu Bakar, who is the *Mudir* of the mosque and *pesantren*, Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, both of who are junior teachers and full-time members of the *Tabligh*.

In terms of its form and appearance, the *markaz* of the *Tabligh* in Entrop is typical of the other *Tablighi* centres in Java, Madura and the rest of Indonesia: The Masjid Serambi Mekah is a modest two-storied structure build of cement and brick, in a hybrid modern Islamic fashion meeting the rudimentary requirements of the *Tabligh*. Its ground floor is an open space measuring forty by sixty meters with a cold cement and tiled floor, where the *santris* of the *pesantren* are taught and communal prayers are held. Delegations from other parts of the world would arrive and camp on the ground floor, using it as their communal space for discussions, readings and planning. The second floor follows the lay-out of the ground floor, with two small rooms being construction via wooden walls that separate spaces for teachers and the administrators of the mosque. As expected, there were only the most basic essentials at hand such as fans and lamps. Like in all other *Tabligh markaz*, the members sleep on the floor and dine collectively on the floor as well.

Cooking is done outside the mosque in an open sheltered communal kitchen that is likewise rudimentary and is linked to the modest *pesantren*, that is made up of two bigger blocks of stone houses that house a total of a hundred boys; and a third block that houses a total of thirty girls. In this respect the *Pesantren Darul Ulum* is somewhat unique as it offers accommodation for girls as well, though as expected there was no direct access to the girls' quarters that has its own separate exit to the back. Both the *pesantren* and the mosque are encircled by a low cement and brick wall, and the entire mosque and *pesantren* complex does not have any other large

communal space for larger congregations. We estimated that at full capacity the mosque and its modest garden might be able to contain around four hundred people in all.

As far as the teaching activities of the *Pesantren* are concerned, the *Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum* does not differ from any of the other *Tablighi*-run educational centres we have visited elsewhere in Indonesia: The *santris* vary in age between eight years to their late teens, with teaching being conducted regularly in groups in the traditional manner. The courses that are offered at the *Pesantren* are likewise typical of the classes taught at other *Tablighi* centres of learning, including:

- Standard courses in Arabic as well as basic courses in Urdu/Hindi;
- Standard course for *hafiz/a* (memorisation of the Quran) for boys and girls;
- Standard reading of the key texts of the *Tablighi Jama'at*, primarily the translated works of Muhammad Zakariyya al-Khandalawi (*Himpunan Fadhilah Amal*) and Muhammad Yusuf al-Khandalawi (the *Muntakhab Ahadits*)

We were also informed that the *pesantren* has sent two of its graduates to Raiwind, Pakistan, to study there with the hope of returning to Entrop after the completion of their studies to teach at the *pesantren* later.¹⁴

With the completion of the construction of the *Masjid Serambi Mekah* and the *Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum* as the *Markaz Besar* of the *Tabligh* in West Papua, the *Tabligh* was able to expand its network and intensify its efforts to find other bases across the province.

Today, apart from the *markaz besar* at Entrop there are two other *Markaz* of the *Tabligh* across all of Papua: One in Manokwari and one more in Sorong. Imam Abdullah noted that “*Manokwari is a problem for us because they are majority Christian and they made it really difficult for us to move in. The (Christian) missionaries kept building Churches and the mission houses everywhere and they*

¹⁴ Re: Interview with Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 22 December 2009.

were afraid we might convert the local Papus to Islam too.” Both the *markaz* in Manokwari and Sorong are built on land that is own and controlled by the *Tabligh*, thanks to donations received from local members and supporters in the province. As such the *Tabligh* in Manokwari and Sorong no longer have to work and live in the more open *Jama’ah* mosques in the town centres and have the right to use their mosques as they see fit. A fourth smaller base is found in Marauke, at the *Masjid Al-Hikmah* on Jalan Mandala Bappel.

In all these cases – Entrop, Jayapura, Sorong, Manokwari and Marauke – it has to be noted that the *Tabligh* has been successful in converting transmigrant Muslims to their cause; but they have had less success in converting ethnic Papus from the tribal areas. As Imam Abdullah noted:

“In the interior we sometimes send delegations also but only to places where we know there are mosques and where our members will be safe. In the Papu tribal areas there are hardly any mosques, the only one that we use regularly is the *Masjid Agung* in Wamena in the Belian valley but like the old mosque in Jayapura that one is used by everyone and so our members cannot stay there for too long. By now we have covered all of West Papua and in every town we have a base – either belonging to us or loaned to us – where we can stay.”

In order to ascertain the level of the *Tabligh*’s success among the ethnic Papus in the interior, we moved our research to the Belian valley in the central highlands of West Papua.

III.b. Islam among penis-sheaths: The activities of the *Tablighi Jama’at* among the ethnic Papu tribes of the Belian valley.

In order to ascertain the level of success of the *Tablighi Jama’at* among the ethnic tribal Papus of West Papua, we travelled to the Belian valley in central Papua by plane. Travel to the Asmat region of the south was impossible to due to the lack of

time, difficulties in transport (the Asmat region has to be travelled to by boat) and costs.¹⁵

The Belian valley is the starting point for most jungle treks and the missionary trail into the Papu hinterland, and is accessible only by air. We took a chartered flight from Sentani to Wamena and stayed in the valley for three days (24th to 26th December). Wamena itself is the only built-up settlement in the Belian valley that is surrounded by tribal areas dominated by the Dani, Yali and Yali tribes, which are among the biggest tribes of West Papua. Deeper inland are even more remote, smaller tribes, some of which are still being discovered today. The nature of Papua's geography means that most of these tribes have been living in isolation from each other for centuries and this also accounts for the linguistic and cultural diversity among the Papus.

Wamena is a small two-street settlement that is served by a single airstrip that allows for landing by propeller-driven light aircraft. It is also the only base for the Indonesian armed forces and air force, that flies reconnaissance missions and rescue missions regularly, as well as the missionary flight service of the MAF. Wamena is distinguished by the number of churches and mission centres that have been built by Christian missionaries as well as small offices run by health and social welfare NGOs, both Indonesian and foreign.

The only visible Muslim presence in all of Wamena is the small Masjid Agung that is on Jalan Yos Sudarso. This is the only mosque that serves the irregular delegations sent out by the *Tablighi Jama'at* to the Belian valley, though during our visit to Wamena the mosque was practically empty. The Muslims of Wamena are overwhelmingly of transmigrant background, most of them from Java, Madura, Ambon, Ternate or Sulawesi. Only one local Muslim could be interviewed for the purpose of this paper, Elias Nur, who claimed knowledge of the *Tabligh* but who insisted that he was merely sympathetic to them and not a regular member. In the words of Elias:

¹⁵ Note that costs in West Papua are higher than anywhere else in Indonesia, due to the fact that most foodstuffs, petrol and other necessities have to be imported in by air or sea. For comparison's sake, a cup of tea that would cost a thousand Rupiahs in Java costs fifteen thousand Rupiahs in a warong in Papua, a plate of plain white rice 10,000 Rp and a plate of fried rice around 30-40,000 Rp.

“They (the *Tabligh*) have tried to send delegations here but they have not been successful in converting any of the Papus because they cannot venture out too far into the jungles without guides who speak the tribal languages. And they are also worried about the reputation of the Papus because they know the Papus eat pork, drink alcohol, have plenty of wives and often are very sexually active. On top of that they cannot stand the Papus because the Papus smell. (A reference to the normal practice among the tribes to smear their bodies with pig fat and grease to insulate them against the cold at night, as the Papu tribes do not wear clothes even in the evenings when it gets cold up in the highlands.) This makes it difficult for them to be successful because they really don’t know how to live in the jungle. They are not ready for it, they don’t have what it takes, unlike the Christian missionaries who are willing to go into the jungle for months and years and maybe not even come back.”¹⁶

We noted that as in the case of Jayapura, Timika, Sentani and Entrop, communication between the transmigrants and ethnic local Papus was cordial though inter-marriage was less common. Nor do the communities live together side by side, as Elias noted:

“Here (in the Belian valley) we (transmigrants) often have problems with them (ethnic Papu tribes) because we do not have the same values or understand each other. When we came to settle here, we bought up the land rights but the Papus don’t understand anything about contracts or deals. So just when you open up the fields to plant rice, they come and rear their pigs or they build a *honai* (traditional hut) on your land. Then we get problems, and then we need to call the police.
... Also sometimes there are some problems when the OPM (Free Papua Movement) is active here, and then the transmigrants get scared. We cannot leave Wamena after dark and that’s why none of us live outside the town. Its too dangerous for us because we might get shot,

¹⁶ Interview with Elias Nur, Wamena-Jimika 25th December 2009.

attacked or robbed. Sometimes they try to kidnap us too. So we stay in Wamena and they come here to trade and buy, and then they go back to the jungle.

The only transmigrants who marry into the Papus are the teachers who were sent from Java, but that happened in the 70s and 80s. But when that happens, you lose your Javanese-ness (*"maka hilang Jawa-nya"*) and you become one of them, you start eating what they eat and you lose your faith too."¹⁷

During our short stay in the Belian valley and in the course of our visits to the local Papu settlements around Jiwika and Sentanu we did not come across any evidence of significant Muslim missionary activity, and no evidence of any visible presence of the mainstream Islamic movements and parties of Indonesia. (Nor did we encounter significant evidence of Christian missionary work among the interior tribes for that matter.) Bearing in mind the rather pedestrian prejudices evidenced towards the ethnic Papus by the local transmigrant settlers, it can be concluded that the *Tabligh's* contact with the ethnic Papus in the valley thus far has been superficial at best. The only activities that have been successfully carried out by the *Tabligh* in Wamena and the outlying areas around the Belian valley involve the conversion and teaching of transmigrant Muslims who were already Muslims before they settled in the valley.¹⁸

In short, the *Tablighi Jama'at* in the Belian valley, as with the case of the *Tabligh* elsewhere throughout West Papua, have become part of the normative Muslim landscape of the province but it remains a phenomenon of *internal Muslim conversion* rather than *outward conversion of non-Muslims*. Though documented material on *Tabligh* activities in Papua is scarce, our limited research in West Papua would suggest that it is primarily a movement of transplanted Javanese, Bugis, Madurese and Sumatran Indonesian Muslims and that it has remained so over the past three decades. Nonetheless credit ought to be given to the *Tabligh* for demonstrating its willingness

¹⁷ Interview with Elias Nur, Wamena-Jimika 25th December 2009.

¹⁸ Though even then it has to be noted that the only visible Muslim presence in Wamena was and remains the *Masjid Agung* on Jalan Yos Sudarso which, as we have noted above, is a mosque open to all Muslims and not dominated by the *Tabligh* in any way. As such there were no regular *Tablighi* discussions or classes being held there, and it was clear that the mosque was not being used by the *Tablighis* or any other Muslim movement as a centre for teaching or regular missionary work and other related religious or social activities.

and determination to extend its activities to this, the easternmost part of Indonesia that happens to be one of the most remote and hostile environments of Southeast Asia today.

IV. Conclusion: Locating the *Tablighi Jama'at* of West Papua in the Grander Structure of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Today, the *Tablighi Jama'at* is fully established in West Papua and is considered a separate, individual administrative unit by the central command of the *Tabligh* is its *Markaz Agong* in Kebun Jeruk, Jakarta. According to its leader Imam Abdullah the total number of active members (both full-time and part-time) across the province numbers around one thousand.¹⁹ The West Papuan *Tabligh* has been conferred independent status on the grounds that the *Tabligh* there are able to organise their own activities without the technical and logistical support of any other *Tabligh* branches elsewhere, and this also means that it is expected to fund its own activities – the funding of which comes from modest contributions by local members. As we have seen above, almost all of the *Tabligh* centres in Entrop and elsewhere were built on lands acquired by the local *Tablighis* themselves, with no financial aid coming from outside.

In the overall structure of the *Tablighi* network across Indonesia, the West Papuan division is therefore an independent unit in its own right and answers only to the central command based in Jakarta, which is the national base of operations for the *Tabligh* across all of Indonesia. The West Papuan *Tabligh* was and remains very active, receiving and sending delegations across the province as well as across Indonesia and further afield. During the course of our interviews with its leaders, we learned that the West Papuan division has even sent off delegations as far and wide as China and Peru. In the words of its leader Imam Abdullah:

“Because we have our own independent status we can both received and send delegations independently. We get little to no funding from

¹⁹ Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, *markaz besar Tabligh*, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

Jakarta, and we have to do everything ourselves, with our own money...

We have also sent out own delegations abroad, but we need to send them first to Jakarta where they are collected and dispatched according to the decisions of the main organizers and administrators there. We can send as many as we want, but normally the procedure is that they will only really know where they will be sent when they are in Jakarta and all the delegations have been collected together. In July and August this year (2009) we sent a delegation from Papua that was later sent to Philippines and then further to Peru. Another delegation sent at the same time was sent by Jakarta to Morocco and a third was sent to China.²⁰

...Our next delegation will leave in the first quarter of 2010 and they will be sent to Jakarta and then to Singapore for certain. After that we may send them to Southern Thailand (*Markaz Besar Jala*) if the security situation permits. At the moment we have one delegation – seventeen in all – that is abroad, and they are in India. They have just done their tour and are probably in Delhi (*Markaz Nizamuddin*) getting ready for their trip back to Indonesia and then returning to Papua. So don't think that just because we are based in Papua we are remote and forgotten. No, once our delegations get to Jakarta then they are part of the international network like anyone else.”²¹

²⁰ A note about the modalities of movement and logistics among the *Tabligh*: It has to be pointed out that even when a delegation from Papua was sent to China and Peru, the final decision to send a delegation to these countries was made by the central command of the *Tabligh* in Jakarta, and not by the leaders of the *Tabligh* in West Papua. As expected, the modalities of movement remain consistent throughout: The West Papua division of the *Tabligh* sends its delegations to Jakarta where they are assembled while waiting for other delegations from other parts of Indonesia (Central Java, Sulawesi, Madura, etc.). Only when there are sufficient numbers of *Tablighis* and the adequate funds are the members then packaged out into groups numbering around a dozen, each with its own leader appointed after a *shura* meeting by the groups themselves. The delegations are then given their marching orders and told to go where they are needed or have been invited. Thus the final destination and itineraries of these groups remain unclear until the day when they are finally told of where they are to be sent. Likewise foreign delegations are equally unclear as to where they will be sent to once they arrive in Indonesia, landing in Jakarta. Thus a delegation from India may not choose to go to Papua on their own volition, but are instead dispatched there by the administrators of the central *Tabligh Markaz Agong* in Jakarta upon arrival.

²¹ Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

As an independent unit the West Papuan division is also in the position to act as hosts for international delegations that come from beyond Southeast Asia, as noted by Imam Abdullah:

“On average we get at least two or three delegations from abroad every year, most often from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. For the Indian *Tablighis* Papua is a very remote place but they like it because it means they are really, really committed to the path of Allah if they manage to come all the way here. Often they are worried when they see the (Christian) missionaries too and they are also upset when they watch the behaviour of the Papus who eat pork and sell pigs in the market. But they are very tough, these Indians, and they are willing to go all over Papua for a month, even up to the tribal highlands in the interior. The last delegation that came to us this year (2009) came from Gujerat, India. There were nine of them. They came with a bigger delegation that arrived in Jakarta and nine of them decided to come to Papua. They stayed with us for almost a month.”²²

The case of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in West Papua demonstrates several salient features of the *Tabligh* that has been well recorded by now but are nonetheless worth repeating here:

- Firstly, it should be noted that as in other instances of the arrival, consolidation and subsequent development of the *Tabligh* elsewhere in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, the *Tabligh* in West Papua has not diverted from its modalities of praxis: Initial probing missions are sent out to ‘test’ the ground and to report to the central command before earnest attempts at conversion are made. After which the *Tabligh* begins to root itself via the creation of local organic networks based – in most cases – in mosques and other religious centres that are initially not under their control, but which are later brought under *Tabligh* influence, or better still replaced by centres that are directly owned and controlled by them. The case of the move of *Tabligh* activities from the *Masjid Agong* of Jayapura to the *Masjid*

²² Re: Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

Serambi Mekah in Entrop is a typical example of such a process of slow but determined rooting of activities.²³

- Secondly, as with the case of *Tabligh* expansion elsewhere, the first probing missions are also given the task of rooting the movement as soon as possible and seeking local means of support – both logistical and financial. Within the space of a decade the *Tabligh* in Papua were developed enough to have its own modest financial support base, and had cultivated enough members, contacts and supporters to have land given to them to build their first *Tabligh*-owned and run centre.
- Thirdly, the development of the *Tabligh*'s chain of command and communications suggests that the *Tabligh* in West Papua (as with the case of *Tablighis* elsewhere in Indonesia and the rest of the ASEAN region) still operate on the basis of an unstated understanding and acceptance of the logic of the nation state and national boundaries. This is why the *Tabligh* in West Papua – though a separate and independent unit – deals directly with the central command based in Jakarta, which also happens to be the national capital of the Republic of Indonesia. All *Tablighi* delegations across Indonesia and outside Indonesia are channelled via Jakarta first; and on the same basis all international delegations that come to West Papua likewise would have to go through the initial point of contact upon arrival, which happens to be Jakarta as well.²⁴

Thus while the *Tabligh* in West Papua are free to develop, entrench and expand their activities in the province, the *Tabligh* command in West Papua is not free to unilaterally engage in cross-border activities with other *Tablighi* centres that may or may not exist in neighbouring Papua New Guinea (which is only 50 kilometres away by road from Jayapura) – without the consent of the central command in Jakarta. This pattern of top-down hierarchical command we have seen elsewhere among the

²³ Re: Interview with Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 22 December 2009.

²⁴ Re: Interview with Ustaz Irfan Ahmad and Ustaz Abdullah Suandy, markaz besar Tabligh, Masjid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 22 December 2009.

Tablighi in Sumatra, Java and Madura elsewhere (Noor, 2009, 2008²⁵), and would suggest that despite its transnational ambitions and modus operandi, the *Tablighi Jama'at* remains a transnational movement that nevertheless operates within the overarching logic of established nation-states and political territoriality.

Only one question is left unanswered after the research that has been conducted in the course of this fieldwork, which is to what extent the *Tablighi Jama'at* in West Papua is really concerned about the conversion of ethnic Papus to Islam and to the *Tabligh's* brand of neo-Salafi Islam in particular. As shown by the limited anecdotal data we acquired during our stay in Wamena and the Belian valley, the *Tabligh's* conversion attempts and missionary work in the Papu tribal areas has been piecemeal at best, with *very limited* results. However as noted by the leaders of the movement themselves, the *Tablighis* remain worried about the activities of Christian missionaries among the ethnic Papus, as they are about Christian missionary efforts in general. Whether this anxiety over and about a competitor in the 'conversion market' galvanises the *Tablighi Jama'at* even further in West Papua remains to be seen, and gives reason for more detailed research in the future. At this stage however, it can be concluded that by expanding its network of activities to West Papua the *Tablighi Jama'at* has indeed stretched its network of activities to the furthest ends of Indonesia, literally going where no *Tablighi* has gone before.

²⁵ Re: Farish A. Noor, *The Spread of the Tablighi Jama'at Across Western, Central and Eastern Java and the Role of the Indian Muslim Diaspora*. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Working papers series no. 175, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, March 2009; and Farish A. Noor, *The Arrival and Expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at network in Madura and its links with the Islamic parties*, 2008. (Unpublished)

Appendix A

Interview with Ustaz Imam Abdullah Suparsono, markaz besar Tabligh, Masiid Serambi Mekah, Jalan Sekoci Kelapa 2, Entrop, 23 December 2009.

‘My name is Imam Abdullah Suparsono and I am from Magelang. My wife is from Ponorogo and we have five children altogether, four boys and one girl. We have been living here in Papua since I moved here years ago and my children were all born here.

When I was younger I worked as a clerk in the medical services, I was a medical officer, and not a doctor. But I was working with the doctors and all my life I have been involved in medicine and medical services; rescue missions, relief operations and such like. I first came to Papua in 1974 and at that time I was already a medical officer but I was single. I met my wife here in Papua and we got engaged here. Later we got married in Java but we both decided that we would come back to Papua because life was good here and we had more opportunities.

I was not a member of the *Tablighi Jama’at* then, in fact I did not even know who they were and how they were different from any other Muslims. Most of the people in Papua did not know who the *Tablighis* were as there were none in Papua at the time. And when they first arrived everyone thought they were no different from any other Muslims. Nor were there any people who could explain the Tabligh to us, for most of the Muslims of Indian origin are based in Fak Fak, not Jayapura. In fact in all of Papua there are hardly any Indian or Arab Muslims, only in Fak Fak and it has always been like that. I know of only one Indian Muslim, Iman I think his name was, who was a merchant in Jayapura. He had a shop selling sundry stuff like tins, pots, cloth, whatever. He was not a member of the *Tabligh* and he was just like the rest of us. But he was the only Indian Muslim and everyone could see that. (“*Jelas kelihatan dia itu orang India, India-nya kelihatan jelas.*”) But later he closed his shop and moved out of Jayapura. That was around ten years ago and we never knew what happened to him after that.

Elsewhere in places like Marauke or Timika there are almost no Indian Muslims, but only in Fak Fak. Those in Fak Fak have settled there for a long time, maybe even

back to the time of the Sultanate of Ternate. But otherwise if you come across any other Indian or Arab Muslims, then they must be professionals (*Karyawan, orang pejabat*) or merchants from maybe Surabaya or Jakarta. Unless they are Indians with the *Tabligh* of course.

At that time all the trans-migrants were new here. Jayapura was just a small town with two roads. You had to go everywhere by boat or plane and there were no roads outside. The missionaries were already here and they were the only ones who were travelling inland, to convert the local Papus, but they were not successful. Most of the Papus would take their money and the rice they gave them, but they remained animists.

The *Tabligh* first came here in 1988. That was the year the *Tabligh* arrived and the leader was Doctor Nur from Jakarta. I met him in Jayapura when he first arrived and he was the one who taught me about the *Tabligh*, and it was thanks to him that I later joined the *Tabligh* and became an active member.

Dr. Nur was a real doctor. He was a lung specialist and he worked in the hospital in Jakarta but he also had his own private practice. He was well respected, a polite and educated man. In those days when a doctor came to Papua, then everyone was impressed, especially when the doctor was an Indonesian. You see, most of the medical staff and personnel here then were missionaries who came from America or Australia, so everyone thought that all doctors were white people! But Dr Nur was a Javanese, and Indonesian, and so he was very popular with the locals when he arrived. All of the people wanted to see him, they kept asking for 'Dr Nur, Dr Nur' and they even went to see him when they were not sick! (Laughs) That was how respected he was.

Dr. Nur came from Jakarta and he was sent to Papua by the *Tabligh* markaz in Kebun Jeruk. His job was to see if the *Tabligh* could settle here and how ripe (*subur*) Papua was for the *Tabligh* to grow. He had a small delegation then, only eleven *Tablighis* who also came from Java. They were all Indonesian, and there were no Indian *Tablighis* with them or any other foreigners. So it was easy for them to mix and to get around. They could speak *Bahasa Indonesia* and Javanese and they could easily get

people to listen to them. Dr Nur was a good speaker and when he started talking to the people at the Masjid Agung in Jayapura people would stay back and listen to him.

This was new to us because at the time Jayapura was small and there were mostly trans-migrants there, people from ‘BBM’: Buton, Bugis and Madura. Most of them would not have time to go and pray because they had just settled and were more interested in working to make money because at that time in the 1970s if you could save money then you could easily buy land in Jayapura and other places like Marauke. That was why we were all here, to settle and build our new lives, so work was important and money very important.

Dr Nur was a dedicated man, and his delegation had come by boat. It was a long trip for them for they stopped at Ternate first, and did their *dawah* work in Ternate for two months. Then they took the boat to Jayapura and stayed in Papua for four months, but mostly in Jayapura which is why Jayapura was our first base.

I joined the *Tabligh* then but like most of the locals we didn’t have the time to be full-time members. Most of us were working and my duties as a medical officer meant that I could not leave Jayapura. But Dr Nur and his delegation went out of Jayapura and then tried to carry out their work in other towns too.

After four months Dr Nur left Jayapura and returned to Jakarta with his team, they all left. But one year later in 1989 a second delegation was sent from Jakarta. This time however the delegation was made up of both Indonesians as well as Indian Muslims from the *Tabligh*, and it was the first time that Indian *Tablighis* came to Papua. That delegation was led by an Indian Muslim though I cannot remember if he was from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. But he was definitely Indian and his name was Maulana Imam Nuruddin. He came from India and then he landed in Jakarta. From Jakarta the delegation was assembled and sent to Papua, twelve of them in all.

Like Dr Nur, Maulana Nuruddin was also based in Jayapura and tried to go into the interior but in those days it was still difficult. And then we had another problem because we did not have a real base in Jayapura or in all of Papua at that time. (“*Nggak ada markaz yang benar-benar dimiliki kita*”) At the time our only base was

the Masjid Agung in Jayakarta, which was also the Jamaah masjid for the town. And so there were all sorts of people there and from all backgrounds, mixing together. (*“Orangnya rame disana dan semuanya campur-campur”*.) Moreover because it was the only big jamaah mosque for Friday prayers, the people didn’t like it when the Tablighis were staying there. They didn’t give us any problems, but they didn’t understand why we were living in the mosque (*“Ngapain tinggal di masjid? Tinggal di losmen aja bisa kok.”*) So for the first few years our activities were hindered by the fact that we did not have any place where we could live, operate, co-ordinate our movements and send our delegations to. At times such as during eid celebrations we were almost forced out of the compound of the Masjid Agung as the mosque was overcrowded with people who wanted to use it too.

That was our condition during the first decade. Nobody bothered us and even the security services did not bother us because they knew we were just ordinary good Muslims who wanted to do our prayers and ibadah without causing trouble to anyone. We never felt rejected, but there was simply no space. And with no space of our own, we could not invite others to join us and it was always a problem when we had to host delegations to Papua- at that time we were receiving a minimum of one delegation per year.

Then in 1998 one of our members, Haji Baduh Taufik who came from Hujung Padang left us this patch of land as *wakaf* (*waqf*) and he let us collect money to build this mosque. In the same year (1998) the *Masjid Serambi Mekah* was built here in Entrop, right in the middle of the settlement area around us. Here there are only transmigrants living together, from all of Java, Madura, Ambon, Ternate, etc. This was the first real base for the *Tabligh* in all of Papua and at that time there was only the mosque. We kept collecting donations and then later we built the *pondok pesantren* next to us, which is also on wakaf land left to us by Haji Baduh. Our *pesantren* is called the *Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum Entrop* and is the only real *pesantren* in the area.

From 1998 we began to develop faster because we could transfer all our activities from Jayapura to Entrop, and Entrop is a good place to be because we are between Jayapura and Sentani. This area is majority Muslim and the (Christian) missionaries

do not bother us here, they know this area is fully Muslim now. Just look at the names of the *kampungs* here: *kampong Abu Bakar*, *kampong Wahab*, *kampong Ahmadiya*; everyone knows this is a fully Muslim area! Also this is a good place for the parents who send their children to our *pesantren*, as they know their boys and girls are not going to be put in some remote village where they cannot reach them.

From our new base we managed to send regular delegations all across Papua and since then we have on average six to eight delegations on the road all the time, across Papua. We still send people to the masjid Agung in Jayapura but we have given that up as our base, we don't use it for Tabligh activities anymore.

Apart from Entrop-Jayapura there are only two other real *Markaz* of the *Tabligh* across all of Papua: One in Manokwari and one more in Sorong. Manokwari is a problem for us because they are majority Christian and they made it really difficult for us to move in. The (Christian) missionaries kept building Churches and the mission houses everywhere and they were afraid we might convert the local Papus to Islam too.

We have a fourth smaller base in Marauke at *Masjid Al-Hikmah* on Jalan Mandala Bappel and another small base at *Masjid al-Salihin* in Adipura. In the interior we sometimes send delegations also but only to places where we know there are mosques and where our members will be safe. In the Papu tribal areas there are hardly any mosques, the only one that we use regularly is the *Masjid Agung* in Wamena in the Belian valley but like the old mosque in Jayapura that one is used by everyone and so our members cannot stay there for too long. By now we have covered all of West Papua and in every town we have a base – either belonging to us or loaned to us – where we can stay.

Now, thank God, we can count ourselves as a fully-functioning branch of the *Tabligh*. The Papua *Tablighi Jama'at* have the status of an independent unit, that is we are not a sub-branch of Ternate or Ambon or whatever. Papua is Papua, we are our own administrative unit. In 2007 I finally retired and since then I have been the *Imam Besar* of this mosque and the head Ustaz of the *Pesantren Darul Ulum*; by extension I am also the head of the *Tabligh* in Papua for now. This is on a rotation basis and we

vote in our *shura* council to see who will represent the *Tabligh* in Papua. For now its me.

Because we have our own independent status we can both received and send delegations independently. We get little to no funding from Jakarta, and we have to do everything ourselves, with our own money. On average we get at least two or three delegations from abroad every year, most often from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. For the Indian *Tablighis* Papua is a very remote place but they like it because it means they are really, really committed to the path of Allah if they manage to come all the way here. Often they are worried when they see the (Christian) missionaries too and they are also upset when they watch the behaviour of the Papus who eat pork and sell pigs in the market. But they are very tough, these Indians, and they are willing to go all over Papua for a month, even up to the tribal highlands in the interior. The last delegation that came to us this year (2009) came from Gujerat, India. There were nine of them. They came with a bigger delegation that arrived in Jakarta and nine of them decided to come to Papua. They stayed with us for almost a month.

We have also sent out own delegations abroad, but we need to send them first to Jakarta where they are collected and dispatched according to the decisions of the main organizers and administrators there. We can send as many as we want, but normally the procedure is that they will only really know where they will be sent when they are in Jakarta and all the delegations have been collected together. In July and August this year (2009) we sent a delegation from Papua that was later sent to Philippines and then further to Peru. Another delegation sent at the same time was sent by Jakarta to Morocco and a third was sent to China.

Our next delegation will leave in the first quarter of 2010 and they will be sent to Jakarta and then to Singapore for certain. After that we may send them to Southern Thailand (*Markaz Besar Jala*) if the security situation permits. At the moment we have one delegation – seventeen in all – that is abroad, and they are in India. They have just done their tour and are probably in Delhi (*Markaz Nizamuddin*) getting ready for their trip back to Indonesia and then returning to Papua. So don't think that just because we are based in Papua we are remote and forgotten. No, once our

delegations get to Jakarta then they are part of the international network like anyone else.

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