

Behind “Ending Child Marriage” Campaign in the Muslim World

News:

The age limit of marriage, again became polemic in Indonesia after the controversy of junior high school couple in Bantaeng, South Sulawesi who strongly desire to get married. Though based in Indonesia Marriage Act, marriage is only allowed if a man has reached the age of 19 years and the woman has reached the age of 16 years.

The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) together with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) proposed to increase the age limit of marriage which was originally 16 years to 20 years for women and 22 years for men through the revision of Marriage Act 1974. Besides that, the Ministry of the PPPA has already launched a national campaign to Stop Child Marriage since November 2017. (sindonews.com)

Comment:

Child marriages in the Muslim world has always been media also gender groups spotlight. Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Indonesia are examples of Muslim countries that are often in the spotlight. In Indonesia, Minister PPPA Yohana Yambise who launched the Stop Child Marriage campaign has referred to data from the CFR (Council of Foreign Relations), an US based think tank institute, which mentioned Indonesia is the seventh ranked in the world with the highest absolute number of child marriages the second highest in ASEAN after Cambodia.

The biggest mistake of Muslim rulers is remain trusting the standard of value promoted by the West through its international agencies. Through the propaganda of ending child marriage, Muslim leaders unaware that the enemies of Islam are weakening Muslim generation through making them slow-matured in thinking and responsibility. There are various laws in Indonesia which merely slowing the children maturity. The term "child" was obscured, and current marriage law has also reversed child maturity age, from the puberty age to 16 years, and even getting slower through recent proposal become 20 years.

Biased standard also strongly reflected in the CFR report which puts Western countries at a minimum of child marriage issues. In fact, obviously the United States is dealing with serious problems of child marriage and prostitution. In all 50 states, a group namely *Unchained At Last* estimated that 248,000 children -- or those under age 18 -- were married in America in that decade (CNN, November 2017). US also dealing with child prostitution, according to Hope International, at least 100,000 children are used as prostitutes each year as part of the \$9.8 billion U.S. sex trafficking industry. “Teen Pregnancy” statistic also very stand-out, a total of 249,078 babies were born to women aged 15-19 years in US, for a birth rate of 24.2 per 1,000 women in this age group.

Why does this standard bias happen? Because there’s an agenda that targets Muslim countries due to at least two motives; **First, economic motive** – where early marriage causes Muslim women to be unproductive, it was clearly expressed by the Indonesian government that early marriage may disrupt government plans for sustainable development and hamper economic growth (Kompas, July 2016). **The second is ideological motive**, to attack Islamic Sharia for curbing girl’s freedom due to allowing child marriage. Yet the problems arising from child marriage in Muslim world are result of secularism, low literacy of the ummah regarding Islamic teachings, the failed secular education to mature the mind, and massive sexual stimulation from the social system. As a result, born a premature generation who is *baligh* (biologically) too fast, but slow to become *akeel* (rational).

But opinion theater continues to be played in Muslim world. Western media is very eagerly exposing the weakness of Muslim, exploiting it for the sake of their Islamophobic agenda, but at the same time blinds them to the cancer that exist in their own community. Analog with a Malay proverb, “An ant across the ocean is seen, but not the elephant nearby”, the West needs to look in the mirror before pointing the face of Muslims!

On the other hand, Muslim rulers should return to Shariah standard alone in term of maturity limit of children. The *akeel baligh* is the phase where maturity of thinking can function optimally, so children will be ready to bear the legal burden (*takleef*) and responsible for any deeds. Islam allows marriage at young age. The Shariah laws do not change with the inclinations of mankind. In the same way the Muslims' thinking should not be changed by the influence of the wrong ideologies that have arisen today.

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