

Maya Soetoro: Indonesia Inspires Me

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"My mother was 52 years old, she died due to cancer. (We) planned to bury her under the tree, she asked, "Put me in the sea. If not, how would I be able to return to Indonesia and travel to see the people I love most?"


That was how Dr. Maya Soetoro, the step sister of U.S. President Barack Obama, remembered to describe her mother's love, the late Ann Dunham, to Indonesia. Not only her mum, but Maya and her brother, Obama, always remember Indonesia as a country where they had spent their lives in. "Indonesia inspires my life," said Maya Soetoro when giving a lecture, *Education for Peace*, in the Senate Hall of UGM on Tuesday (11/6).

Despite her short stay in Indonesia as she had to follow her mother who was doing research on microfinance, Maya was often brought along to see cultural attraction and performance while they stayed in Ngasem, Yogyakarta. "When I was 6 or 7 years old, I lived in Ngasem. I went to see the shadow puppet play, the cultural festival in the Square in front of the Palace, and Taman Sari," said Maya.

Since she was a little, she had been introduced by Ann Dunham on the importance of understanding of the diversity of faiths and cultures. She recalled there were religious symbols in her room, such as Garuda, Lakshmi and Vishnu, and a mosque miniature," she said.

Once she begged for her mum to make her a Christmas tree. "In 1977 there were not many Christmas trees in Indonesia. My mother asked the driver to get a tree from the mountain area (Mt. Merapi). We decorated it with colourful papers but it was not festive enough. So, my mum got the red and green chillis and put them on the tree," she recounted.

Her experience living in Yogyakarta, Maya admitted, was very memorable for her although she grew up in Hawai'i. The tolerance in Yogyakarta at that time showed the importance to maintain



tolerance. "Tolerance connects culture, love, cooperation, tradition and history into one. When global world economy is facing a very unique challenge, the policy taken has not come into the thing that we believe at present, to return to the real principle," she said.

Inspired by the lives of people of Yogyakarta, Maya had established an NGO that priorities security and peace. In her opinion, the activities done by the organisation is to encourage people to live in harmony in their own roles. "We learn from books on religion and we develop a model of security and peace, how to manage conflict in a better way," she said.

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