# THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND RELIGIOUS HOSPITALITY IN OPEN DAG PPME AL IKHLASH AMSTERDAM

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### Abstract

This article describes and analyses the Open dag event held by PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam. It is an annual event and a form of religious hospitality in which the members of PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam warmly welcome the guests or strangers. This study uses a perspective of hospitality from either scriptural or theoretical basis. In terms of scripture, religious hospitality is highly commended by Islamic and Christian scriptures. While in terms of theoretical perspective, there are many scholars who discussed the theme based on various approaches; theology, sociology, ethics. I found that Open Dag allows people from various backgrounds to meet in person and to become aquianted with the existence of PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam. The civic engagement which is gained through religious hospitality practiced by PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam leads to peace building among communities.

### A. Introduction

People live within a community in a particular geographic area today and in an era of advanced technology. Often we find out that people are internationally very connected but, on the other hand, disconnected from their immediate contexts. People share their daily routines and precious leisure time mainly with their family, the closest circle of their lives. No seldom do they not know the people next door.

As a Muslim diaspora organization amidst Dutch society, there is a need for PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam to create an event that allows its members to interact with the surrounding, especially because the presence of PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam is considered new in the area.

However, letting people know what the members do in the 'Indonesich Cultureel Centrum' is a way of peace building and conflict prevention with the local

citizen. When they share information on what they do to others, it means that they are inclusive in a way that they openly interact with the others. Being inclusive and open to otherness is path to the peace and conflict prevention. Indonesian people wearing headscraft or hijab come and go to this building may raise neighbour's curiosity and suspicion. Especially due to political dynamics, either worldwide or local, the polarization among society increases. Dutch people who live around the building may generalize Muslims accordingly to the information they receive from television and other media which is not always positive-or in another word- mostly negative.

Given the serious threat to peace by radicalism and terrorism in the name of Islam, every member of society is held to actively promote peace to counteract this negative image. Beside, passive action and being silent Muslims are encouraged by their sacred texts to actively creating a peaceful relation between Muslims and other communities.

The Qur'an, the book of divine revelation, teaches nonviolent approaches to conflict prevention. One of them is to maintain a friendship (*silaturrahim*) with everyone regardless differences such as race, colours, nationalities and religions. The message, as will be discussed in the following, is universal i.e., encouraging mankind to know one another.

In accordance with the above framework, it is necessary to understand that people are free to conceptualize activities for coming to know one another. Discussions, conferences, summits, and any other forms are some of the examples of events to build understanding among elites and educated people. In society, people find their ways of making friendships through daily interaction, trade activities, festivals and other communal activities.

By doing such events, as a minority, Indonesian people living in Amsterdam try to maintain their friendship with others since Open Dag is a day in which PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam is open to everyone. People, whatever their religions, may visit into the mosque, see what is inside, a picture gallery of activities, ask explanation about the organization, enjoying cultural and traditional performances, and enjoy Indonesian cuisine.

The purpose of this event is to introduce who PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam is. The organization tries to show that Indonesian Islam (this organization) has its particular characteristics of inclusivity, openness, moderation, and tolerance. Such introduction is especially important because Indonesian Muslim population in the Netherlands is a triple minority. Being Indonesian diaspora is minority, being religious is also a minority, and being Muslims is also a minority. The presence of Indonesian Muslim diaspora even was not well-recognized by Muslim researchers in the Netherlands. It can be seen from several books and research reports on Islam in the Netherland which mention Indonesian as neither one of the immigrant countries of

origins nor identities. The clear example is the report done by *Sociaal and en Cultureel Planbureau*. Among other nations of origins such as Turkey, Marocco, Egypt, Suriname and India, Indonesia is not mentioned in the report.

### B. PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam

PPME stands for 'Persatuan Pemuda Muslim se Eropa' (Bahasa Indonesia) - roughly translated as 'Association of Young Muslim in Europe'. PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam is one of six branches of PPME in the Netherlands and Germany. Under the umbrella of PPME the Netherlands six branches are accounted for; PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam, PPME Breda, PPME Hemskerk, PPME Den Haag, PPME Rotterdam and PPME Germany.

PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam was officially established in December 2005 after the separation from PPME Amsterdam (which is now named Euro Muslim) due to a different understanding of Islamic legal and practical issues. For extended discussion on the history of the separation I do refer to a thesis entitled "Islamic reconciliation on an Intra-religious organization; Euro-Muslim and PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam" written by Muhammad Saiful Mujab.

After the separation, PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam faced two tough years. Before settling in the building with its right of ownership, the organization faced great difficulties in performing religious activities. Prayers and gatherings were conducted from one house to another house of the members. The organization is now centered in Indonesich Cultureel Centruxm, Jan van Genstraat 140, Badhoevedorp. This building was bought in March 2016 and was officially inaugurated on 28 March 2017.



Pict: the building of PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam

The members of the organization are around 200 families. The majority of them is Indonesian. Although the organization belongs to Indonesian community, people

Mieke Maliepaard and Mérove Gijsberts, *Moslem in Nederland 2012*, (Den Haag, Sociaal and en Cultureel Planbureau, 2012).

from different nationalities may engage with activities or even its membership. That is why PPME does not attach "Indonesia" in its name whereas, in fact, this organization belongs to the Indonesian community. The purpose of this naming is to provide space for other nationalities. Members of this organization from different nationalities are welcomed. They may come from countries such as Suriname, Malaysia, and the Netherlands.

As the consequence of being not based on nationality (Indonesia), at least two languages are commonly used in this organization; Dutch and Bahasa Indonesia. Bahasa Indonesia is used mostly by old generation of Indonesian diaspora. Dutch is mostly spoken by children of Indonesian diaspora, either cross nationalities or Indonesian marriage, born in the Netherlands. But this does not mean that the children cannot speak Bahasa Indonesia at all. They prefer to speak Dutch because Dutch is the language they communicate with their friends in schools and their environments.

# C. Open Dag PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam: An Event for Civic Engagement

Beside educating its members through Islamic teaching activities and particular ritual gatherings, PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam is also concerned with doing *da'wah* which is related to social issues. Some activities they conducted or worked in cooperation with other organizations, such as the international conference on Islam Nusantara, are not only limited exclusively to its members but also are open to make others aware of the existence of the organization; Indonesian Islam.

Open dag is conducted annually, a week before Muslims perform the worship of Ramadan fasting. The four aims of conducting this event is first, to keep in touch with neighbours, second, to let people know the existence of the Indonesich Cultureel Centrum and all its activities, third, to celebrate the coming of month Ramadan, and fourth, to provide a chance for PPME Al Ikhlash's members to apologize among each other for mistakes they did intentionally or unintentionally so that Ramadan can be anticipated with cleaner heart. The main intention of the event is not interreligious hospitality as Marianne Moyaert suggests, yet religious hospitality to maintain civic engagement is a means to building Intercommunal Peace. While at the same time facilitating interreligious dialogue in a more festive way.

Open Dag was conducted on 20 May 2017 from 11.00 AM until 01.30 PM. During this time, Indonesich Cultureel Centrum was widely open for public. People could see and ask everything. The committee prepared ten Dutch speaking people to guide and inform guests about the organization, what kind of ideology the organization follows, is it a group of traditionalists, puritans, or even radical?, and the kind of activities in Indonesian culture. They accompanied the guests having conversations while having the building tour.

The committee invited the community around the PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam, Indonesian Muslims in the Netherlands, Muslims organizations in Amsterdam, individuals from various backgrounds, and authorities such as Indonesia Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Mayor of Haarlem, police (*wijkagent*) and fire ward (*brandweer*) officers.

The event was not purely religious. It is conceptualized as most-enjoyable to make the guests feel at home. Cultural performances, such as Saman dance (an energetic traditional dance from Aceh), Pencak Silat (a martial art originated from Indonesia), and singing were set on a stage outside of the mosque. This concept (a cultural event whith a religious message) should enhance the invitee's motivation.

Varnshney interprets Open Dag as a form of associational civic engagement. During the event, individuals do not only interact with their particular groups. This opportunity, according to Varshney, will make a strong relationship between the structure of civil society within a plural context. In addition, they are also invited into theological dialogue after a speech from the representative of PPME Al Ikhlash about what and who PPME Al Ikhlash is.

PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam, according to Marianne Moyaert's concept of ideology and openness, plays between inclusivism and pluralism. Plurality is not rejected but positively valued as religious diversity. Members of PPME Al Ikhlash mostly believe in the truth of their religion but also affirm "the independent validity of other ways." As far as I am concerned, the members of PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam generally have two definitions of truth, theological and sociological. Theologically, the members of PPME Al Ikhlas believe that their religion is the complete one. At the same time, sociologically they say that others beliefs are true according to the respective believers.

In his speech, the ambassador of Indonesia, a Hindu suggested that Indonesian Islam is unique because they accept modernity and democracy. In addition, he continued, Islam is a religion respecting diversity. This what made Islam spread in Indonesia peacefully without any violence, war, and coercion. The preachers (Walisongo, nine saints) preserved local tradition, wisdom x and faith, such as Buddhism and Hinduism so that Islam was accepted by the majority of Indonesian society

Mr. Ambassador also hoped that this community can contribute to peace making and to intertwining of Islam and culture. This is in line with what is being practiced by the organization, the spirit of Walisongo in the Netherlands is to respect local cultures and to adapt some cultures into Islamic values as far as they are not irrelevant or contradictory to Islamic teaching.

Civic engagement is very important to be practiced by PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam. From two types of civic engagement as promoted by Varshney;

associational and everyday x of civic engagement, PPME Al Ikhlas finds it difficult to implement the latter. The Dutch context of everyday civic engagement is different from the Indonesian way, in terms of culture and religion, because of the rare interaction between Indonesian Muslim community with their neighbor. Even if the members of the organization pass through neighbor houses, they rarely really meet the neighbors. Instead, for instance in religious practice, people in Indonesia meet each other naturally when they perform their five prayer times in the mosque.

The participation of religious and political leaders or community groups brought inspiring atmosphere. Although there was no specific agenda for religious discussion, their presence and togetherness built awareness and understanding in the community and among the authorities.

People returned home with new experiences. Children had made new friends, with whom they had played together. Also youngsters had their own exchanges. A Russian teenager shared that now he had just come to know what Ramadan and fasting is about. Committee members interviewed several guest with positive outcome. "Indonesian Muslim are relatively tolerant. They are open to local culture and easily integrate with their surroundings."<sup>2</sup>

Such an event is an important venue for creating inter-communal civic engagement and that serves as an agent of peace building by preventing conflict from the outset. The Dutch friction with Islam was mentioned by some politicians. Their political interests may bring polarization among society. Civic engagement bridges between communities to manage such tensions.

## D. Religious Hospitality in Open Dag PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam

Besides, Open Dag PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam also exemplifies and performs religious hospitality. In the ancient Christian tradition, hospitality was understood as not only a help for needy sojourners and strangers by providing shelters, food, and protection, but also in recognition of their worth. Today, it is simply understood as "coffee time after church service". Pohl interprets hospitality as a way of life in churches and homes.<sup>3</sup> Hospitality is spiritual discipline and spiritual gesture of healing in welcoming strangers and marginalized. As Morales quotes from the Book of Leviticus "You shall love alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."<sup>4</sup>

The definition of hospitality is getting narrowed by Martha Stewarts' in defining hospitality as entertaining family and friends and to the service of hotel and restaurant industry. Marianne Moyaert re-conceptualizes interreligious hospitality as a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Interviewee with Hasanul Hasibuan, the chairman of the Committee, 29/05/2017

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Christine D. Pohl, "Hospitality, a Practice and a Way of Life," Vision, Spring (2002), 34.

<sup>4 &</sup>quot;http://www.uuabookstore.org/Assets/PDFs/3101.pdf, accessed on 27 May 2017 at 13.20

fair interreligious dialogue; a balance of openness and steadfastness.<sup>5</sup> The term which is going to be used in this paper is 'to accept others as a religious practice'.

Islam, like other religions, is rich in accounts of religious hospitality. Here are provided some Qur'anic verses and Hadith concerning the order and encouragement of hospitality.

Islam highly commanded hospitality. Narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet says:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه: أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: ( من كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر ، فليكرم جاره ، وليوم الآخر ، فليكرم جاره ، ومن كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر ، فليكرم جاره ، ومن كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر ، فليكرم ضيفه. (رواه البخاري) رقم:١٠١٨، (ومسلم) رقم:٤٧٠

"Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain his guest generously and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should talk what is good or keep quiet. (i.e. abstain from all kinds of evil and dirty talk)."

The hadith was recorded in some versions. That is why the above translation has slight difference from its Arabic words of غليكرم جاره which best translates "should honour his neighbour", instead of "should not harm his neighbour". The Arabic version of the English translation above originally translates فلا يؤذي جاره (not mentioned in the above Arabic text). Both narrations are acceptable. In the first the emphasize is on "not to harm" which is a passive way of neighbourhood relationship whereas "to honour" is the active action. As long as a person does not do harm to his surrounding, being silent is enough. But the other recommendation from Muhammad is to honour, to do something based on the culture where people live.

This hadith is a clear command of Muhammad to his followers 'to practice hospitality' (entertaining guests generously and honouring neighbours). In the hadith, the order seems so strong to relate faith to three teachings; who believes in Allah should honour his neighbours, who believes in Allah should entertain guests generously and who believes in Allah should talk what is good.

This linguistics, to relate three teachings to faith, is like a father says to his son, if you are my son, please do this. Actually, if the son does not do what the father

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ahmad ibn Ali Ibn Hajar Al Atsqalani, *Fathul Bari fi Syarhil Bukhori*, (Cairo, Almaktabah As Salafiyyah, 1990) vol. 10, 445-446.

http://www.gowister.com/hadith/bukhari/5899/, accessed on 27 May 2017, at 12:56 PM.

asks, the father doesn't acknowledge his son, but that saying is to emphasize the importance of the command. Therefore, entertaining guest generously is one of three deeds which is strongly emphasized to be done.

From the Qur'an, the teaching of hospitality is implied in the story of Abraham who received guests and performed his best to serve. In the end, as a result, the guests brought him a very much good message; i.e., his wife is going to have a child.<sup>8</sup>

Beside the story of Abraham, another Qur'an verse on hospitality is the following. This verse is fundamental that God commands us to know one another. He emphasizes that he creates human in differences. To perceive all people are equal regardless of race, sex, and religion, is the basic of religious hospitality.

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." <sup>10</sup>

Imam Suyuthi, in his work on Qur'anic interpretation 'Al-Durr Al-Mantsur fi Tafsir Bil-Ma'tsur¹ mentions two stories as the background of revelation¹¹ for the interpretation of this verse. The first story is when the conqueror of Mecca, Bilal ibn Rabbah (a black slave) climbed the Kaaba and recited azan (Muslim prayers calls) from above the Kaaba. Some people insulted him: "is this black slave who calls for prayers?". Some others replied, if God dislikes him, God will change him for sure. Then, this verse was sent down.¹²

The second is the story which is the cause of the revelation of this verse. It is the story of Abu Hind, a slave who had been freed. Muhammad ordered Bani Bayadhah (name of a tribe) to marry one of their daughters to Abu Hind. But they rejected "O, the messenger, how can we marry our daughters to our prior slave?" Then this verse was sent down. <sup>13</sup>

This verse is universal indeed. God's call "O mankind" is not only to attract Muslims' attention but all mankind'. Textually, God said "he created human in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The Qur'an, Al Dzariyat: 24-30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Qur'an, Al Hujurat: 13.

http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=49&verse=13, accessed 27 May 2017 at 02.31 PM

A verse was sent down from God to Muhammad not in a free space. It was sent down for a reason, problem, or backgrounds which Muhammad and his people encountered with.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Jalaluddin As Suyuthi, *Addurrul Mantsur fit Tafsir bil Ma'tsur*, (Cairo, Markaz lil Buhuts wad Dirasat al 'Arabiyyah wal Islamiyyah, 2003), 591.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> As Suyuthi, Addurrul Mantsur, 591.

differences so that human may know each other". Two inter-connected issues are going to be explained, human equality and to know one another.

# 1. Human equality

All human is equal for God. Humans are not to be distinguished by their sex, descendant, color, social status, wealth, etc., but their righteousness. Righteousness can be gained by doing good. It can be concluded that what God sees from human is the contribution of a person to his or her surroundings. On the contrary, human cannot be proud of their masculinity (males is superior over females), descendants (one tribe is nobler than others), colours, races, etc.

In the farewell hajj (the hajj before Muhammad passed away), he delivered a speech on the equality of human in front of God.

"All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action."<sup>14</sup>

In the verse, following the statement "We have created you from male and female," God states the purpose of making the diversity; "التعارفوا that you may know one another". Difference can trigger a conflict as Biggar states that "human experience confirms that diversity among peoples can be a source of value as well as of conflict". The potential for conflict will be reduced by knowing one another. Knowing each other is the purpose of religious hospitality.

## 2. Knowing each other

The purpose that God creates us in tribes and nations is that we may recognize one another. The word "one another" is a reciprocal relationship. We should understand or know others as well as be open to being recognized by others. This kind of interaction will raise both sympathy and also empathy.

Moyaert suggests yet another meaning of interreligious hospitality, which is interreligious dialogue. God does not make a certain way to conduct such way of knowing each other in interreligious dialogue. He opens widely the door of innovation by his saying "that is best." God says:

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/imam-abdullah-antepli/the-last-sermon-of-prophe\_b\_1252185.html accessed on 26 May 2017, at 18.02

Nigel Biggar, Between Keen and Cosmopolis, An Ethic of the Nation, Eugene; Wipf and Stock, 2014, 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The Qur'an, Al Ankabut: 46.

"And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."

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Theological discussions and argument are ways to know and understand each other. He challenges interreligious dialogue "*in a way that is best*" based on culture, social, economics, and other consideration. So did the Prophet himself. Five years after his migration to Medina, no less than 35 delegations and groups came to Muhammad. Most of them met him for theological discussion. A highly interesting is the coming of the delegation of Bani Najran, a Christian tribe. Sixty people came to the mosque of Medina right after the afternoon prayer (*ashar*) to meet Muhammad. The delegates performed their prayer in the mosque. Some of Muhammad's followers wanted to forbid them. But Muhammad said to his followers to let them pray. And they prayed. <sup>18</sup> This shows that Muhammad openly practiced interreligious hospitality.

In terms of peace building, religious hospitality also entails a civic engagement. Ashutosh Varshney argues, based on empirical findings in India (Varshney 2002) that there is a strong relationship between the structure of pluralist civil society and the presence and absence of communal violence.

Civil society is "the part of our life that exists between the state on the one hand and families on the other, that allows people to come together for a whole variety of public activities, and that is relatively independent of the state." <sup>19</sup>

Varshney distinguishes two civic engagements; an *associational* form of civic engagement and *everyday* form of civic engagement. Associational civic engagement is like a business partnership, professional organization, sports club, etc. Everyday civic engagement is daily life activities such as neighbourhood interaction.<sup>20</sup>

Civic engagement, *inter*-ethnic and *intra*-ethnic, plays different roles in ethnic conflicts. Inter-communal civic engagement is an agent of peace because it builds bridges between communities and it manages tensions. Meanwhile, if civic engagement only existed in the intra-communal bound and the inter-community link is weak or does not even exist, the probability of communal violence would be considerably high.<sup>21</sup>

United Nations defines peacebuilding as:

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http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=29&verse=46, accessed on 27 May 2017 at 03:17 PM.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibnul Qayyim Al Jauziyyah, *Zaadul Ma'ad fi Hadyi Kharil 'Ibad*, Al Resalah Publisher, Beirut, 1998, vol. III, 549.

Astunosh Varnshey, Ethnic Conclic & Civic life, Hindus and Muslim in India, (London, Yale University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Varnshey, Ethnic Conclic & Civic Life, 3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Varnshey, Ethnic Conclic & Civic Life, 3.

"A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives." 22

Peace building is the result of activities of many people in different sectors and at different levels.<sup>23</sup> One of the ways to maintain peace is through interreligious hospitality. Religious hospitality results knowing each other. Knowing each others produces mutual understanding. Mutual understanding creates tolerance. Tolerance generates interdependence.

### E. Conclusion

Open Dag PPME Al Ikhlash Amsterdam is a representation of religious hospitality. Open dag is one of endeavours of PPME Al Ikhlas Amsterdam to create peace with its surroundings hence to maintain civic engagement.

Civic networks play an important role in peace building. The communities surrounding the mosques had the willingness to attend and see the event because the concept of the event is not purely religious, a cultural event. Meeting in persons makes this Indonesich Cutureel Centrum Building not alienated.

Open Dag was conducted successfully and succeeded in achieving its goals. Harmony is the positive result of this event. Yet there are still some areas that can be developed gradually. First, to broaden the scope of interreligious hospitality to other religious communities or organization. Therefore, interreligious dialogue can be conducted sufficiently. Second, the members of PPME Al Ikhlash should have been prepared. The preparation here is the precondition of religious hospitality that is the commitment towards the members' own faith, tradition and religion. In addition to that, the members should have understood the aims of interreligious hospitality so that they will be mentally ready.

Conflict is prevented from very outset by negotiating differences before they trigger a clash. For long term purpose, the absence of communal violence is the main expected result of such event.

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http://www.unpbf.org/application-guidelines/what-is-peacebuilding/#fn-1937-3, accessed 30 May 2017 at 03.40 PM.

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