

A responsible international actor

INTERVIEW WITH RETNO MARSUDI

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA



RETNO MARSUDI graduated in International Relations from Gadjah Mada University, and undertook further studies in European Law at the Hague Hogeschool in The Hague and Human Rights at Oslo University. She served as Indonesia's Ambassador to Norway and Iceland from 2005-08, and the Netherlands from 2012-14. In between these two assignments, Ms Marsudi was Director General for America and Europe in Indonesia's Foreign Ministry. She was sworn in as a member of President Joko Widodo's Working Cabinet on 27 October 2014.

Indonesia's diplomatic priorities in 2015 were highlighted as the protection of sovereignty, the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad, economic diplomacy and the advocacy of Indonesia's regional and international interests. Have these changed? If so, why?

Our foreign policy priorities remain the same, although I must say of that the environment and the challenges have evolved.

For example, last year the protection of Indonesian citizens was our priority focus, since the main task at hand was to build and strengthen the system. This year, the system is up and running, showing concrete results, such as a reduction of cases involving Indonesians abroad.

Our focus on economic diplomacy has not changed. The establishment of our economic diplomacy team last year has shown concrete results, namely in the number of business deals facilitated by Indonesian diplomats around the globe. Business deals that have supported our economic growth, which is predicted to reach 5.2 per cent this year.

Border negotiations continue to be discussed with our neighbours, as part of our effort to safeguard our sovereignty, and to set an example that with clearly delineated borders we can avoid potential disputes.

Indonesia's role on the regional and global stage continues to be enhanced. At the bilateral level, President Jokowi attended more than 64 bilateral/international meetings while our Vice President held 22 bilateral meetings.

We continue our focus on ASEAN as the cornerstone of our foreign policy. This year, we are pursuing the strengthening the ASEAN Community, which came into being at the end of 2015. We are also working towards the realisation of ASEAN Vision 2025.

Meanwhile, in the last year alone, we hosted the Asia-Africa Commemorative Conference, the Bali Process Ministerial Meeting, the OIC Extraordinary Summit on Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the Bali Democracy Forum, as well as a number of other regional and global conferences.

As the world's largest Muslim country, what role can Indonesia play in promoting a two-state solution in Palestine, and reducing the tensions in the Gulf, notably between Iran and Saudi Arabia?

As the biggest Muslim majority democratic country in

the world with a tradition of tolerance and moderation, Indonesia can provide different perspectives towards peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East.

Our support for Palestine is mandated in our Constitution. We want to see a sovereign and independent Palestine under the two-state solution.

That is the reason why last month we hosted the 5th OIC Extraordinary Summit on Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif in Jakarta. To garner the support of the Islamic world towards Palestine. To place the issue of Palestine at the centre of the world's attention. To ensure that concrete steps are taken in support of the Palestinian cause.

I have also personally travelled abroad to inaugurate Indonesia's Honorary Consulate in Ramallah.

In regard to relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, President Jokowi has appointed me as his special envoy to deliver a message of peace to King Salman and President Rouhani.

We offer our support to our two friends to resolve their differences. We emphasise that good relations between them are important, not only for bilateral, regional and global peace and stability, but especially for the good of the Islamic ummah.

You have previously mentioned ASEAN as the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy. How would you characterise Indonesia's relations with the European Union and with the United Kingdom? Does Indonesia have a position on the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU?

Both the UK and EU are important traditional partners for Indonesia. The number and the depth of Indonesia's areas of cooperation with them are enormous, from trade and investment to development cooperation, environment, education, and renewable energy.

We also share many joint efforts in addressing international challenges, such as promotion of tolerance and moderation, as well as combating terrorism and transnational organised crime.

President Jokowi's visit to Europe in April will be a reflection of our strong commitment to continue to strengthen and develop those relationships.

With regard to the relations between the UK and EU, Indonesia follows closely the dynamic development in the region. Indonesia values and is committed to continue developing its partnership with both the UK and EU.

Please comment on the other priorities of Indonesia's diplomacy for 2016, notably competing territorial claims in the South China Sea and the issues of migration and countering extremism worldwide.

Firstly, I want to emphasise that Indonesia is a non-claimant state in the South China Sea. Peace and stability in the South China Sea is important since more than half of global merchandise trade and a third of the world's maritime traffic passes through the area.

With that in mind, Indonesia is concerned by the growing tension that we are seeing there. All parties should restrain themselves and not take actions which may further aggravate the situation. We call upon all parties to respect the prevailing international laws, especially UNCLOS 1982, and to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes. Indonesia also calls upon all parties to follow the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea and strive towards the early conclusion of the Code of Conduct.

With regard to the problem of irregular migration, Indonesia has first-hand experience of receiving an influx of refugees last year. Although we are not party to the Refugee Convention, we have gone beyond our obligations and received them due to humanitarian considerations. I have just recently co-chaired the Bali Regional Meeting Conference last March 2016, together with my colleague Julie Bishop of Australia, to provide common solutions to such problems. This regional meeting resulted in a commitment to establish a new mechanism for consultation during emergency situations. In addition, countries of origin, transit and destination need to work together to resolve the root causes of the problem.

We need to take a comprehensive approach to address both the humanitarian aspect as well as the criminal aspect of the problem, namely human trafficking and people-smuggling. I believe such an approach can also be applied in Europe to deal with the current migration situation.

Recent terrorist attacks in Jakarta, Brussels and other places shows that no country is free from such threats. It also shows that terrorism, extremism and radicalism is tied to no specific religion or belief. Thus, Indonesia believes that we need to apply a comprehensive approach to solve those problems.

Hard power can be applied through law enforcement. But it must be accompanied by a soft approach through de-radicalisation programmes, a cultural approach, and the promotion of moderation and tolerance.

Indonesia will continue to be the key driver to voice Islam as *rahmatan lil'alam* (a blessing for the universe). We have launched Indonesia's digital initiative "Empowering Leaders for Peace" in February 2016 to advance social media narratives on moderation, tolerance, and peace.

We also continue to pursue international cooperation with other countries in wide-ranging fields, from intelligence sharing, and capacity building for law enforcement officers, to interfaith dialogue and spreading the word of tolerance.

As the first woman to hold the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, please comment on the position and role of women in Indonesia, and in particular women's role management and senior government positions.

The issue of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment has always been close to my heart. Let me reflect a bit from my own personal experience.

I was honoured to be appointed as the 18th Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and first woman to be in the position. My appointment, together with seven other prominent women, is a clear reflection of how the government balances merit and gender equality.

For a long time, diplomacy has been a man's world. Yet I believe that women can succeed in anything if we put our minds to it. With that in mind, I joined the Foreign Ministry in 1986.

Today, the Foreign Ministry is very different from what it was 30-40 years ago. Gender equality is a watchword whereby new recruits are balanced between male and female. A merit system is fully implemented, guaranteeing equal opportunity to those who are qualified to hold key positions in Indonesia's diplomatic service.

At the same time, gender-responsive policies are at hand, making the work environment friendlier to working mothers and ladies who are career diplomats.


Such change happens almost everywhere in Indonesia. Women are taking leadership roles as CEOs in companies, ministers, governors and regents, parliamentarians, ambassadors and almost every other job there is.

Is there anything else you would like to say to our readers?

I want to especially highlight Indonesia's efforts at economic reforms to improve efficiency and our competitiveness.

We continue to deregulate the economy. In fact, the government has issued no less than 11 economic policy packages in the last year to make Indonesia's economy more open and competitive.

These include the revision of the negative investment list, where around 35 new sectors have been opened to foreign investors; the creation of a one-stop service for investors, coupled with three hour investment permit issuance; and the acceleration of infrastructure developments in priority areas such as toll roads, power plants, railway networks, seaports and airports.

I hope that readers of FIRST will be well informed and make their investment decisions accordingly. 

Indonesia is concerned by the growing tension in the South China Sea and calls on all parties to refrain from actions that may further aggravate the situation