Honourable members of Indonesian Parliaments,
Honourable members of Australian Parliament,

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to Indonesia’s Parliament, and also to the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), the Australian National University (ANU), for inviting me and giving me the honour to speak here today.

Indeed, it is my great pleasure to be here today, to share my thought with you on the subject of political change in Indonesia, its impacts on foreign policy, and the role of parliamentary diplomacy. If time permits, I will also try to explore the role of parliament and parliamentary diplomacy in promoting regional cooperation.

Political Change and New Identity

Today, Indonesia is obviously different from what it was ten years ago. Since the collapse of New Order government in May 1998, Indonesia has once again
entered an era of democratic practices. The introduction of electoral reform, multi-party system, direct elections, decentralisation, and freedom of the press have all provided Indonesia with some necessary ingredients to qualify as a democracy.

Yet, Indonesia’s democracy is still a young one, and the democratisation process is still ongoing until today, and I believe it will take even many more years before Indonesia’s democracy becomes consolidated. At the moment, therefore, it is fair to say that Indonesia’s democracy is still characterised by a combination of dramatic breakthroughs, moments of great optimism, and occasional frustration as well.

At the same time, the democratisation process has also opened up the opportunity for Islam to once again come to the centre stage of national political life. Under the New Order government, the relationship between Islam and the state had always been characterised by mutual suspicion and antagonism. In the past, Islam, especially in its political form, was often subject to the politics of marginalisation by the state. Nevertheless, Islam managed to preserve its social influence within the society, and the New Order government never succeeded in curbing a sense of entitlement among segments of the Muslim community to seek a formal political role. With the opening up of the political system since 1998, Islam has once again become an important political force in Indonesian politics.

The move towards democracy and the revival of Islam --as social and political force-- constitute two significant developments in Indonesia’s domestic politics since the collapse of Suharto’s New Order. In fact, Islam
and democracy have become two important elements of Indonesia’s politics in the post-reformasi era.

Within this context, there are two significant questions often raised with regards to democracy and Islam in Indonesia. First, how resilience is Indonesia’s democracy? This is a legitimate question indeed. In newly democratising states, the path towards democracy has always been susceptible to either democratic backsliding or even the return of authoritarianism. Within Southeast Asia, the case of Thailand is illustrative. However, Indonesia’s brief records in preserving democratisation amid turbulent economic and political transition suggests that there are reasons to believe that the country would continue to be resilience in facing the threat of democratic regression or back-sliding.

Second, many wonder whether the emergence of Islamic politics in Indonesia would serve as a liability to democracy. In this regard, there are reasons to believe that the role of Islam in Indonesia would be crucial to the development of democracy in the country.

First, Indonesia’s Islam is moderate in nature. For the majority of Indonesian Muslims, tolerance and respect for religious differences are central to their belief. This belief is clearly reflected in the strongly-held commitment to preserve the pluralistic nature of the state. Indeed, Indonesia has never been based on certain religion, and the state’s identity has been defined as neither theocratic nor secular.

Second, the democratisation movement itself would not have been possible without active participation by Muslim leaders and Muslim organisations. For example,
Amien Rais and Abdurrahman Wahid play an important role in promoting democracy and advocating a tolerant brand of Islam in Indonesia. The emergence of pro-democracy leaders within the two mainstream groups would also strengthen the commitment to democracy.

Third, as a matter of principle, Islamic political parties in Indonesia are bound to participate in politics within the agreed framework of non-theocratic nature of Indonesia's state identity and democratic rules of the game.

Fourth, all formal political forces, faith-based or otherwise, are clearly aware that it is democracy that has created the opportunity for participation in politics and political process. The political role of Islamic political parties, and the space within which they could articulate Islamic political aspiration and interests, could only be guaranteed if democracy continues to be "the only game in town." In other words, Muslim politics has a high stake in the continuation of democracy in the country.

Impacts on Foreign Policy

How, then, have these political changes impacted on foreign policy? First, Indonesia's foreign policy now has to recognise and reflect its new, emerging national identity. Indeed, what has transpired from 10 years of reformasi (reform) has been the changing national identity of Indonesia, and that new identity has in turn transformed Indonesia's international image. Previously, Indonesia was often identified as the largest Southeast Asian country, or as a natural regional leader. At present, Indonesia is often depicted as the world's largest Muslim country on
the path towards becoming the third largest democracy on earth.

Indonesians, both political and community leaders, often take pride in this new identity. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for example, often speaks of Indonesia as a democracy and a moderate Muslim country. Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda also often refers to democracy and moderate Islam as two valuable assets in Indonesia’s foreign policy.

Second, Islam has also increasingly played an important consideration in the conduct of foreign policy. However, it is important to note that Indonesia’s foreign policy has not been based on co-religionist solidarity. In fact, Indonesia formulated a middle way by which Islam could be incorporated into its foreign policy. Islam, in its moderate form, then entered the vocabulary of Indonesia’s foreign policy as an asset. The expression of Islam in foreign policy is formulated in terms of Indonesia’s image and role as a moderating voice not only between the Muslim world and the rest, but also within the Muslim world.

Third, the changing domestic context within which foreign policy has to be formulated and executed constitutes another important effect of political change on foreign policy. Unlike during the four decades of authoritarian rule, the current government can no longer ignore people’s aspiration and views in formulating and conducting foreign policy. Within a democratic order, foreign policy is no longer an exclusive domain for the few policy-making elites. In the context of Indonesia’s democratisation process, foreign policy has to be
formulated within a complex power structure where the government can no longer act as the only dominant actor.

As democracy begins to consolidate, the role of the public and non-governmental actors has increasingly become more important. For a foreign policy initiative to be legitimate, the state is required to allow and incorporate the participation of the society and other stake-holders in policy-making. Within this new context of domestic power structure, Foreign Ministry can no longer preserve its monopoly as the only institution that formulates and execute foreign policy. The way by which foreign policy is now made has undergone significant changes.

The Role of Parliament

The role of the Parliament is certainly crucial and important in this context. Any democracy would require not only the mere existence of a parliament, but also a working and functioning one, which is able to balance and act as a critical partner to the executive branch of power. A well-functioning democracy requires a parliament capable of undertaking the oversight role over the executive, and ensuring the government respects and upholds the principle of accountability.

In foreign policy, the rights and the role of parliament should not be dissimilar to those in other policy areas. Foreign policy, despite the often misleading assumption that it is an elitist matter and therefore falls under the purview of the few elite within the government, does affect public interests. Within a democratic order, foreign policy should not be excluded from public
scrutiny. The government should also be held accountable for any foreign policy initiative it takes.

The Indonesia's Parliament, like any other parliament in a democracy, is entrusted not only with the tasks of reviewing and monitoring the conduct of foreign policy and diplomacy by the executive, but also with the obligations to shape, guide and provide inputs into the formulation and the execution of foreign policy. The Parliament should play a major role in determining foreign policy objectives, and how those objectives should be attained, and by what means.

Indonesia's parliament has clearly shown its ability and willingness to play such a role. The problem, however, remains. First, many in the government are not yet accustomed to such pre-requisite of democracy. We often heard complaints from segments of the executive that the Parliament is more as a nuisance rather than as a necessity. Parliament is often seen as an obstruction, or a hindrance to the work of government in the conduct of foreign policy and diplomacy. Worse, there are still those who think that the Parliament's main role in foreign policy is only to approve whatever the government has decided.

Second, related to first one, the effective role of the parliament is still constrained by the problem of adequate access to information and lack of transparency on the part of the government. The case of the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between Indonesia and Singapore, the case of the ASEAN Charter, and the case of Burma, are illustrative. Members of Parliament complained that they have been kept in the dark by the government on these issues.
Third, the Parliament is not a perfect institution. The problem of capacity is certainly a major impediment to an effective role. For example, not all members are well equipped with the necessary knowledge about foreign affairs. Members of parliament are also constrained by the lack of staffs to assist them in grasping the complex nature of day to day conduct of foreign relations. While the foreign ministry could employ dozens of staffs to manage an issue, members of parliament are left with only one or two staffs, if none at all.

Unless the problem of information, transparency, and capacity are addressed, then it is hard to imagine how the parliament could exercise oversight in an effective manner. Without addressing these problems, the parliament will continue to face a paradox: on the one hand, it holds supremacy in principle. On the other hand, it continues to be marginal in shaping the directions of foreign policy.

**Parliamentary Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation**

How then parliament can play a role in diplomacy and promote regional cooperation?

Honourable Abdillah Toha once maintained that “in a modern democracy, the management of international relations and diplomacy is no longer adequate to be handled exclusively through the executive to executive relations. The parliament should also play a diplomatic role.” Beyond the exercise of oversight role and providing inputs to foreign policy formulation, the parliament can also directly exercise the conduct of diplomacy in its own way, through what is now increasingly recognised as “parliamentary diplomacy.”
Indeed, the term “parliamentary diplomacy” might sound like a trampling over the executive domain. However, without the intentions to overlook the downside of parliamentary diplomacy, I would like to highlight some important aspects where the role of parliament might be crucial to the government in formulating and conducting foreign relations.

First, government’s decision might not always reflect the real aspiration of the public. The government might not necessarily be fully aware of foreign policy issues that are priorities to the people. Here, members of the Parliament could bring diverging public views into the parliament, and put them forward to the government, and ensure that they are reflected in the conduct of foreign policy. As such, the legitimacy of a foreign policy initiative would be greatly enhanced. In this context, the parliament could act as a clearing house for different aspirations, interests, and views regarding a particular policy issue.

Second, the parliament within a democratic setting is a reservoir of public opinion. The parliament therefore can communicate the broad-based opinion within the society it represent to the government and societies of other countries. This practice, either through parliamentary visit or trans-national parliamentary activities, could enhance understanding among nations.

Third, there are cases where governments are not able to resolve differences and disputes. Here, parliamentary diplomacy is useful for members of parliaments from different countries, through inter-parliamentary friendship groups, to discuss those urgent problems and find new ways of approaching them,
without committing the states. In a less formal setting, which encourages frankness and candid discussion, mutual understanding is easier to come by, and brilliant solutions to problems are often emerged.

In short, parliamentary diplomacy could be employed to undertake a wide range of “international activities undertaken by parliamentarians in order to increase mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving the control of governments and the representation of a people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of inter-governmental institutions.”

Given such utility, parliamentary diplomacy, in its various forms, clearly serves an important channel for strengthening Indonesia-Australia bilateral relations. Regular exercise of contacts and dialogues among parliamentarians would certainly promote greater understanding of each other’s concerns, views, and even interests. Institutionalised relationship would also clear any misgivings, misperceptions and prejudices.

In the same token, the role of members of parliament, and parliamentary diplomacy, are also crucial in promoting regional cooperation. First, inter-parliament relationship constitutes an important building block of any regional cooperation. Regional cooperation would not be complete unless it rests on an inclusive web of inter-relationship which goes beyond government-to-government relationship.

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Second, parliamentary diplomacy is crucial in promoting confidence-building measures and, at the same time, act as an instrument for preventive diplomacy. As mentioned earlier, members of parliament could be instrumental in bringing together different points of view and help achieving consensus.

Third, developing a sense of community is crucial for any regional cooperation. A sense of regional community can only be achieved if the network of cooperation is based not only on the relationship among governments, but also on other forms of relationship, of which the relationship among parliaments is crucial.

Fourth, regional cooperation works better if new thinking, new approaches, and fresh ideas are constantly produced. Inter-parliament forums are well suited to generate them. Relevant to this Indonesia-Australia Parliamentary Committees Forum is the recent proposal by H.E. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on the need for a new regional institution in the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, the discussion among parliamentarians on how regional architecture should be shaped and restructured would serve as invaluable inputs to governments on how regional cooperation should be best promoted in the years to come.