

Fishing reconciles – The EMS Project of the Year 2005 on Halmahera, Indonesia

"Fishing reconciles" is the title of the peace project initiated by the Halmahera Church. For the past year, the EMS partner church has been supporting the establishment of interreligion fishing groups. This joint fishing project is intended to help Christians and Muslims to overcome the hatred and injuries experienced during the violent clashes five years ago. The EMS community chose the "Fishing reconciles" project as Project of the Year 2005 and will provide special support to this initiative in the coming year.

June 17, 2004 was the hopeful day for the fishing group in Gamhoku. At four o'clock in the morning, the new fishing boat was launched by representatives of the GMIH church leadership together with the Muslim community and the crew made up of different religions was dispatched for their first fishing trip. Since then, 20 Christians and Muslims have been sailing regularly out of Gamhoku and casting their nets together. When they return, their wives sell the fish on the market in neighbouring Tobelo. The money they make is shared equally among them. Even in Bukubualawa, 67 Christians and Muslims have united to form an interreligion fishing crew. Due to the large number of people interested, they have already had to split up into three groups.

The inhabitants of the two villages Gamhoku and Bukubualawa experienced the unrests of December 1999 differently. In Gamhoku, there were open conflicts between Muslims and Christians, who are in the majority there. In Bukubualawa, however, there were no violent clashes. When the conflict on Halmahera started to spread, all the inhabitants of Bukubualawa decided to leave their village. The Muslims went to the city of Ternate. Some of the Christians took shelter in the military barracks in neighbouring Jailolo, but others simply fled into the forest. "The reason why we fled at that time was that we did not want anybody from outside to bring the conflict into our village and we did not want to kill each other. Basically, we are all related," said Hasan Hamisi, village chief of Bukubualawa. He is Muslim.

For this reason, the process of reconciliation is easier in Bukubualawa than in Gamhoku. All the refugees have already returned to Bukubualawa because they have no more to fear in their village. In Gamhoku, however, the situation is much more complex. Troublemakers caused a violent clash between the inhabitants and there were many victims, particularly on the Muslim side. So far, not all refugees have returned to the village. Some of them have not yet had the courage to go back. Others were among the troublemakers during the unrests so that the village community has refused to let them return to Gamhoku.

Many families who fled at that time have joined the "Fishing reconciles" initiative. When I asked them how they felt within the group, a Muslim told me that he felt safe and accepted by his Christian brothers and sisters. He explained that apart from that, the fishing group was a good chance for him to improve the economic situation of his family.

As part of the programme "Reconciliation and Reconstruction on Halmahera", the GMIH formed two teams. Pastor Reinhard Salakparang, chairman of the Church, is responsible for the "Reconciliation" team, whereas the "Reconstruction" team is

headed by Pastor Saartje Papoeling, who is also chairperson of the GMIH. She is currently striving to cooperate with the rural district of North Halmahera. There are joint efforts to train multipliers from both religious communities for reconciliation work. These multipliers will work at grass roots to promote an awareness for peaceful cohabitation.

The efforts of the GMIH to cooperate with the regional administration are in full swing. An advantage for the church is the fact that the present chief administrative officer of North Halmahera, Djidon Hangewa, is a previous member of the GMIH Church Leadership. In addition, he represented his church at the EMS Mission Council in the year 2000.

In the dialect of East Indonesia, the expression "baku bae" means "making it up with each other" as opposed to "baku marah" or "baku musuh" which means "being hostile to one another". Basically, "baku bae" describes a reconciliation process at the end of which the parties are at peace with each other. This process has started in Halmahera. "Halmahera baku bae" is no longer a pipe dream but is already reality on earth. The "Fishing reconciles" projects brings those people together who long for peace and well-being on this island.