

Al-Ghazali's thought on Ethics of Living in the Society Based on *Bidayah Al-Hidayah*

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Abstract

Islam emphasizes the ethics of living among society, especially towards the Muslim community. Living among the society with ethics is considered as an attitude that must be cultivated, cultured and made as a guidance by Muslim individually when dealing with fellow human beings in their daily life. Some Muslim scientists through their scientific research have elaborated this issue as to be understood, embraced and cultivated in Islamic societies. Among them stood al-Ghazali who has been widely approved by the Muslim world as the *mujaddid* (reformer) of Islam for the fifth century also describes it as it is. This paper attempts to highlight the character's thoughts on the ethics of living in the society among the Muslims. This qualitative study was carried out using the content analysis method on *Bidayah al-Hidayah* book. At the end of this discussion, a summary on aspect of thought of al-Ghazali will be made clear on the ethics encompassed in the ethical descriptions on dealing with strangers in the community, friends and companions. This paper will conclude the ethics described by al-Ghazali to be practiced and cultivated by Malaysian communities in order to preserve harmony and peace within the society.

Keywords: Life Ethics, Morals, al-Imam al-Ghazali, *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, Muslim Community.

Introduction

Islam is a religion that emphasizes the ethics of living among society. The life ethics here are referred to the relation and bond that is made with good manners. Allah S.W.T creates human differs by their races, languages and colours just for those humans to get to know each other and establish a relationship and bond among themselves in a society. The nobleness, highness and greatness of a person cannot be judged by their face, race or their nation but based on their faith and piety to Allah S.W.T. Allah S.W.T said:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۗئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْۤا اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰنَكُمْ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ حٰبِيْرٌ ۙ ۱۳

Translation: "O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the

most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware."
(al-Hujurat 49:13)

Al-Baghawi (1997) explains that the word '*dhakarín wa untha*' in this verse refers to the Prophet Adam and his wife Saidatina Hawa. Thus, this means that all human are their descendant, saying that all human beings are related by blood. While the word '*lita`arafu*' means that they are to know each other either near or far from the descendants of Prophet Adam with no intention to boast about their own race.

Islam requires unity among human, especially upon the muslim community. The Prophet P.B.U.H said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْضَى لَكُمْ ثَلَاثًا... فَيَرْضَى لَكُمْ أَنْ تَعْبُدُوهُ
وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَأَنْ تَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Translation: "From Abu Hurayrah R.A. had said: said the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W: Indeed with Allah three things for you... so He bless you to worship Him, and for you to serve no one except Him and to hold on to the rope of Allah S.W.T solely and you shall scattered. " (Muslim, 2000)

Al-Nawawi (1972) described that the phrase "*hold on to the rope of Allah S.W.T*" in the hadith refers to making the Quran as a guidance, know its limits, and act with its nobility. While the terms '*unbreakable*' refers to the order to apply unity in the congregation of Muslims and keep the bond within (*amr bi luzum jama`ah al-muslimin wa taalluf ba`dihim bi ba`d*). This shows that the interconnected bond among people through interaction between them are one of the basis of unity that need to be addressed. The bond must be plaited with manners and morals to guarantee the unity. This paper chooses to elaborate on al-Ghazali's way of thinking on the life ethics among the society, especially among the Muslim community through his book, *Bidayah al-Hidayah* and study its suitability as a guideline for the community and the state of Malaysia. Before that, some explanations will be made on al-Ghazali and his book for a smooth read ahead.

Al-Ghazali and His Book

He is Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Tusi al-Shafi`i and was born on the 450H in Tus. Al-Ghazali, the son of Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, mastered knowledge in various fields, thus called as an Islamic argumentist (*hujjat al-Islam*). He had written reports in various fields of study and his councils were attended by famous scholars. This famous scholar practiced al-Shafi`i in and stood with *al-Asha'irah*. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, his mastery in various fields of knowledge and honor given to him, *hujjat al-Islam*, encourages the historians (*muarrikhin*) and hadith scholars (*muhaddithin*) to agree without doubt that he is the *mujaddid* (reformer) in that century (fifth century). Al-Ghazali died at the age of 55 years on Monday, 14th Jamadil Akhir 505H and was buried in Tus (Ibn Kathir, 1998; Ibn al-`Imad, 1989; al-Madkur, 2009; al-Qaradawi, 1994).

Muhammad `Uthman al-Khasht, as one of those who study the book of *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, explained that al-Ghazali wrote the book of *Bidayah al-Hidayah* while he was in the last phase of his life that is the phase of sanctity where in this phase, he had matured in

thought and heart. Abd al-Rahman Badawi and he cited Maurice Bouyges's view that this book was written between 488H and 499H (al-Ghazali, 1985; Badawi, 1977). The contents of this book are divided into three parts namely *al-Ta'at* (obedience), *al-Ma'asi* (disobedience) and *Adab al-Suhbah* (ethics in relationship). Muhammad Uthman has listed two books of *syarah* to *Bidayah al-Hidayah* book which is *al-Kifayah* written by 'Abd al-Qadir ibn Ahmad al-Faqih (982H) and *Maraqji al-'Ubudiyyah* written by Muhammad al-Nawawi al-Jawi Al-Makki (1897M) (al-Ghazali, 1985). In Malay world of Islam, besides Muhammad al-Nawawi, there was another Malay scholar who had contributed to join the force by translating and lecturing the text and he is Shaykh 'Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani in his report entitled *Hidayah al-Salikin* (al-Fatani, 2002, p. 65).

The Concept of Ethical Living In Society According to al-Ghazali

'Ethics' means; first, referring to knowledge of moral or moral principles, secondly, referring to the principle of moral (or *akhlaq*) or moral values that became a guidance towards an individual or a group such as association, occupation and others. While the meaning of the word 'life' is; first, to keep on living and breathing (on humans, animals and others); and grow (on plants). Secondly, it means to sit (stay or make somewhere home). Third, it means to earn a living in a certain way. Fourth, it means it is still moving or working (regarding organizations, companies and others). Meanwhile, the meaning of the word 'socialize' is to live or to join as a society while the word 'society', means a group of people living together in a place with certain rules and regulations (Kamus Dewan, 2005). Hence, the meaning of 'ethics of living among society' refers to the moral or moral values practiced by a group of people living and interacting or socializing in a society.

The ethical living among society's concept according to al-Ghazali (1999) can be understood based on the term *al-suhbah* which he uses in his reports such as *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din. Al-Suhbah* (friendship) refers to the interaction of fellow human beings in societies, sitting together (*al-mujalasa*) and neighboring or mixed (*al-mujawarah*). *Al-Suhbah* is divided into two. Firstly, the '*al-suhbah*' which occurred randomly due to neighborhood interaction or due to meeting in the office, school, market, or when meeting leaders, traveling or others. Secondly, the '*al-suhbah*' which is planned by Allah S.W.T who urges His servants to strengthen each other's brotherhood. Human interaction can occur when someone interested to someone else. On the other hand, this interaction would not happen if someone does not interested to anyone around, even when a situation occur he will avoid to associate to anyone that he does not like or interested with. These interactions occur among people based on the level of likeness in them toward others. There are likely four levels which is;

- 1) Loving someone for himself/herself.
- 2) Loving someone for the benefits within that person.
- 3) Loving someone to get rewards in the hereafter.
- 4) Loving someone solely because of Allah S.W.T and this is the greatest.

Al-Ghazali (2003) lists in his book, *al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din*, that ethics of human interaction is included in the list of forty things that are the basis of the religion. As for the person who strive to achieve happiness in Allah S.W.T's *rahmah*, it is necessary to hold on to the ten fundamental points in '*aqidah*' and keep on practicing, externally and internally. External practice is divided into ten basic points, whereas the eighth principle is to fulfill the rights of all Muslims and interact with them well (*al-qiyam bi huquq al-muslimin wa husn al-*

suhbah ma`ahum). Meanwhile, the internal practice is described into twenty points namely ten matters concerning the purification of the heart and ten matters relating to self-deception with noble behaviour. This suggests that the ethics of living among society refers to the ethics and morals that need to be implemented whenever human are socializing and interacting with each other in a society. It is part of the religion and must be exercised to seek the guidance of Allah S.W.T and become a pious Muslim. The best communication ethics is to communicate as to achieve the pleasure and guidance from Allah S.W.T. Moving to the next sub-topic, the ethics mention earlier will be explained.

Manners Based On The Ethics Of Living In The Society

The ethics of living in society is explained by al-Ghazali (1985) in the third part of *Bidayah al-Hidayah's* book. After describing the manners of an individual with Allah S.W.T, manners of a pious person, manners of a student and manners of a child to its parents, he listed the manners or ethics of an individual to the whole human being. Al-Ghazali divides the entire human into three groups namely *majahil* (anonymous), *asdiqa'* (friends) and *ma`arif* (known people). The details are as follows:

a) Ethics in dealing with the Unknown (*al-majahil*)

In short, al-Ghazali (1985) only lists five manners or ethics when one deals with people who do not recognize them. The five manners are:

- 1) Do not join people that talk nonsense or on unbeneficial issues.
- 2) Do not hear bad words.
- 3) Do not mind the words of those who want to do bad things to you.
- 4) Do not hang out too much and seeking for help from them.
- 5) Do advise them on their misbehaviors wisely but make sure that they are willing to accept the advice.

b) Ethics on Dealing with the Companion (*al-asdiqa'*)

Al-Ghazali (1985) explains that when one wants to find a friend, it is necessary to consider two things: ways to choose friends and how to fulfill their rights. One needs to find a worthy companion where he is willing to lend a hand in any matters be it in study, religion and the world. Such kind of friend can be identified based on five criteria. First is a sensible person. Taking in an ignorant people as a friend will only spark fights and hates. Their acts or words used might harm other person even though he has no intention of doing it. As a matter of fact, it is better to befriend with someone wise and intellectual than the ignorant one. Second is a noble person. Someone who behave badly most of the time cannot control himself, neither his anger nor his desire. The qualities that usually found in good companion is helpful, always encouraging towards good things, dare to feel pain, paying deeds, taking into account all the goodness that is given, covering all the bad qualities seen and many more.

Third is a good friend. People who are *fasiq* are people who are not afraid of Allah S.W.T and certainly not to be trusted. Befriended with a *fasiq* person might led someone to take sins lightly as for the *fasiq* it is a common thing. Thing such as gossiping considered common as a lot of people doing it without realizing that they are in a great sin upon Allah S.W.T. Fourth is a down-to-earth friend (humble). The person who takes worldly life as a

priority will definitely influence others to prioritize the world as he/she is. So, by befriending a humble person, an individual will eventually be affected by its humbleness. The fifth is a true friend. A liar is most likely to cheat his companion or even his best friend. However, al-Ghazali (1985) understands the reality of the society in which one finds it difficult to meet the perfect companion though he/she always studying the religion and worshipping in the mosque. When that happens, one needs to choose one of two things. First is to isolate ourselves from the public to be safe from all their bad intentions. The second is to interact with them based on their three respective criteria:

- 1) The friend for the hereafter in which a person should take him/her as an example in preparing for the hereafter. It's like the basic needs for us human beings.
- 2) Friends of world affairs whereas only their manners (*akhlaq*) is taken to be applied. It's like a drug that is only needed at a certain time.
- 3) A friend who can entertain the heart where one should keep noted from the evil, defamation and bad intentions so that they can be avoided. It's like a disease that no one wants. However, when inevitable situation occur, one should take it as an experience and a guidance for the future's sake.

After a relationship had bonded, one must comply with the rights of the relationship by exercising some manners. The manners are as follows (al-Ghazali, 1985; al-Ghazali, 1998):

- 1) Prioritize your friends beyond yourself in financial affairs even though you yourself needs it too. If you cannot afford that, then offer a sum of money to the friend so that whatever good could be done.
- 2) Lend a hand to help a friend before they start seeking for help.
- 3) Hide all the companion's secrets, cover his shame and when others criticize him, do not tell him the negative comments.
- 4) When someone praises the friend, it is important to let he/she informed about it, listen diligently as the friend speaks and do not cut his/her sentences.
- 5) Calling the friend by his favorite name, praising his kindness, thanking him for all the kindness he has given, preventing others from harassing him like he does and advising him gently with reasonable arguments.
- 6) Forgiving all the faults of the companions and do not defraud them.
- 7) Forgiving friends while they are alive and after their death.
- 8) Do good to friend's family members after his/her death.
- 9) Relieves the burdens of companions and do not burden them for them to be happy, feeling pleasure when friends are happy and sad when they are in any kind of sadness.
- 10) Giving greetings when meeting the friend and offering a seat.
- 11) Moving the seat if needed to offer the friend one and accompany him/her to the door as a matter of respect.
- 12) Be quiet when friend is talking and do not interrupt the conversation unless your opinion are demanded.

Generally, al-Ghazali (1985) explains that one needs to treat friends like how oneself want to be treated. If one does not love friend as he loves himself, the *ukhuwwah* (or friendship) is considered *munafiq* (or hypocritical) and that will lead to destruction in the world and in the hereafter. In conclusion, a person's friendship in a society needs to be based

on five criteria of worthy qualities of being a friend or at least three of the best criteria and twelve manners that need to be exercised when interacting with a friend.

c) Ethics on Dealing with Non-Companion Individuals (*al-ma`arif*).

According to al-Ghazali (1985), a crime usually occurs between a person and other person known. It does not usually happen to best friends as real friends help each other to keep the friendship strong. This would not occur between a person and a complete strangers as they certainly would not interfere with other persons' affair. If no disturbance on one's affair, then no dispute created. The point is, it is unpleasant when someone take their friendship lightly by expressing gratitude in their relation only with meer interacts . Al-Ghazali suggests to keep a good distance from this kind of people. However, it is inevitable that situations like meeting them at school, mosque or market could occur and interaction are needed then there are some manners that need to be exercised. They are:

- 1) Do not insult or bash these persons because one do not exactly know them by heart, there is a chance that they are better than they look (in terms of morality, knowledge and so on).
- 2) Do not glorify them too much for their property as it might destroy a person by personality. Allah S.W.T will look down on those who look up to those who are given the blessings of the world. People who are given the honor in the world will also look down to someone that dare to sacrifice religion for the sake of world pleasures.
- 3) Do not respond to their animosity as it will destroy the religion.
- 4) Do not become a liker only after being praised and bribed and do not feel puzzled and do not scowl them if insulted.
- 5) Do not let you greed swoon over their property, position and assistance. When given help, be grateful to Allah S.W.T and thank the Samaritan. If no help offered, do not let anger consumed you, do not critics and do not spread hate to others.
- 6) Offer advice only if it is likely acceptable to the listener. When advice offered to the wrong person at the wrong time, not only it is not taken but it might also sparks conflict. When they misunderstood something and do not want to be advised, just let them be. Unless the misunderstanding is caused by ignorance and might let them astray if ignored then they need to be advised wisely.
- 7) When you saw them doing good to someone then thank Allah S.W.T. But when they do evil then let their affairs to Allah S.W.T and pray to Allah S.W.T to keep them from their evil. If insulted do not say: "Do you even know me [that you dare to insult]?" This is because, perhaps the humiliation is a redemption for sin that has been done or perhaps it is a test. Therefore, one need to seek for forgiveness to Allah S.W.T when humiliated.
- 8) Listen to the good thing that is being said and spread the goodness while on the other hand, ignore the bad conversation and do not spread it.
- 9) Face them, whether they are good friend or not, with a smile, use good words and be humble. Do not insult and feel proud, instead treat them with honor.
- 10) Be careful when associating with the *fiqh* elitist nowadays, especially the one that keen to (or fond of) disagreements and debates. This is because most of them are oftenly associates with maliciousness, making claims based on their poor judgment, spreading shame, collecting and exploiting others' mistakes, throwing false claims, lying and pretending in front others. Interacting with them will only resulted in

devastation and humiliation. Only the people who are protected by Allah S.W.T will be save from this *fitnah*.

11) Smile, humble and modest when doing something.

12) Do not feel full of yourself and do not mingle with the crowd unless there is a need.

13) When sitting in the crowd, avoid raising legs, tossing fingers, stroking beard, touching teeth, playing with nose, spitting, shooing the flies, stripping and yawning in front of people, whether during prayers or other situations.

14) Calmly sit back with them, speech needs to be neat and understandable. Listen attentively to their story without obviously expressing wilderness if puzzled and do not ask them to repeat it.

15) Avoid mentioning own success or blessing such as children's success, poem, talks, writing or any personal affairs to others.

16) Do not dress neither like a woman nor like a slave, do not excessively apply eyeliner and too much perfumes.

17) Do not force others to fulfill own wishes or encourage others to commit crime.

18) Do not let anyone know the actual property owned either to family members or the public. If the amount is not as much then people will only look down to you. If it is a lot, surely some of them might fell dissatisfied with what is given. One need to be firm but gentle when involving family members.

19) When disagreed with the opinion stated, one should act noble, do not act foolish and spoiled, less hand moves, avoid turning backwards and do not sit on your knees and beg. One should only speak when his/her heart has begun to calm down.

20) When one is near to a king, try to imagine the danger (of his position) as if he were at the edge of a sword.

21) Be cautious as there are people who want to be friends only when it is easy. He/she might turn into enemy anytime.

In a nutshell, the living ethics in society according to al-Ghazali refers to the manners that need to be exercised by a person when interacting with three groups of people; stranger, close friends, and people who are known but not too close. Based on al-Ghazali's thought, one will know how to differentiate between true friends and a fake one. True friends will definitely help in education, worldly affair and religion affair. When interacting with people who do not perfected the criteria as true friends, one shall refer to the guideline stated by al-Ghazali which divides them into three groups, that is those who are to be observed and followed by his religion (*deen*), those who are to be observed and followed by their manners (*akhlaq*) and those who need to be taken precautionary measures to not be affected by their ignorance. These criteria and guidelines need to be embraced and cultivated by the community in order to strenghten the bond made with no hostility, no unbeneficial argument and nothing towards the bad side.

The Suitability Of Al-Ghazali's Thinking In Malaysia

Al-Ghazali's thinking is appropriate to be practiced and learnt among Malaysians, especially the majority of the Muslim community. This is because the Muslim community in Malaysia has been exposed widely to the influence of al-Ghazali's thought through the seminars and scripture councils. So, they are easy to accept and practice al-Ghazali's way of thinking. The proof is that there is a educational-chain linking the ulama in the Malaya with al-Ghazali. Ahmad al-Qushashi and Ibrahim al-Kurani were among the scholars who linked al-Ghazali's thinking to the Malay scholars back at the days. For example, among the Malay scholars who

studied with al-Kurani was Shaykh Abd al-Ra'uf Singkel. Shaykh Muhammad Yasin al-Fadani also lists the books of al-Ghazali such as *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Minhaj al-'Abidin*, *Bidayah al-Hidayah* and *al-Hikmah fi Makhluqat Allah* that were accepted through his teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Ali al-Maliki that is linked to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ramli based on *sanad al-Kurani* to al-Ghazali (Abdullah, 2004).

In 1778M, Shaykh `Abd al-Samad al-Falimbani translated and described the book *Bidayah al-Hidayah* in his work entitled *Hidayah al-Salikin* (al-Fatani, 2002). Raja Ali Haji also contributed in spreading al-Ghazali's thinking, especially those that contained in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Minhaj al-'Aididin* and *Bidayah al-Hidayah* into the Malay world as for example through his poetic masterpiece entitled *Gurindam Dua Belas* (Watson, 1979; Sham, 2004). The book *Bidayah al-Hidayah* was also lectured by a Malay scholar named Muhammad al-Nawawi al-Jawi al-Makki in his work, *Maraqiq al-'Ubudiyyah* (al-Ghazali, 1985). According to Hamka (1977), al-Ghazali's thought through his book, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* greatly influenced the Malay community. He acknowledged that his work entitled *Tasawwuf Modern* (1939M), the *Lembaga Hidup* (1940M) and the *Lembaga Budi* (1940M) was influenced by al-Ghazali's thinking through *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Minhaj al-'Abidin* and *Bidayah al-Hidayah* (Sham, 2004).

After understanding the reality of the Malaysian society, especially the Muslims who are already familiar with al-Ghazali's thinking, it is important that al-Ghazali's ideas are to be spread among Malaysians more systematically. Al-Ghazali's thinking particularly with regard to the ethics of living in society should be taught at school, university and applied by the government in programs aimed at unity between races and communities. At school level, these manners (*adab*) exposure to young learners in moral, ethics and religious subjects will spark the seeds of unity between them. At the university level, al-Ghazali's thinking can be applied in the syllabus of *akhlak* and morals courses, especially in the Ethnic Relations, Islamic and Asian Civilizations courses (TITAS) which have become compulsory courses at universities. This is to ensure that the living ethics in society could be educationally discussed and cultivated by educated and wise youngsters whom soon to be the future leaders of Malaysia. This will complement the mastery of the living ethics in society, from the book of *Bidayah al-Hidayah* which is not only taught at the *musolla*, mosque or *pondok-styled-institution* but is also studied and cultivated by university-level students.

At the government level, the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN), one of the department under Prime Minister's Department, is a significant official department of unity and social relations. This is because the vision of this department is to be the lead agency to preserve, enhance and strengthen the unity and harmony of society in Malaysia. Under JPNIN, there is an institute called the Institute of Research and Training of National Integration (IKLIN) which is established to promote the sharing of knowledge, ideas, training, research as well as the concept of lifelong learning to cultivate knowledge and education in the field of National Unity and Integration. IKLIN also embarked on trainings, researches and developments (R & D) and also approaches smart collaboration between local and international universities along with the aspiration to be a center of excellence in lifelong learning and to create great brilliant and glorious human beings. IKLIN was established along with the intention to produce a united Malaysian nation. This statement is for the need of Malaysians from all levels to understand this pure means interested within that with given the knowledge in the fields required (Department of National Unity and Integration,

<http://www.jpnn.gov.my/ms/info-jpnn/profile#visions>, July 4, 2017; Department of National Unity and Integration, <http://www.jpnn.gov.my/ms/institut-financial-integration-national-international>, July 4, 2017). Thus, government departments like this and the likes could apply the living ethics in society in training programs, education and the like based on al-Ghazali's thinking for the purpose of education and cultural among Malaysians in more comprehensive and systematic ways.

Conclusion

The living ethics in society refers to ethics that need to be cultivated when human beings are interconnected in a society. It is part of important practices in the forty religious foundations that must be exercised by particular Muslim individuals to seek the guidance of Allah S.W.T. For a Muslim, the best ethics in relationship is a relation that is based on achieving the pleasure and guidance of Allah S.W.T. The living ethics in society is to be implemented by one when interacting with the three groups of people which is; stranger (*al-majahil*), friends (*al-asdiqa'*), and known person but not too close (*al-ma'arif*). These are the guidelines to be embraced and implemented by members of society so that the relationship will be stronger and towards argument-free and disagreement-free relation. The manners in the living ethics in society according to al-Ghazali's thinking is appropriate and easy to cultivate in Malaysia. This is because al-Ghazali's teachings have been commonly taught in *musolla*, mosques and *pondok-styled* institution by the speakers and teachers who teach the book of *Bidayah al-Hidayah* since the early of Islam. Therefore, al-Ghazali's thought should be recommended to be officially taught at the school, university level and programmed and organized by the government to be cultivated by the Malaysian community for example through the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) or the like to make it more comprehensive.

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