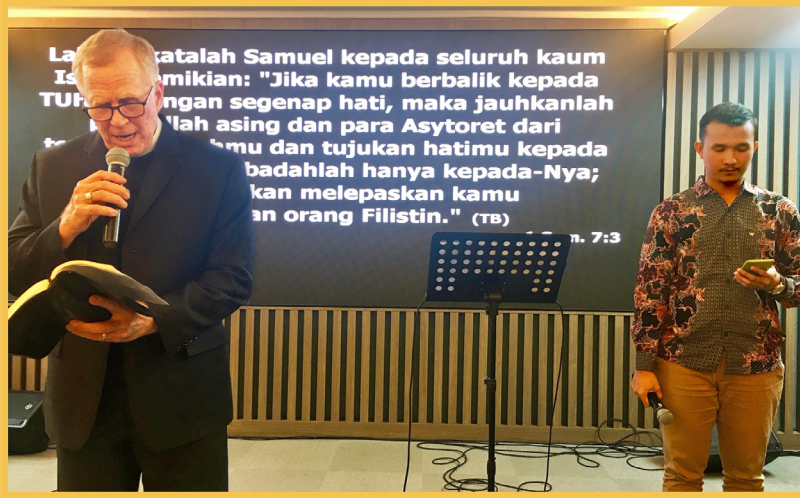


# Return to Indonesia

by Ambassador Sichan Siv



Above: Ron preaching at Christ Church Palembang  
Right: Ron preaching at UPH Grand Chapel



**B**y the Grace of God, I accompanied Rev. Dr. Ron Scates to Indonesia this summer. After surviving three days of travel and a 6.9 earthquake that killed eight people and destroyed 1,000 houses, we made it to Palembang, capital of the former Buddhist Kingdom of Sriwijaya, a major power in Southeast Asia along with Cambodia's Hindu Kingdom of Angkor until the 13th - 15th centuries.

(On December 4, 2016 Ron, then interim senior pastor of our First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, baptized me with the assistance of Rev. Scott Simpson. My wife, Martha, told me the baptism was my best gift to her. I told Ron that it was his best gift to me. Ten days later, Martha lifted off to be in Heaven with the Lord.)

Sunday, August 4, 2019, Ron preached about “Ebenezer” at Christ Chapel Palembang, which our Rev. A. Mitchell Moore helped start. CCP has a very dynamic and young congregation under the leadership of Tofer Tobing, who served as our guide, interpreter, and culinary/cultural adviser. He treated us to some delicious local dishes: *Pempek* (fish cake), *Pindang Tulang* (meat soup), *Kangkung Balacan* (water spinach), *Capcay Goreng* (mixed vegetables), and *Ayam Goreng Bawang Pitih* (garlic chicken).

Two days later in *Karawaci*, Ron preached the same theme at the Grand Chapel of *Universitas Pelita Harapan-UPH* to 2,500 faculty, staff, and students. A similar number watched the service at different locations. I did not get the memo and



Above left: Sichan and Indonesian President Widodo;  
 Above right: Sichan and former Indonesian Ambassador to UN, Rezlan Jenie  
 Below: Indonesia in festive mood before its 74th Independence Day



was the only person wearing Batik, as opposed to the 4,999 who wore black and white coats/ties or skirts/blouses. This was the second time in a few months that I made a faux-pas in dress etiquette. On a trip to Istanbul in the spring, I brought one red tie, thinking that it would go well with the red flag of Turkey. I was told upon arrival that the attire would be dark suit and neck tie with white shirt.

*"Those who think they know*

*something do not yet know as they ought to know."*

- 1 Corinthians 8:2

UPH, co-founded by Johannes Oentoro, a visionary friend of mine, sets aside Tuesdays from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM for worship and fellowship. In memory of Martha, I presented a signed copy of "Golden Bones" to the main library named after him.

At lunch, Ron introduced me to two key leaders, Ric Cannada, who headed the Reformed

Theological Seminary, and Johannes Halim, associate pastor of Karawaci Presbyterian Church. At his dentist's recommendation, Ron returned to San Antonio that night and left me to fend for myself. Fear not! He had already planted an impressive VIP program for me. Since our arrival, I followed his routine with morning walks at 5:00 AM, even though I couldn't keep up with his pace. After his departure, I slacked off a bit, sometimes didn't start till 6:00 AM. My excuse? No excuse really, it's just still very dark at five!

The following day, I moved to Jakarta to attend the General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship of which Ron is a board member. The G.A., terms too familiar to me, took place at the Reformed Millennium Center that houses the Reformed Evangelical Church-Indonesia with a total capacity of 8,000 seats, a seminary, and a world class concert hall. The conference under the theme "Storming Seas," with participants from around the globe and an impressive list of speakers, was opened by the legendary Dr.

Stephen Tong who founded the church. He usually preaches in Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong in one weekend. A renaissance man, he also composes music and conducts the Jakarta Symphony. Channel 21 at the Karawaci Aryaduta broadcasts his sermons in English, Indonesian, and Chinese.

Indonesia—three times the size of Texas, three time zones, 270 million people (87% Muslims, 10% Christians or 27 million)—is the fourth populous country after China, India, and the USA, and the largest Muslim society in the world. It is home to several hundred ethnic groups with distinct customs and dialects living on 17,500 islands. Java with some 140 million people is the most populous island on earth.

In 1969, the year that Armstrong and Aldrin landed on the moon, I landed at Denpasar's brand new Ngurah Rai airport (now handling more than twice the volume of San Antonio International's 10 million passengers). After we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Moon Landing on July 20 of that year, I now celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Siv-Indonesia Relationship (SIR)!

During the past five decades, I have had the opportunity to observe Indonesia's development over numerous visits, including some memorable ones. In the early 1980s Martha and I had a wonderful time in Bali. In Ubud, we spent an afternoon trying to unlock a brief case we bought earlier in Bangkok with all possible combinations, until the staff came up with a

brilliant idea: a saw. *Et voilà!* Our cottage in the middle of beautiful terraced rice fields provided an idyllic venue to feast on delicious *Bebek Bengil*, Bali's famous "Dirty Duck," while fireflies as bright as mini flashlights created a special ambiance. Our interaction with some aggressive monkeys at the forest temple and the attractive beaches at Kuta made our extended honeymoon quite unique.

In 1996, I traveled across the country speaking to universities in a fantastic program organized by the U.S. Information Agency. In the summer of 2002, I represented the United States at a U.N. conference in Bali. We took a short walk along the beaches from the hotel to the convention center every morning for tough negotiations as Australian and European tourists started sunbathing. One day I was asked to deliver the U.S. statement while wearing a Batik shirt. It pleased our Indonesian hosts and

baffled other delegates who saw an Indonesian looking speaker sitting behind the "United States" sign.

Indonesia's one trillion-dollar economy earns the country a place with China, India, Japan, and South Korea as Asian members of the G20. Indonesians are proud of its "Unity in Diversity" principle. Officials who briefed us at the Presidential Palace and addressed us at the WRF General Assembly always pointed this out.

*Istaqlal*, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia and third in the world, was designed by the Christian Architect Frederick Silaban and has the Jakarta Cathedral as a neighbor at the heart of the capital. It reminds me of the Coptic and Greek Orthodox churches that stand proudly near the King Abdullah Mosque in Amman.

I was happily reunited with former Indonesian Ambassador to



Ron and Sichan with Christ Church Palembang Leadership

the U.N. Rezlan Jenie, a great colleague who helped shape a solid working relationship into a long-lasting friendship. Over the famous Balinese “Dirty Duck” dinner, we reminisced the time we spent together in New York as representatives of our countries. We launched a U.N. quartet—Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, US—with many Asian ambassadors in *karaoke* sessions to build good will after working hard on multiple issues. Rezlan’s favorite was The Beatles (*I saw her standing there*). Mine was Frank Sinatra (*Strangers in the night*—Martha’s favorite song). I am proud that I did not embarrass the United States!

We cooperated in some historic events, especially the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami, one of the world’s worst disasters: Indonesia suffered 200,000 deaths and 500,000 homes destroyed.

According to *Golden Bones* (page 298), the United States was the first to respond to the tragedy immediately pledging \$350 million. The amount did not include our military asset with the Abraham Lincoln Carrier Battle Group of 27 ships, 45 aircraft, 57 helicopters and 15,000 personnel, delivering some 12 million pounds of supplies. At a conference in Mauritius in January 2005, I announced that the United States would support efforts to develop global early warning systems for tsunamis and other natural disasters. By March 1, the

American people had donated over \$1 billion through some 130 agencies. Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton (41 & 42) were called by President George W. Bush 43 to help raise awareness for relief efforts. It produced a friendship between two former political opponents which 42 called a great gift in his life.

The US-Indonesian relationship turned 70 this year and is now entering its 8th decade. The high point might be on May 25, 2005 when President Yudhoyono became the first foreign head of state invited to a domestic event at The White House as President George W. Bush honored Asian Pacific American heritage. Martha and I were privileged to be recognized by the 43rd president along with then Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta and then Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao (now Secretary of Transportation).

The Indonesian president thanked us for our post tsunami assistance. He read a letter from a third grader in Michigan: “I am sorry what happened in your country. I have heard something

*about it. I hope your family and friends are okay. In church, I pray for you and your country. In school, we are raising money for your country. We have a loose change bucket, and kids bring money in. Also, we are making tsunami bracelet to raise money, too. I have made you one. I hope you like it. I will continue praying for you and your country in church. Your friend, Maggie.”*

And one from a girl in Aceh: “I was so happy and my heart was touched by the letter you sent us. My family, my dad, mom, older brother and younger brother have disappeared, and now I live with my cousins. I hope you are healthy and well where you are. I am so glad you are paying attention to us here. I hope to receive your bracelet in the coming days, because I want to wear it on my arm to remind me that I have new friend. Your friend, Nada.”

*“God’s light shines indeed in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* - John 1:5

President George W. Bush said it best: “We may be on the opposite sides of the ocean, but we have a lot in common. We are



Sichan in Batik shirt with Ron and UPH leadership



Sichan and WRF Board, L to R: Rob Norris (chair), Karen Jansson, Tod Smedley, & Mauro Meister

*both among the world's largest democracies. We both share the belief that our great diversity is a source of strength."*

Indonesia was in a festive mood in early August 2019, getting ready for the 74th anniversary of its independence from 350 years of Dutch rule. Red and white flags and banners adorned buildings and streets. Many items were sold for 74,000 rupiahs (\$5.30)

and stores even offered 74% discounts. I wondered whether everything would be free in 2045 when the country celebrates its 100th year of independence.

My return trip took only 32 hours from door to door, four hours shorter than the outbound one, during which Ron and I were seat mates on the 15-hour trans-Pacific flight from Los Angeles to Guangzhou.

Once inside my home in San Antonio, I praised the Lord for another opportunity to serve.

*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. - Philippians 4:13*

To Indonesia, I say "Terema kasih atas ingatannya." Thanks for the memories.

*I'll be back!*

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*(Sichan Siv, member of First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, served as deputy assistant to President George H. W. Bush and ambassador to the U.N. under President George W. Bush.)*