when two Muslim members of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), from Egypt and India, detailed inhumane abuses currently inflicted on livestock in several major Muslim countries that cannot be justified in Islamic terms. The overall tone was the glamour of sales and promise of profits. When asked about the proprieties of ‘selling Islam’, Sir Iqbal Sacranie (Chairman of Muslim Aid, United Kingdom) affirmed: “It’s a good product!”

International Seminar on Islam in Myanmar
(Kuala Lumpur, 29 April 2012)

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

The International Seminar on Islam in Myanmar, with the special theme “Democratisation in Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges for Its Muslim Community”, was jointly organised by IAIS Malaysia, the Myanmar Muslim Intellectual Forum (MMIF), the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) East Asia, the Regional Islamic Da’wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP) and the Institute for the Study of the Ummah and Global Understanding (ISUGU). The speakers were Dr Maung Maung (Haji Mohammed Hussein; on the “Education of Myanmar Muslims in the Age of Globalisation”), Soe Myint Than (“Economic, Social and Welfare Position of Myanmar Muslims”) and Maulana Akbar Shah (U Tun Aung; on “The Future of Muslims Youths in Myanmar”) from Myanmar, and Ambassador Dato’ Mat Amir Jaafar from the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Most of the speakers began by addressing the current plight of Myanmar Muslims, highlighting particularly the challenges and opportunities in regard to democratisation, with a strong focus on education. Generally speaking, the educational infrastructures and facilities remain rudimentary: while formal schooling and even higher education exist, many Myanmar Muslims are denied the opportunity for various reasons, such as lack of funding and transportation, as well as poverty; e.g., children have to work as daily wage-labourers to help their family, thus being deprived of education. The challenge is greater for religious education, which faces the problem of integrating traditional knowledge with modern disciplines.

While there is much to be desired from the present situation, sources of hope lie in both history and current opportunities. For instance, it was argued that despite seeming political inertia among contemporary Muslim youth, a different picture of the past can be gauged from the lives of such figures as Sayar Gi U Nun, U Razak, U Rashid and U Pe Khin. These were past leaders who were active politically even during youth, such as in the struggle against colonialism or the Rangoon University student strike in the 1920s.
Other challenges include confronting discrimination under current leadership, forging unity among Muslims on the one hand and with the Myanmar society on the other. Being recognised as a citizen, for instance, still remains a problem due to the difficulties and complications of registering for the National Scrutinisation Card, a prerequisite for citizenship. Myanmar Muslims benefit from Myanmar’s vibrant agrarian economy, the result of being blessed with such agriculturally conducive aspects as fertile soil, fresh water resources, large water reserves, high quality agricultural products (e.g., organic, not genetically modified, fruits) and an efficient irrigation system. Yet resistance to change has prevented the industry from realising its full potential because farmers prefer to stick to conventional methods rather than embracing modern technology.

A few recommendations emerged from the deliberations. An example is the proposal for the establishment of a Muslim Affairs Ministry or Department, a practice which has precedence in other countries in the region like Singapore and Thailand. Other suggestions that were made were the changing of the current mindset to become more global, the fostering of better relations among Muslims as well as non-Muslims through dialogue, and concrete initiatives for economic improvements, e.g., fresh water harvesting and multi-farming system.

Visit to IAIS Malaysia by a Delegation headed by HE Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Singapore (7 May 2012)

Christoph Marcinkowski, Berlin, Germany

On his visit to IAIS Malaysia, Mr Masagos Zulkifli, who was appointed quite recently (on 21 May 2011) to his current position as Minister of State in both Singapore’s Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and who serves also as one of five Members of Parliament for the Tampines GRC constituency, was accompanied by his country’s High Commissioner to Malaysia, HE Mr Ong Keng Yong, and furthermore by Mr Filbert Tay, First Secretary at Singapore’s High Commission, and Ms Samantha Toh, Country Officer in Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The event featured welcoming remarks by Professor Mohammed Hashim Kamali, the CEO and Director of IAIS Malaysia, who provided a concise introduction to the Institute’s activities. Emeritus Professor Osman Bakar (Deputy CEO, IAIS Malaysia) added to Professor Kamali’s remarks by focussing on the role of Muslims within ASEAN.