SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Closed-door Roundtable Discussion on Human Rights and Islam
(Kuala Lumpur, 20 November 2012)

Karim D. Crow, IAIS Malaysia

A closed-door Roundtable exchange was held at IAIS Malaysia on 20 November 2012, presided over by Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Founding Chairman & CEO IAIS Malaysia) and Tan Sri Hasmy Agam (Chairman of Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)). Fifty participants contributed to the frank exchange of views, and the meaningful day-long discussion was moderated by Karim D. Crow (IAIS Malaysia).

This first collaborative effort between IAIS Malaysia and SUHAKAM had the following objectives: to identify pressing domestic human rights issues in Islam; to facilitate critical appreciation of such issues from the Islamic perspective and promote open discussion, analysis and research; and to explore appropriate mechanisms to intensify internal dialogue within Malaysia in a spirit of problem solving and continuing engagement. The morning session saw two major presentations: Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali, “Maqasid al-Shari’ah and Human Rights in Islam”; and Professor Najibah Mohd Zain (Deputy Dean, Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyyah of Law, IIUM), “Issues of Human Rights: Past, Present and Future Trends.” The afternoon session comprised two and one-half hours of honest consultative exchange of concerns among all participants, where specific issues relevant to human rights in Malaysia were treated from a variety of perspectives. These included the conception of and rationale for human rights from an Islamic perspective; gender specific topics and women and children disabilities; sexual minorities (LGBT); death penalty; and women’s rights, including Malaysia’s reservations to CEDAW.

The sincere, wide-ranging discussions were guided by the informed parameters of the two morning presentations. In particular Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali explored the potential for developing new resources which the Maqasid al-Shari’ah offer for purpose-oriented rethinking of moribund positions among Muslims. Human dignity and justice have the potential to serve as the matrix for a new architecture of human rights in Islam. Dr Najibah Mohd Zain pointed out the Malaysia-specific constraints on reforming and enforcing human rights, and seeking uniformity of state laws. Tan Sri Hasmy Agam provided frank insights into SUHAKAM’s efforts for thirty years and the urgency for Malaysia to acquit itself properly in its international obligations. All these efforts are predicated upon increased engagement of the Muslim community and a transformed understanding of Islamic principles.