

Book Launch: *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Quranic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (IAIS Malaysia, 23 November 2015)

Ahmad Syarieff Fadhli

On 23 November 2015, IAIS Malaysia, in collaboration with the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF), co-organised a Book Launch Ceremony officiated by His Royal Highness, Sultan of Perak Darul Ridzuan, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah Ibni Almarhum Sultan Azlan Muhibuddin Shah.

The event was attended by a total of 100 guests, including Tun Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, the Chairman of IAIS Malaysia, Associate Professor Dr Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil, Deputy CEO of IAIS Malaysia, Tn. Hj. Nasharudin Mat Isa, CEO of the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF), as well as the Ambassadors of France and Indonesia.

The book, entitled '*The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principles of Wasatiyyah*', is by Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali, the founding CEO of IAIS Malaysia, a world-renowned scholar in his field of specialisation.

Professor Kamali serves on the advisory boards of 13 local and international academic journals and has addressed over 200 national and international conferences. He has also published 28 books and over 170 academic articles. His works have been translated into several languages, including Arabic, German, Italian, Turkish and Japanese. He also features in the book *The 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World* (2009, 2010).

In his book, Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali examines the concept of *wasatiyyah*, or moderation, arguing that scholars, religious communities, and policy circles alike must access this governing principle, as that which drives the silent majority of Muslims. Kamali explores *wasatiyyah* in historical/conceptual terms as well as in contemporary/practical terms.

Tn. Hj. Nasharudin Mat Isa, in his welcoming remarks, stressed that the topic of moderation closely resonates with GMM. Given current global conditions, the dissemination of Islam's version of moderation is much needed. The book provides a detailed analysis of this important yet somewhat neglected aspect of Islam. The book defines *wasatiyyah* as "a recommended posture that occurs to the people of sound nature and intellect, distinguished by its aversion to both extremism and manifest neglect" (p.10).

In his address, His Royal Highness stressed that Professor Dr. Mohammad Hashim Kamali's book provides readers with many valuable reflections on the concept of the "middle way" in the Islamic tradition, and on the different ways

in which the idea can be understood and applied. Importantly, and as the book's subtitle indicates, Professor Dr Mohammad Hashim Kamali posits the notion of moderation as an essential Qur'anic principle.

At the end of his speech, His Royal Highness quoted the most famous verse in the Qur'an concerning the notion of the middle way and moderation, where Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala says, "We have made you into a balanced middle nation, so that you may bear witness (to the truth) before others and so that the Prophet may bear witness (to it) before you". [Surah al-Baqarah, verse 143]

**Counter- and Alternative-Narratives for a Comprehensive Strategy
to Effectively Combat ISIS Propaganda
(Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), 27 October 2015)**

Alexander Wain

Professor Alex P. Schmid began with a concise definition of extremism: an "intolerant, authoritarian ideological position whose adherents view politics not as a peaceful competition between parties... but as a zero-sum struggle, utilising... criminal and violent tactics." Extremism, he said, was ultimately the product of radicalisation, itself a political polarisation accompanied by the rejection of any and all dialogue with those who hold opposing views. Using these generalities as a framework, Schmid proceeded with his analysis of ISIS and its propaganda machine.

While labelling ISIS an extremist organisation rooted in Salafist Jihadism, Schmid described its ability to use a narrative of restored honour and heroic deeds to recruit large numbers of idealistic young Muslims in search of a brighter future. Importantly, Schmid argued that ISIS has been unwittingly helped in this task by the Western media. In particular, Schmid described a vicious cycle inherent to the ISIS-journalist relationship: ISIS perpetrates terrorist acts designed to meet the journalist's (financial) need for blood on the front page and, in return, gains widespread exposure and legitimacy. This symbiotic relationship, Schmid said, constituting a marriage of convenience, presents profound difficulties for anybody wishing to counter ISIS and its ideology by means of keeping it out of the public eye. Nevertheless, and within this specific context, Schmid proposed several strategies for combating ISIS. Centring himself on the need to limit ISIS's ability to disseminate their ideology, Schmid first suggested (and perhaps rather contentiously) government censorship of the public media in order to end this destructive ISIS-journalist relationship. Secondly, and closely tied to this, he suggested responsible media self-censorship (inclusive of social media).