

Dr. Akhmetova stated that Shi‘ism began as a political faction rather than a truly religious movement; and, in spite of the minor disagreements, Sunnis and Shi‘is have lived together side by side in peace and harmony, intermarrying and living in the same neighbourhoods up to the 21st century. Current tension between Sunni and Shi‘ah Muslims, according to her, is a product of very recent global events. To achieve regional and global stability, as Dr. Akhmetova suggested, the Islamic concepts of moderation and *ikhtilāf*, the recognition and tolerance of disagreement among the scholars, should be practiced to create a milieu of diversity and pluralism in religious and intellectual assessment. The seminar was well accepted by the delegates, who participated lively in each session through asking questions and sharing their experiences and practices related to the topics.

Seminar on Women’s Leadership in Islam (15 May 2014, Kuala Lumpur)

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

On 15 May 2014, IAIS Malaysia organised a seminar on Women’s Leadership in Islam in collaboration with Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia. The speakers were Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali, CEO of IAIS Malaysia; Che Asmah Ibrahim, Deputy Chairman of the Women Committee, IKRAM; and Associate Professor Dr Raihanah Abdullah, associate professor at the Department of Shariah and Law, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya.

The first speaker, Professor Kamali defined leadership in a broad sense to include intellectual leadership, a domain which even historically has witnessed significant contributions by women, such as in the sciences of hadith. The renowned hadith scholar, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani enlisted over 170 female hadith scholars, one of whom even mastered a number of other disciplines. A study by Jalal al-Din Suyuti reveals that no woman has been involved in hadith forgery.

Attempts to preclude women from leadership have invoked scriptural arguments—a strategy which Kamali deconstructed in detail. Verses that may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted include the one proclaiming that “men have a degree over women” (al-Baqarah 2:228) (which must actually be read in the light of another verse, al-Tawba 9:71 declaring that men and women are protectors (*awliyya*) of each other) and that “men are caretakers (*qawwamun*) of women” (al-Nisa’ 4:34) (which actually goes on to say that this is only because the men provide by way of maintenance (*nafaqa*)).

This recognition for female leadership must nonetheless confront cultural impediments. Towards this end, progress is being made, as seen in the case

of Afghanistan. The 2004 constitution of Afghanistan secures women's rights among others by imposing a quota for women in the representative assembly. Yet women themselves demand for higher quota, from one female representative to two representatives from each province.

The second speaker, Che Asmah Ibrahim, explored the concept and importance of leadership in Islam. Concurring with Kamali, Che Asmah added that throughout Islamic history, female participation in public life and decision-making has always been recognised. An example is when the second caliph, 'Umar al-Khattab decided to lower the rate of dowry (*mahr*) for marriages but swiftly retracted this policy following objections from the womenfolk. To be sure, classical scholars did exclude women from certain offices, but even then this has less to do with any innate qualities or traits of women than with the specific functions that these scholars assigned for the office, such as the caliph's duty to lead military expeditions and to lead the Friday prayer congregation. Asmah insisted on equity over equality, for the latter seeks to homogenize or uniformize male and female by means of a "one-size-fits-all" formula whereas the former takes into account the peculiar strengths and distinct qualities of each gender. In practical terms the latter often means imposing male standards upon female, when in fact men and women may exhibit different leadership styles, which itself calls for greater awareness, training and education to understand the different ways in which the different genders lead.

Imposing quota as with the case in Afghanistan may not necessarily be productive. While acknowledging the possible benefits of the quota system, she nevertheless questioned if this is not an affront to women i.e. they hold their positions, not because they are qualified leaders but because they are women (to fulfil the quota requirement).

Asmah also explored the challenges faced by women, such as the lack of role models, balancing home and work and challenging social stereotypes. Sometimes women themselves are privy to such stereotypes: for instance, based on their own testimonies, female workers are more comfortable with male subordinates and superiors than with female ones, perceiving female bosses in extreme terms, either too soft or too rigid, nowhere in the middle. By way of recommendation, Che Asmah proposed for the adoption of a national level Muslim Women's Charter.

The third speaker, Raihanah Abdullah, examined the contemporary trends, issues and challenges of Muslim women leadership in Malaysia. She stressed that, while female participation in the economy is clearly visible and encouraging, women nevertheless seemed to gravitate more towards "soft" professions, such as teaching, nursing and health care. Women are also less visible as leaders—except in some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and even then as head of their "women committee". Still more worrying is the status of women

in Islamic institutions in Malaysia, none of which (she claimed) can boast of female leadership. However, in 2010, three women were appointed as Shariah court judges. Although an earlier state fatwa in Terengganu (1986) declared it impermissible, the National Fatwa Council (2006) allowed it. Women leadership faces further challenges such as cultural stereotypes, balancing work and home, and creating a work environment conducive to women's safety and growth.

**National Geoscience Conference 2014:
'Climate and Sea Level Change Through Geologic Time'
(13-14 June 2014, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia)**

Daud AbdulFattah Batchelor, IAIS Malaysia

The 27th National Geoscience Conference held in Kuala Terengganu on 13-14 June, and co-organised by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and the Malaysian Minerals & Geoscience Department, was attended by 200 participants. The potential effects of ongoing climatic and sea level changes are of global concern, especially for countries with coastal populations. The most recent geologic period, the Quaternary (0 to 2.6 million years ago), is characterised by high frequency climate and sea level changes. The conference focussed on understanding these changes to facilitate prediction of future coastal trends. In addition to the conference theme there were sessions on geohazards, engineering geology, geochemistry, hydrogeology and economic geology. The conference was opened by Professor Datuk Ibrahim Komoo, UMT Vice Chancellor, who emphasised that geoscientists have a leading role in contributing towards understanding past environmental changes. The well-known geological truism that "The Present is the Key to the Past", needs to be joined with one that "The Past is the Key to the Future". Geologists understand past climatic changes well and so are ideally positioned to assist with future predictions.

Professor Fredolin Tangang, Vice Chair of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Working Group I, highlighted recently published IPCC findings that human-induced impacts are without doubt the dominant factor for increased greenhouse gas concentrations, global warming of the atmosphere and ocean (0.1°C per decade since 1971), diminishing ice and snow, and rising sea levels (17 mm per decade since 1901). General predictions are for a more rapid rise of temperatures and sea levels unless more is done to cap anthropogenic carbon dioxide and methane emissions. Dr Daud Batchelor in his Keynote Address provided an overview of the stratigraphy, climates, sea levels and environments experienced over the past 3.0 million years in the (currently) drowned Sundaland