

Annual Review 2008

Our Mission & Objectives

Mission Statement

To promote an understanding of Islam that recognises the principles of justice, equality, freedom, and dignity within a democratic nation state.

Objectives

To promote and develop a framework for women's rights in Islam, which takes into consideration women's experiences and realities.

To eliminate injustice and discrimination against women by changing practices and values that regard women as inferior to men.

To create public awareness, and reform laws and policies within the framework of justice and equality in Islam.

Contents

Message from the SIS Management Team	04
Research and Publications	09
Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform	17
Public Education and Communications	23
Advocacy and Networking: International and National	37
Organisational and Financial Matters	44
Getting Involved	51
In Memoriam: Zaitun Mohamed Kasim (Toni) (1966 - 2008)	52
Acknowledgements	58

Message from the SIS Management Team

How does one summarise a year's work, short as it may seem, into a two-pager? It's daunting but the management team will try to do justice to speak of the amazing work that was done, and is ongoing, at Sisters in Islam (SIS).

In March 2008, following the resignation of Zainah Anwar as Executive Director, a new management team led by Maria Chin Abdullah took over, with Norhayati Kaprawi, Rashidah Hashim and Masjaliza Hamzah forming the rest of the team. Each headed the respective four units created under a new organisational structure that consisted of: Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform; Public Education and Communications; Research and Publications; and Operations and Finance. There was also a major revamp in the structure of governance with the merging of the Planning and Management Committee and the Board. We took over this leadership challenge at an exciting time to Muslim women; one that would require strategic thinking as well as committed action.

The landmark 2008 General Elections in the country saw many new women representatives in Parliament and the State Assemblies, as well as a new Minister for Women, Family and Community Development from the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) political party. This led the then Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi, to set up a new unit under his department to advocate for the rights of Muslim women, the Secretariat of Advocacy and Empowerment of Muslim Women (SENADA), helmed by Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil. While some saw this as an opportunity for more focused attention on issues affecting Muslim women, many women's groups were concerned that the struggle for women's rights was being divided along religious lines. In spite of this, SIS felt that as an advocacy group working on the rights of Muslim women, it would continue to engage with both SENADA and the Ministry for Women.

While 2008 brought in new players and new structures to the government, the reform of laws and policies to eliminate discrimination against women, especially Muslim women, remains a serious challenge. SIS's role remains urgent and unique, given its strong track record on empowering Muslim women to take charge of their lives. The progress and achievements made this year are an accumulation and continuation of more than 20 years of work to advance equality and justice for women in Malaysia.

The crux of SIS's support for Muslim women lies in its legal information services, especially its Telenisa helpline, court monitoring and mobile legal clinic, which served some 1,000 clients in

2008. These services were given further impetus by SIS's partnership with the Bar Council Legal Aid Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and All Women's Action Society (AWAM). With their support, the legal services unit was able to carry out its mobile legal programme for grassroots women in Selangor, reaching an audience of 320. Not all women are mobile or have access to information on where to find support and legal services. Going to the communities was one way to reach out to a wider group of women and it generated interest from other communities to have similar programmes as well.

Advocacy for law reform continues to be a key aspect of SIS work. The year opened with SIS and its partners from the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) launching a "Kotakan Kata" (Keep Your Promise) campaign among Members of Parliament to remind the elected representatives of their commitment to reform all laws that discriminate against women, which JAG has been campaigning on for the last 23 years. The arduous campaign to amend the Islamic Family Laws continued with more lobbying of government officials, SENADA and Parliamentarians.

Research forms the basis of SIS's arguments for reform of laws and policies, and statements made

against discrimination against women. It also lays the foundation for engaging directly with the government in advocacy work. The ongoing nationwide research on the emotional, financial and social impact of polygamy on the family helps to deepen our understanding of the complexities of such family formations and their impact on different members of the family – husband, wives and children. Next year, the research team will conclude its findings which will certainly mark a significant contribution to the discourse on polygamy, family formation and women's rights. The intention is that the research will also provide strategic recommendations for law and policy changes, and raise public awareness on the impact of the practice of polygamy. SIS research work also expanded to examine issues of moral policing where morality standards seem to be set by overzealous religious enforcement officers.

The training and education work carried out over the year compound SIS's work from high level policy and legal advocacy to one grounded with support from grassroots Muslim women. As a culmination of the consciousness raising conducted between 2007 and 2008, a Muslim women's coalition, Gabungan Hak Wanita Islam (Muslim Women's Rights Coalition, GAHWI) was initiated by SIS with participants of the workshops. The creation of this new grassroots

network of eight traditional women's organisations will lend greater voice and force to Muslim women's issues and concerns.

Consistent efforts were made to form strategic alliances with key government officials. The outstanding support received from Terengganu Chief Shari'ah Judge Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya has added on to more voices speaking out for justice and equality for women. The management team, in their various programmes, consciously sought, formed and/or renewed alliances with a broad range of people. In the campaign against book banning, which arose following bans on SIS resources the previous year and solidified after a SIS publication was affected in August 2008, artists, writers, bloggers, publishers and academicians were enlisted to be part of the cause. Involvement with the National Council of Women's Organisations, and human rights and free expression NGOs like Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and SUARAM in various activities such as training, education, advocacy and campaign work on social justice issues was encouraging as it added on to a larger pool of empowered voices speaking against discrimination faced by women.

At the international level, SIS's preparatory work for the launch of Musawah, a global

movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, intensified. Much of the year was spent on consultations with Islamic scholars and women's rights activists to finalise the Musawah Framework for Action, to edit and publish a book of theoretical papers to underpin our demand for equality and justice in the Muslim family, and to reach out to women's groups working on family law reform in 51 countries to get involved in this effort at movement-building. The Global Meeting to launch Musawah was planned for February 2009 where more than 200 activists, academics, lawyers, and policy-makers working on issues of equality and justice for Muslim women and family law reform from all over the world met in Kuala Lumpur.

The above highlights are some of the excellent examples of the kind of strategic thinking and action that the management team, together with the SIS Board, members and staff, had collectively thought through and turned into reality. It was, and is, this same kind of committed partnership for action and transformation which contributed towards our conviction to achieve justice and equality.

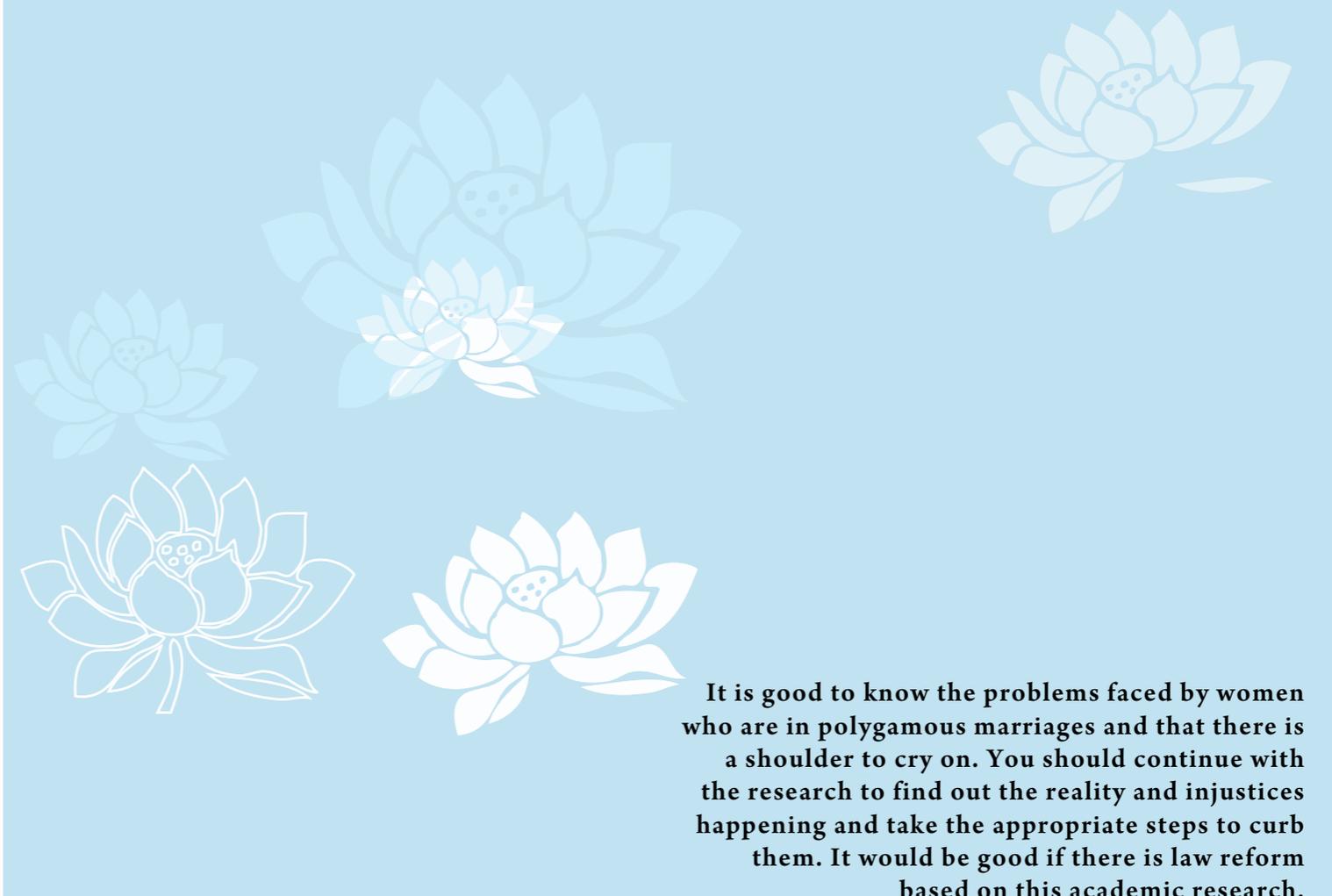
Undoubtedly, all of the above work had the quiet but strong support of the staff of the Operations and Finance Unit. Their commendable work

helped to raise and manage SIS funds, mobilised members to put their strengths to good use, provided capacity building for staff and members to build their confidence and assertiveness, and organised many fun activities, including good food, to build friendship and foster understanding.

Lastly, the management team would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Board for their valuable guidance over this whole year, especially for helping to manage the transition between Zainah Anwar's departure and the new Senior Manager's arrival and the work of the new management team. The same appreciation goes to members of SIS as well as supporters and volunteers; terima kasih for your unquestioned support and confidence in the management team, especially during this critical leadership transition period.

Maria Chin Abdullah
Senior Manager
On behalf of the Management Team

Research and Publications



It is good to know the problems faced by women who are in polygamous marriages and that there is a shoulder to cry on. You should continue with the research to find out the reality and injustices happening and take the appropriate steps to curb them. It would be good if there is law reform based on this academic research.

Umi Kartini
Housewife and businesswoman



In January 2008, as part of the transition management plan, the research arm of SIS was restructured to include responsibility for publications, resulting in the creation of a new unit that started operating upon the recruitment of a programme manager in February.

Research

SIS's national research on the Impact of Polygamy on the Family in Malaysia, initiated in 2006, continued to progress with data collation in collaboration with academics from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia. With polygamy a perennial issue that has been shown to be emotive in the conservative context of Malaysia, this groundbreaking research is crucial to the realisation of SIS's objective of promoting and developing a framework for women's rights in Islam that factors in women's experiences and realities.

The research targeted for a total of 2,000 interviews via questionnaire in Peninsular Malaysia – where polygamy is more prevalent than in East Malaysia – incorporating in-depth interviews and focused discussions in groups to strengthen the findings of the questionnaire. Originally intended to end in December, data collation was extended till April 2009 owing to difficulties in getting respondents and enumerators. The unit intended to look into advertising for both source and resource in local media and online networks.

During the year, two Coordinating Committee Meetings were held to put in place the research team structure, reporting processes and targets, as well as to discuss larger issues regarding coordination of the research, which included operationalising it under four geographical zones. Monthly workshops discussed the progress of the research, issues arising from fieldwork and updates of results. In addition to obtaining more respondents for the questionnaire, the research team was able to find in two towns, a few respondents who were willing to contribute to an in-depth interview and to join a focus discussion group held in the East Coast state of Kelantan.

Using the data – both qualitative and quantitative – the research team gave four presentations to fellow researchers, SIS members and staff, as well as key academics and activists for their feedback. These were preliminary findings from one of the four zones of study; discourses of polygamy; perceived impact of polygamy on family functioning among wives and children; and preliminary findings of a focus discussion group and in-depth interviews.

Internationally, SIS research also contributed to a book project by the Turkey-based Coalition of Sexual and Bodily Rights, which looked at interlocking historical, social and political factors in formulating contemporary moral standards. For the Malaysian case study, SIS conducted fieldwork in at least four states, interviewing judges and enforcement officers to shed further light on the reasons behind moral policing in the country. The

data collected will be useful for SIS to understand the larger issue of moral policing, the Shari'ah Criminal Offences and the process of fatwas and their gazetting, following the controversial fatwas on tomboys and yoga in the second half of 2008.

Publications

The unit coordinated with SIS's stable of writers and editors to translate information from the latest research and scholarship on Muslim women's issues and rights into simple reading material. Since it was newly established and yet to operate at full capacity, the unit did not complete any publication. However, two publications – Women as Judges and the fourth Baraza! bulletin – were slated for release at the Musawah Global Meeting scheduled in February 2009. Other publications in the works were the 2007 Annual Review and a booklet on domestic violence. The domestic violence and Women as Judges booklets were updated editions whose content was being revised to incorporate new interpretations and additional research, to be re-presented in Q&A format to better highlight the salient points.

The SIS biannual bulletin – Baraza! – initiated in 2005, continued to be well-received by its target demographics – academics, policymakers, activists, supporters, funders and students of law, Islamic and gender studies. For the fourth issue, the topics lined up were on faith and feminism, exploring with women activists and activist-scholars of all religious and cultural backgrounds on how

these came to be. Effort was made to ensure that outstanding publications would be completed in 2009. While publications income is often a trickle, sales soared to RM19,907, an increase of almost 100 per cent from 2007, thanks in large part to a distributor who bought in bulk for the South Asian and Middle Eastern market. Distribution was otherwise through the usual channels. SIS books are provided gratis to local organisations, scholars, activists, government agencies, university and state libraries, and sold through bookstores and independent outlets in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore; and externally via a local independent distributor. SIS's publications are promoted via its website and during its public education events. In 2008, SIS found four externally initiated opportunities in the Klang Valley – the Monash University NGO Fair, the Single Mothers' Conference at the International Islamic University of Malaysia and UMNO Club meetings at the party's headquarters – to reach a wider audience.

SIS's most successful sales and promotions outing was at the KL Alternative Bookfest (KLAB) in May 2008, an occasion for small, independent publishers - SIS sees itself as one through its research and publications arm – to sell, launch and discuss books. The event drew hundreds of book and art lovers, academicians and students over the two days it ran, with SIS events benefiting tremendously from the synergistic connections. It was a full house of some 70 people at the SIS discussion on book banning which had four



SIS staff and volunteer were entertaining a visitor who dropped at SIS booth during KL Alternative Bookfest which was held in May at Annexe building Central Market

panelists: SIS programme manager Norhayati Kaprawi, CIJ Executive Director V. Gayathry and newspaper columnist Astora Jabat. The quality of participation was also evident during the lively Q&A session that found voices supporting a court challenge to the banning.

SIS also held a Vox Pop quiz asking people whether they would read a banned book. SIS

found overwhelming support against book banning, as reflected in the number of people signing the specially designed postcards against book censorship – 430 in those two days alone. Signatories included luminaries such as national laureate A. Samad Said, activist Hishamuddin Rais, academic Farish A. Noor, writer Kam Raslan, newspaper columnist Marina Mahathir, TV host Aishah Sinclair and activist/singer/songwriter

Shanon Shah. The postcards from the event, along with others collected following the ban on SIS's book, *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*, created a powerful physical and visual message when they were duly handed over to the Home Affairs Ministry in December 2008.

🌸 Campaign against Book Banning

A steady trend of book banning in Malaysia has, however, negatively impacted the unit's primary objective of promoting progressive views and alternative interpretations within Islam that uphold principles of justice, equality and freedom. Among the banned works in previous years were important SIS resources such as K.H. Husein Muhammad's *Fiqh Wanita: Pandangan Ulama Terhadap Wacana Agama dan Gender (Women's Fiqh: The Views of the Ulama on Religious and Gender Discourses)* and Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

In the face of a generally suppressive environment for freedom of expression, SIS has had to take on an anti-censorship campaign in collaboration with other NGOs besides issuing press statements to assert its position on this matter. Even so, in 2008, SIS was compelled to up the ante and reconsider its strategy when the organisation's own publication, *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*, was banned on 14 August by

the Home Ministry under the Printing Presses and Publications Act (1984) for allegedly "containing twisted facts on Islam that could undermine the faith of Muslims".

The book is a compilation of essays from Southeast Asia and the Middle East on Muslim women's struggle to acquire rights and promote justice in their respective countries. The writers are international scholars and activists, among them Fatima Pir T. Allian; Fatma Khafagy; Kamala Chandrakirana; Norma A. Maruhom; Suzaina Kadir; Yuniyanti Chuzaifah; SIS founding Executive Director Zainah Anwar; SIS first Chief Trainer, the late Zaitun Mohamed Kasim; Ziba Mir-Hosseini and SIS founding Board member Prof. Norani Othman who also edited the book.

The unseemly manner of the ban, with no notice nor details from the enforcing authority, the Home Affairs Ministry, made the censorship all the more callous and a disservice not only to the writers, but more crucially the women, those whose lived experiences informed the book and those whose lives would have improved from the knowledge it provided. In response, SIS revved up its ongoing campaign against book banning that was initiated with the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and other civil society groups. SIS held a press conference which was covered by major newspapers and was well-attended by other non-governmental organisations, academics and members of civil

society, with supportive press statements from CIJ and another ally NGO, Writers' Alliance for Media Independence.

To promote the cause and build a collective voice for it, scores more copies of the existing anti-book-banning postcard addressed to the Home Affairs Minister were printed and more signatures solicited at SIS events. Three and a half months later, SIS successfully set up a meeting with the Ministry, joined by nine NGOs and institutions concerned with civil rights, including the Malaysian Bar Council.

The meeting provided both sides the opportunity to clarify their position and purview, during which SIS and its supporters handed over to the official in charge close to 1,000 postcards signed by concerned citizens, with the upshot of a future meeting to be arranged by the Ministry with the authority in charge of publications on Islam, the Islamic Affairs Department (JAKIM). However, with no legally provided recourse to contest the veracity of accusations laid against the book, SIS members later decided that a legal challenge was in order, planned for 2009.



SIS and other NGO representatives submitted the 1000 signed postcards opposing the book banning attempt to the Home Ministry, Putrajaya.

SIS Publications Catalogue

Q&A Booklets

In English

- ✦ Are Women and Men Equal Before Allah? 1991 (2nd printing 2003, 3rd printing 2006)
- ✦ Islam and Family Planning, 2001 (2nd printing August 2001, 3rd printing April 2003)
- ✦ Islam and Polygamy, 2002
- ✦ Hadith on Women in Marriage, 2004

In Bahasa Malaysia

- ✦ Adakah Wanita dan Lelaki Saksama di Sisi Allah? 1991 (2nd printing 2003, 3rd printing 2006)
- ✦ Adakah Lelaki Islam Dibenarkan Memukul Isterinya? 1991 (2nd printing 2003)
- ✦ Islam dan Perancangan Keluarga, 2001 (2nd printing 2002)
- ✦ Islam dan Poligami, 2003

Seminar Books

- ✦ Shari'a Law & The Modern Nation State: A Malaysian Symposium, 1994 (2nd printing 1998)
- ✦ Hudud in Malaysia: The Issues at Stake, 1995
- ✦ Islam, Reproductive Health and Women's Rights, Report of Proceedings, 1999 (out of print)

- ✦ Islam, Reproductive Health and Women's Rights, 2000 (out of print)
- ✦ Islamic Family Law & Justice for Muslim Women, 2003
- ✦ Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism, 2005

Working Paper Series

- ✦ Guardianship Law & Muslim Women, 2002
- ✦ Women as Judges, 2002

Other Books Published By SIS

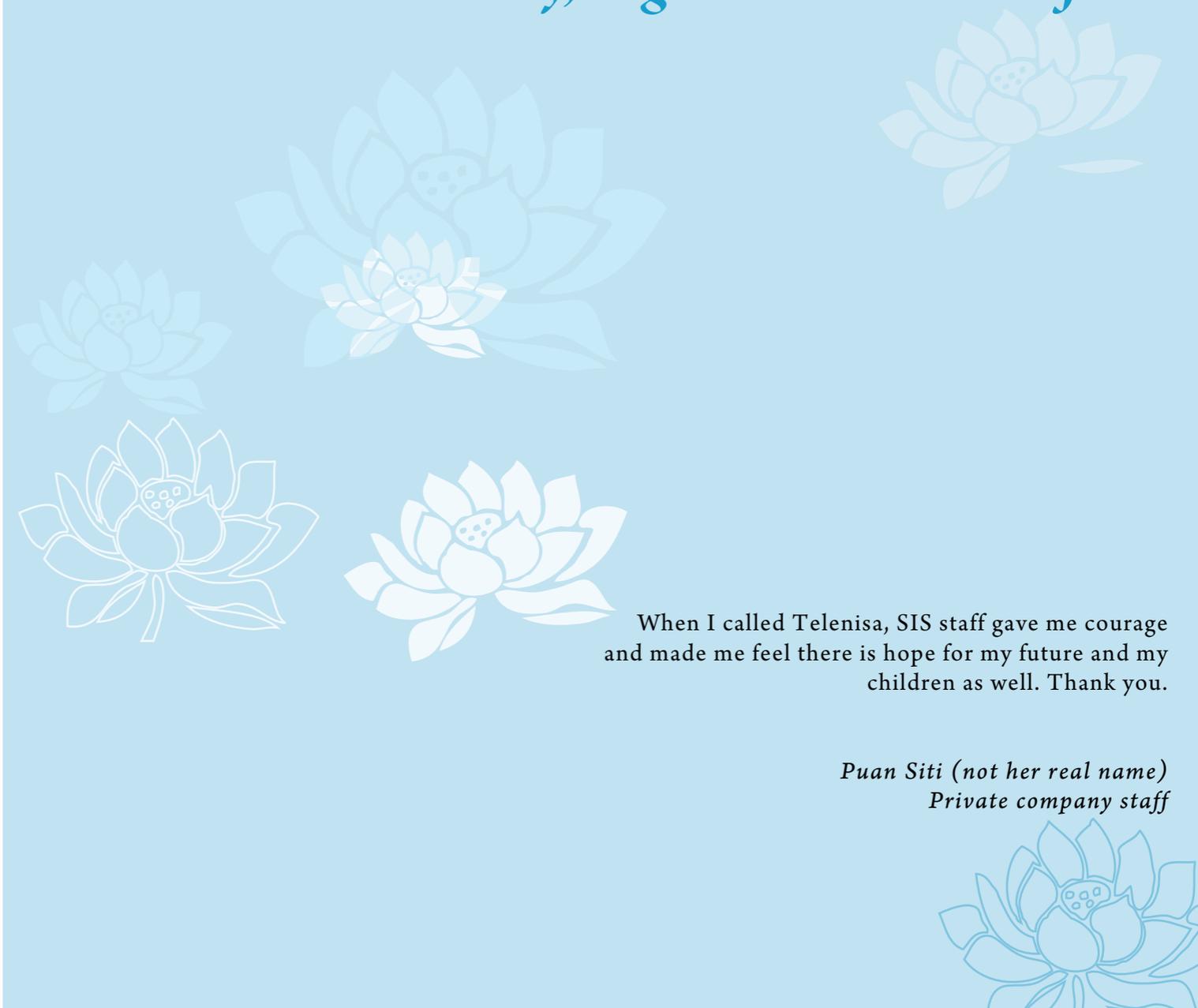
- ✦ Muslim Women in the Family & the Society, Dr. Fathi Osman, 1996 (out of print)
- ✦ Islam & Women's Reproductive Rights, Masdar F. Mas'udi, 2002
- ✦ Wanita Muslim Dalam Keluarga dan Masyarakat, Dr. Fathi Osman, 2002 (out of print)
- ✦ Fiqh Wanita: Pandangan Ulama Terhadap Wacana Agama dan Gender, K.H. Hussein Muhammad, 2004
- ✦ Al-Quran Untuk Kaum Wanita, Nasaruddin Umar, 2004
- ✦ Paradigma Baru Teologi Wanita, Nasaruddin Umar, 2004
- ✦ Kudrat Wanita Dalam Islam, Nasaruddin Umar, 2004

- * Unveiling the Ideal: A New Look at Early Muslim Women, Shayan Afzal Khan, 2007

 **SIS Bulletin: Baraza!**

- * Trends in Islamic Family Law Reform, 2005
(2nd printing January 2006, 3rd printing June 2006)
- * Diversity of Opinions: An Islamic Legacy, 2006
- * Islam and Human Rights: Conflicting or Complementary? 2007

Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform



When I called Telenisa, SIS staff gave me courage and made me feel there is hope for my future and my children as well. Thank you.

*Puan Siti (not her real name)
Private company staff*

The unit was renamed from “Legal Services, Reform and Advocacy” to reflect SIS’s legal services and efforts to reform laws, attitudes and behaviour as part and parcel of SIS’s overall advocacy work.

Legal Services

The everyday discrimination Muslim women in Malaysia face as a result of the regressive provisions in Islamic Family Laws (IFL) necessitated the establishment of SIS’s legal services, which expanded from a newspaper column offering free legal advice in 2002 to other channels and the Court Watch programme in 2006. The latter entails accompanying clients to court and monitoring cases and attitudes of the officers in charge, whereupon the data obtained are fed into SIS’s advocacy strategy to alleviate these problems in the long run.

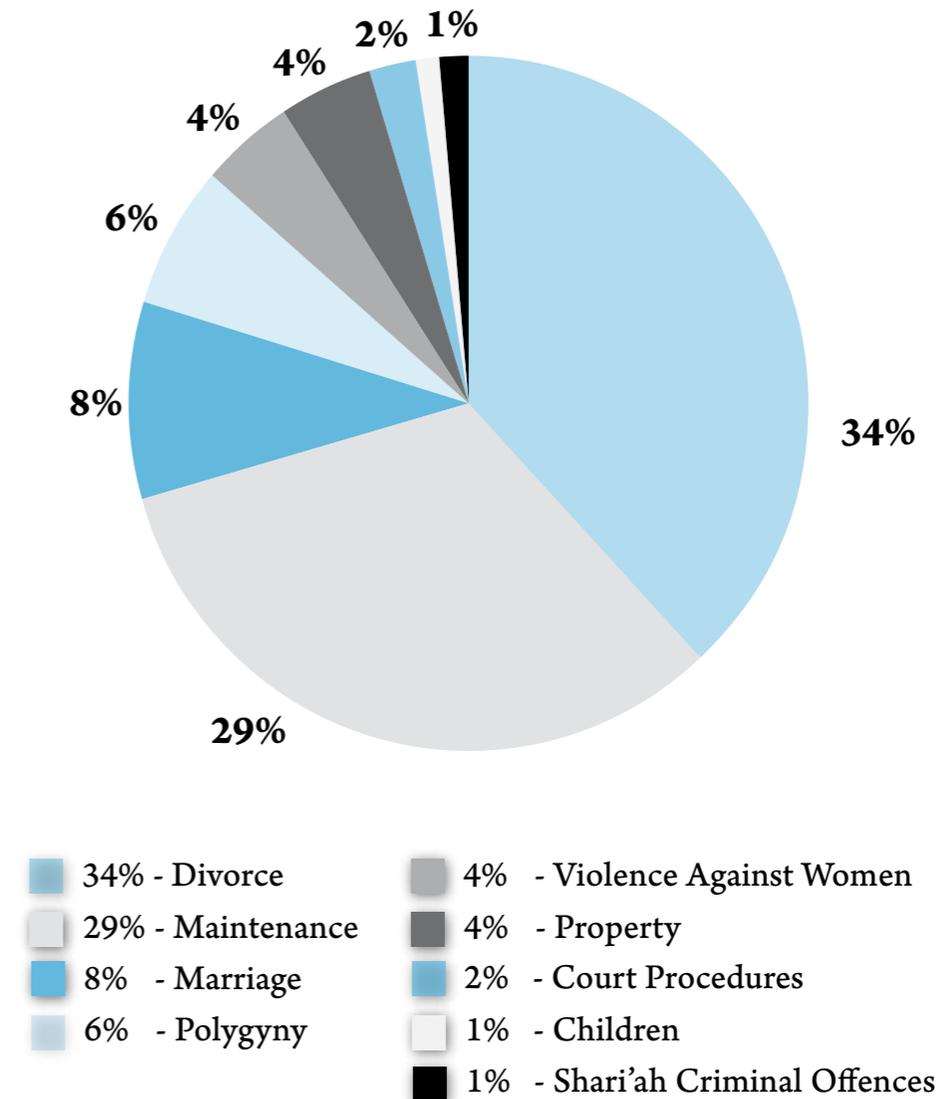
Crucial to SIS’s legal services, especially the Telenisa helpline and Court Watch, are chambering students, who are guided by SIS lawyers. To prepare them for their 14-week pupillage and ensure that they would be able to give grounded legal advice, the students were first trained by SIS lawyers, the Bar Council Legal Aid Centre (LAC) and women NGOs on feminist legal theory in addition to Shari’ah and civil laws. Following past feedback, the module conducted by SIS and fellow NGOs All-Women’s Action Society (AWAM) and Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) was modified to show the relevance of law from a feminist perspective, and additional Shari’ah training was conducted by SIS’s former legal officer Nora Murat.

The programme not only benefited SIS’s constituents but also simultaneously sensitised an important component in the Shari’ah system – the future lawyers. Besides enhancing these chambering students’ communication skills and knowledge of the Shari’ah, the experience of directly dealing with genuine cases afforded them an invaluable exposure to actual court procedures and an insight into the current lived realities of Muslim women. Two out of seven students responded in an exit poll implemented since September that they would return to help out with SIS after completing their pupillage.

Legal Clinic

SIS provides free legal advice on Shari’ah law and court procedures through its Telenisa programme which uses various communication channels – from e-mail to face-to-face meetings and via telephone – to cater to all comfort levels and facilities available to SIS’s constituents. In 2008, Telenisa served 707 clients – 84 of whom were women – and dealt with 1,144 cases. The main issues were divorce (34 per cent), maintenance (29 per cent), marriage (8 per cent), polygyny (6 per cent), violence against women (4 per cent), property (4 per cent), court procedures (2 per cent), children (1 per cent), and Shari’ah criminal offences (1 per cent) (see pie chart).

As a first step to achieving two of Telenisa’s objectives for the year – to review and improve on the legal advice and counselling provided to



clients – a feedback form was introduced to gauge the effectiveness of the services rendered from the clients’ viewpoint. Rated in terms of competence, relevancy of information, meeting client expectations with regard to the information given and treatment in respect of privacy and politeness, SIS scored highly in all the categories. To enable the unit to better serve its clients, a mini library compiling current Shari’ah law books, cases and resource materials was created.

Mobile Legal Clinic

Following up on recommendations from the 2007 evaluation and planning meeting, the Mobile Legal Clinic was set up to perform the same functions as the Legal Clinic but with the added feature of mobility to enable direct outreach to women in low-income communities, especially Muslims. Spearheaded by SIS in collaboration with the Bar Council’s LAC, AWAM and WAO, the Mobile Legal Clinic provided at grassroots localities a half-day programme that consisted of: a legal rights awareness session on women, family and employment under both civil and Shari’ah laws; a skit or role-play about domestic violence and employment issues; an information corner where leaflets and other legal literacy materials were displayed; and legal information consultation on both civil and Shari’ah systems.

The Mobile Legal Clinic managed to set up within Selangor at community centres of the Klang,

Subang Jaya and Kelana Jaya local councils and a public housing area in Setapak, reaching a total of 320 women who generally found the half-day session informative and useful in that they now knew their legal rights and where to seek help. There were requests for follow-up sessions and a rise in phone calls received at the Legal Clinic after each such outreach by the Mobile Legal Clinic.

However, organising the Mobile Legal Clinic is time-consuming and requires coordination with other partners. While it is worth pursuing, the delivery mechanism may be reviewed; it may, for example be conjoined it with SIS’s Public Education and Communications Unit, especially after large group training awareness (LGTA) sessions. The content may also be modified to incorporate a women’s rights workshop.



KL Legal Aid Centre officer was distributing ‘Know Your Rights’ leaflets during Mobile Legal Clinic in Klang

Legal Literacy

SIS’s weekly advice column in the leading local Malay daily Utusan Malaysia, created since 2002, continued to be published upon popular demand. The Q&A column appears every Friday and its contents are uploaded on the SIS website to ensure perpetual public access to the information. Since little has changed in legislation and attitudes of those in power, the topics addressed during the year under the guidance of SIS member and former Senior Legal Officer Razlina Razali were the chronic ones on child custody, maintenance for both wife and children, distribution of property, polygamy, divorce and marriage. On a more heartening note, the column has also generated information from readers for SIS in return, with callers offering helpful comments regarding a particular problem highlighted or raising new issues for the attention of SIS – such as the little-known problems with faraid claims – showing yet another instance where SIS has empowered voices for change. SIS is grateful to Utusan for continuing to provide this public space to serve its readers with respect to imparting legal information on key issues confronting Muslim women.

Court Watch

The Court Watch was created in 2007 in response to numerous complaints from women about the problems and distress they faced in dealing with the Shari’ah Court, from prejudiced judges to

insensitive court officers and unnecessary delays of proceedings to lack of enforcement of judgments and awards.

For 2008, the Court Watch’s objective was to monitor the Shari’ah Court in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur in terms of professionalism, fairness, impartiality and sensitivity on the part of judges, lawyers and court officers in executing their tasks. As was done previously, chambering pupils were recruited to sit in on hearings to record the proceedings on a form from which key findings would be tabulated to feed into SIS’s advocacy strategy. The form was revised during the year to ensure that the data produced would shed light on the underlying problems and meet the objectives of the programme.

The Court Watch achieved some measure of success since the mere presence of informed, third-party observers was enough to behave judges, lawyers and court officers to behave professionally. However, owing to lack of human resources and capacities – there were not enough chambering students to do the watch daily, with most managing to commit only to three days per week – only 37 cases were documented; the data produced were not comprehensive and lacked qualitative information in the form of comments and explanations that would help illuminate the context better. The chambering students needed training on awareness and attentiveness to the possible obstacles women face, as well as on assessing cases.

Advocacy and Networking

The unprecedented results of the 2008 general election, which shook the long-ruling federal government of Barisan Nasional's hold, brought home the point that women's issues, among other pressing democratic concerns, could no longer be ignored as an important election agenda. The election results saw some fresh new faces in Parliament who were more gender-sensitive, thus providing an opportunity to push forward gender mainstreaming. A significant change was the establishment of the Secretariat of Advocacy and Empowerment of Muslim Women (SENADA) in June under the Prime Minister's Office. Headed by the former Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the Secretariat was accountable to the Office of the Adviser on Women and Social Development Affairs.

While it appears to show the state's responsiveness to the unceasing problems Muslim women face, such a set-up has an unfortunate effect of separating governance of Muslims yet again – in this instance, from the purview of the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry. A similar predicament arose with the establishment of the Family Support Unit under the Shari'ah Judicial Department. SIS's position, along with JAG's, was for a Child Support Agency to be set up for all, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

The tabling of the 2007 bill on the IFL amendments dominated SIS's advocacy work for most of the year. In preparation of JAG's lobbying of legislators to ensure that the bill would be an improvement of past, highly regressive versions, SIS researched past amendments made to the law since 1992, best practices in other Muslim countries, and differences between the civil law and the IFL in regard to provisions for the same concerns. Documents comparing and contrasting all these as well as an FAQ about the IFL were produced. SIS met with the Parliamentary Gender Caucus on the IFL and on the upcoming Musawah Global Meeting to obtain parliamentarians' awareness and support for both.

Public Education and Communications

I feel obliged to become a GAHWI member as I believe in SIS's work and their struggle to secure Muslim women's rights. I am willing to cooperate in putting forward women's (in particular single mothers') problems to be highlighted and taken into account by the responsible parties.

*Puan Latifah
Entrepreneur & Gabungan Hak Wanita Islam
(GAHWI) member*

While SIS's public education programme is a continual effort to raise awareness among Muslim women about their rights in Islam, the year 2008 saw added impetus in the drive to make direct contact with the grassroots women and organisations, and build a solid network in anticipation of SIS's main event at year-end – the National Symposium on Creating a Happy, Stable and Just Family.

The National Symposium was part of the long-term SIS campaign to build public support to reform the discriminatory Islamic Family Laws in Malaysia and also part of country-level preparations for the Musawah Global Meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2009. For the former, participants were grassroots leaders identified from SIS's training sessions; for the latter, participating organisations from around the world were to consult and build support among women's organisations in their home countries for reform of Muslim Family Laws.

In 2008, SIS conducted a record 28 events, the bulk of which were workshops and large-group training awareness (LGTA) sessions across both east and west sides of the country, spanning 11 states to reach more than 2,000 women. This marked a departure from the previous concentration of activities in the Klang Valley, where SIS is based. The training was a success, not just in terms of support from both participants and resource persons, but most concretely in the creation of

a new grassroots network for Muslim women's rights, Gabungan Hak Wanita Islam (GAHWI) as a voice from a seldom-heard stakeholder group, in keeping with the SIS slogan of "empowering voices for change". The training roadshow, which introduced the fundamental problems with current implementation of Islamic Family Laws, also helped to build SIS's image on the ground – some participants admitted to doubting SIS's motives prior to the training but have since assumed a positive view of the organisation.

SIS's position on freedom of religion, a contentious issue amid conservative sentiments in Malaysia, appeared not to have affected their support; indeed, the impression SIS made was such that there were clamours for more training and branches to be set up in their states! SIS is thankful for the continued support of Terengganu Chief Shari'ah Judge Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya since 2006, who generously gave his time to speak in most of the LGTA sessions during the year; Shari'ah lawyers and Indonesian scholars and activists also contributed to the success of the workshops and study sessions. Altogether, apart from the National Symposium, SIS held eight LGTA sessions and nine workshops for grassroots women, a roundtable meeting that decided to form GAHWI, two Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops, four Study Sessions, one Public Lecture, one newly introduced international Study Tour, one Focus Group Discussion for the upcoming Musawah Global Meeting in 2009, and one dialogue session

with local Muslim NGO representatives on gender equality in Islam (see PEC table).

National Symposium

On 4 December 2008, some 230 Muslim grassroots women leaders, selected from SIS workshops held all over the country during the year, gathered for the National Symposium on "Creating a Happy, Stable and Just Family", co-organised with GAHWI and JAG. The objective was to obtain from Muslim grassroots women the issues affecting them and their suggestions for law reform. After discussing the implementation of Islamic Family Laws, the Shari'ah judicial system, the impact of these laws on women and factors of a happy family, the participants agreed to form a network to submit a memorandum of 24 demands to the government for the reform of Islamic Family Laws. They resolved, among others, to urge for the consolidation of state Islamic laws for consistency and abolition of gender discriminatory laws; legal and gender courses for judges, and court and law officials; research on polygamous men, and gender education starting from primary-school level.

The symposium was off to a good start as it already had the attention of the relevant authorities, with Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as chairperson of SENADA officiating and panellists who included the Terengganu Chief Shari'ah Judge Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya; Haji Walid Abu Hassan, Ketua Unit Pembangunan Undang-Undang Keluarga Islam dan Sistem Kehakiman Shari'ah, Seksyen Shari'ah,



Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil was giving an opening speech at National Symposium 'Creating a happy, stable and just family' at Corus Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

Attorney-General's Department; Mohd. Asri Tahir, Ketua Penolong Pengarah Bahagian Dasar dan Penyelidikan, Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Malaysia. To offer the perspectives of grassroots women and NGOs, the symposium had Zarizana Abdul Aziz of JAG; Hamidah Karim of National Council of Women's Organisation (NCWO); and from SIS, Legal Officer Nazreen Nizam, Legal consultant Hajjah Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah and Board member Prof. Norani Othman. Written feedback obtained at the end of the symposium revealed that virtually all participants responded positively to recommending friends and family to come for similar workshops, finding it a mind-opening experience. Some suggested having workshops around the country as well as targeting men, young and single women, and students.

LGTA Sessions and Workshops

The LGTA is a one-day large group training to raise the awareness of grassroots women with respect to Islamic Family Laws and gender equality so as to build constituent support for amendments that comply with Islamic principles of justice and equality, and that are abreast with global Muslim Family Law reform initiatives.

For 2008, SIS held eight LGTA “Know Your Rights” sessions, which saw an average of 150 participants, with the Army Welfare Body (Bakat Darat), the Sabah, Sarawak and Kedah chapters of NCWO, Single Mothers Association of Kuala Lumpur, Wives of Elected Representatives’ Charity Body of Perlis (Baidunita Perlis), Muslim women in Pahang, Sabah Women’s Organisation (PEWASA), and Perak Lawyers Committee and Women’s Development Board. Each session had one to three guest speakers.

Chief Shari’ah Judge of Terengganu Dato’ Haji Ismail Yahya spoke at all except one that was originally intended as a workshop but turned into an LGTA due to a huge turnout. The other guest speakers were SIS Board member Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim, Mutiara Single Mothers Association President Mariam Abdul, Shari’ah lawyer Sa’adiah Din, SIS founding member Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri outgoing SIS Executive Director Zainah Anwar and Roseniza Sidik, a single mother. The heartening response to SIS’s message was reflected in the participants’ written and oral feedback as well as



Dato’ Haji Ismail Yahya, Chief Shariah Judge of Terengganu was giving a session on Muslim Family Law with a group of women from Bakat Darat

attitude, with majority staying until the end despite earlier protestations of busy schedules. Validated by the new knowledge, insights and experiences of each other, the women voiced full support for SIS’s reform proposals, affirming the organisation’s mission in turn and adding to its repository of the lived realities of Muslim women in Malaysia.

LGTA sessions also provide a pool from which potential grassroots leaders are identified for follow-up training as advocates for SIS’s reform campaign. In 2008, a TOT for 30 grassroots women leaders, conducted by gender trainer Angela Kuga Thas, Indonesian scholar-activist Nur Rofiah Bil Uzm, regular SIS trainer lawyer Sa’adiah Din and SIS’s Zainah Anwar, led to a roundtable meeting that agreed to form GAHWI. The first objective of GAHWI, with SIS acting

as the temporary secretariat, was to work on the establishment of a one-stop Child Support Agency within a year to resolve the constant mess left by absconding husbands.

SIS held seven “Know Your Rights” workshops for Muslim women in Terengganu and the Klang Valley neighbourhoods of Bangsar, Petaling Jaya and Setapak, Single Mothers’ Association of Shah Alam, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and the KL chapter of the International Transport Federation (ITF). A few of these one-day workshops, which had an average of 38 participants, were in response to requests from former participants who wanted to share with friends the empowering knowledge they had gained from them. Each workshop had one to three resource persons, who were Sa’adiah Din, fellow lawyer Nik Elin Zurina Nik Rashid, SIS Legal Consultant Hajjah Nik Noriani, SIS Senior Legal Officer Razlinawati Razali and social activist Zalina Hassan.

Mindful of public education as a crucial strategy of SIS and the need to constantly build a pool of trainers and their capacities, a TOT on “Islam and Gender” was held for SIS. Twenty-five members and staff attended the three-day session in July 2008, conducted by prominent Indonesian activists Lies Marcoes, Nur Rofiah and Nyai Siti Ruqayyah. To take advantage of their presence in Malaysia, SIS also organised other activities involving these resource persons. A workshop on “Muslim Women

Issues in Contemporary Society” was held for 30 Muslim academics, social activists, journalists, writers and university students. SIS also organised a dialogue on gender equality between Nur Rofiah, Nyai Ruqayyah and Muslim women leaders from Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), Middle Eastern Graduates Centre (MEGC), Muslim Women’s Action Association (PERTIWI) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.



‘Islam and Gender’ Training of Trainers for members and staff

Study Sessions

SIS had planned for six study sessions during the year but with focus on the nation-wide workshops and the new study visit programme, only four were eventually held, attracting between 30 and 40 participants each. These study sessions are designed to reach a wider audience, transcending gender and religion, by featuring topics that extend to broader

concerns of political Islam and related current issues that affect women's rights.

In February 2008, ahead of a widely anticipated general election, SIS thought it opportune to learn from the experience of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, in dealing with inter-ethnic and inter-religious issues, specifically from the country's biggest Muslim NGO Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Amin Fadlillah and Fathonah Daud, two active NU members studying in Malaysia, related how NU has consistently ensured respect for cultural and religious diversity as well as women's rights. Revealing the majority Muslims' moderate position and practice, the speakers left their audience with a positive outlook on reconciling religion and culture in Malaysia as well. In the same month, a study session designed as an introduction to understanding the Qur'an for peoples of other faiths was held for a Christian women's group. On "The History and Message of the Qur'an", SIS found as speaker a male supporter, Mustaqeem Al Radhi, the Director of MEGC. Having heard from Mustaqeem the main message and history of revelation, the audience took with them an assurance of Islam's message of diversity, multiculturalism, freedom of religion and the rights of women and the disadvantaged, in contrast with the prevalent misconceptions perpetuated by the patriarchal authorities.

Though an important demographic in society, youths are often disregarded or underestimated

when it comes to their thoughts on national issues that affect them as well. Not wanting to make the same mistake, SIS invited Tricia Yeoh, the Director of the Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS), to replicate for SIS her presentation on a survey of urban and rural youths' views of national unity, with its attendant issue of national identity. Activists, decision-makers and the general public who attended the "Young Minds" study session in May 2008 found insightful the findings of the research by the CPPS and Malaysian Bar Council. Many voiced their appreciation to SIS for the opportunity to exchange views with peoples of various religious and ethnic backgrounds on a topic that remained contentious, as evidenced by a few requests for further discussion in another session.

In July 2008, hoping to glean the factors that enabled reforms in the Islamic finance sector via application of Maqasid al-Shari'ah (objectives of Shari'ah), SIS set up a study session with Prof. Malik Muhammad M. Al Awan, a multi-disciplinary scholar of Islamic jurisprudence who has been engaged in Islamic finance for the last 30 years, to talk on "Islamic Law Reform in Light of Maqasid al-Shari'ah". Revisiting the concept and application of Ijtihad in the contemporary Muslim world, as well as problems in implementing change and reform, participants also brought up local issues such as Islam Hadhari and the allegedly exclusive use of the word "Allah". The professor's progressive and inclusive statements gave participants a wider perspective of Muslim

Family Law reform as well as some measure of hope from international interpretations that are more accommodating than the mainstream views in Malaysia.

Public Lecture

Another highly commended and attended event was SIS's Public Lecture in 2008, by the renowned Prof. John L. Esposito. Given his vast knowledge of contemporary Islamic issues and his esteemed stature among peoples of various faiths, SIS invited him to give a one-hour lecture on "The Future of Islam: Reformation or Stagnation". An audience of more than 160 from all faiths and walks of life, including Christian leaders, attended this forum which provided Malaysians an insight into the current political and social developments of Muslim societies in the Muslim world and the West, as well as an invaluable opportunity to engage with the professor regarding local issues.

Study Tour

The year 2008 chalked another first for the Public Education programme with the introduction of an international Study Tour. A 10-member SIS delegation representing a cross-section of stakeholders – religious leaders, academics, journalists, activists, grassroots leaders, and SIS members and staff – visited Indonesia's leading Muslim NGOs, activists and scholars in Jakarta and Surabaya. A workshop on sexuality and reproductive health and rights by Rahima (Centre

for Education and Information on Islam and Women's Rights Issues) was enlightening, as were dialogues on progressive Islam and gender with Prof. Nasaruddin Umar, Director General of the Religious Guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; former First Lady Ibu Sinta Nuriyah; scholars Kyai Hussein, Kyai Afifuddin and Nur Rofiah; Kamala Chandra Kirana, adviser of National Commission on Violence against Women (KOMNAS), Nyai Siti Ruqayyah of Rahima and Uztaz Nakhoei, a young ulama from Indonesia. The delegates also enjoyed being guests of former Indonesia and NU president Abdurrahman Wahid aka Gus Dur at his live radio talkshow, during which he gave a humorous take on Indonesia's anti-pornography law. Inspired by the high-level discourse they found in the people they met from all societal strata, the SIS delegates vowed to inject the scene in Malaysia with the same intellectual vigour.

Media

As a leading women's rights organisation in Malaysia, specialising in Muslim women, SIS continued to receive good coverage in both English-language local and foreign media, from online to print and broadcast, whether out of interest in the organisation itself and its activities, or in its views as an opinion shaper. In fact, the bulk of the 79 media interviews formed the latter, featuring both staff and members, though SIS is also pleased to report that there were

three international features on the organisation itself – in Al Jazeera (twice) and Indonesia’s Radio 68H – and a local feature in the popular online news daily Malaysiakini. As for SIS activities, the National Symposium was reported in two online news sites, Malaysiakini and The Nut Graph; the anti-book-banning campaign was reported in local paper The Sun and wire agency Associated Press; the workshop in Sabah was publicised in local newspaper Daily Express Sabah; and the study tour in Indonesia was covered on Radio 68H.

Besides taking up SIS’s issues with book banning and the fatwas against tomboys and yoga – which appeared to have been discreetly buried following public outrage – the media also sought SIS’s take on the perennial issues of violence against women, moral policing, freedom of expression, detention without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA), freedom of religion and conversions to Islam, women in leadership and gender discrimination. All these underlay the issues and events that cropped up during the year: women candidacies in the general elections; a proposed travel restriction on women; a religious authority alleging a link between rape and wearing lipstick or ‘sexy’ school uniforms; the successful petition to the Penang Shari’ah High Court by Muslim convert Siti Fatimah Tan Abdullah to revert to her original faith, followed three months later by an unruly protest against an eventually halted Bar Council forum on legalities in conversion issues and arguably the most outrageous ISA detention ever, of a member of Parliament, a popular blogger and

a journalist. SIS’s voice of protest joined many from the civil society calling for reason and justice to prevail, with most of the issues dying a natural death. Even the unexpected release of the three ISA detainees took place soon after.

SIS was also able to leverage on the column of its outgoing Executive Director, which appears monthly in the leading English daily The Star, providing reasoned and incisive commentaries on issues of the day concerning Islam, democracy and women’s rights. Zainah Anwar’s resignation was also covered by the same newspaper, while her win of a local women’s magazine Woman of the Year Award was covered by a local television channel and a Malay newspaper. The death of former Planning and Management Committee member, Manager and Chief Trainer Zaitun Mohamed Kasim (Toni), an outstanding human rights activist in her own right who had also left her mark internationally, was also covered by a few local media.

SIS’s international standing was clear, with coverage in Al Jazeera (thrice, including the online version), Astro, Washington Post, South China Morning Post, Adelaide Now, Australia’s ABC Radio National, Indonesia’s Radio 68H (twice), Germany’s Deutschland Funk, the online Asia Media Forum, and international news agencies Associated Press and Reuters.

Website

Having adopted a new content management system in 2007, the SIS website was projected to be fully running a year later upon the expected completion of data transference. Though this was delayed owing to the unexpected resignation of the person in charge, SIS was fortunate that an intern, Maira Sutton, could step in to do some updating work so that the website at least had information on SIS’s current activities. The transition affected somewhat the rate of visitors to the website, which dropped from an average 200 hits a day to 20. Most of the users were from within the country (some 80 per cent) while the rest came from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Looking ahead, plans are being made for a Malay section with its own editorial agenda – rather than merely functioning as a translation of the English section – and Muslim women from the working and middle classes as the target audience, in concert with SIS’s public education target, for the majority of whom Malay would be the preferred language of communication. It was also high time for SIS to catch up on using information technology as an advocacy tool in Malay – which

Resource Centre

has been sadly under-utilised in Malaysia, leading to a digital divide not just in urban and rural terms but also in language. The SIS Resource Centre serves to offer alternative reading materials by well-known and progressive writers and hence

stores a wide range of titles on women’s issues, contemporary Muslim concerns, jurisprudence and biographies. This little-known treasure trove of periodicals, conference papers, pamphlets, brochures, audio-visual materials and newspaper clippings has now grown to 4,000 materials, with an average of 10 books a month brought in from travelling contacts or received from partner organisations overseas. Besides SIS and Friends of SIS (FOSIS) members and staff, the Resource Centre is also open to the public for an annual fee of RM50 (students, RM30). Efforts will be made to promote the Resource Centre more, especially to researchers, tertiary students, scholars, SIS’s guests and visitors.

three international features on the organisation itself – in Al Jazeera (twice) and Indonesia’s Radio 68H – and a local feature in the popular online news daily Malaysiakini. As for SIS activities, the National Symposium was reported in two online news sites, Malaysiakini and The Nut Graph; the anti-book-banning campaign was reported in local paper The Sun and wire agency Associated Press; the workshop in Sabah was publicised in local newspaper Daily Express Sabah; and the study tour in Indonesia was covered on Radio 68H.

Besides taking up SIS’s issues with book banning and the fatwas against tomboys and yoga – which appeared to have been discreetly buried following public outrage – the media also sought SIS’s take on the perennial issues of violence against women, moral policing, freedom of expression, detention without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA), freedom of religion and conversions to Islam, women in leadership and gender discrimination. All these underlay the issues and events that cropped up during the year: women candidacies in the general elections; a proposed travel restriction on women; a religious authority alleging a link between rape and wearing lipstick or ‘sexy’ school uniforms; the successful petition to the Penang Shari’ah High Court by Muslim convert Siti Fatimah Tan Abdullah to revert to her original faith, followed three months later by an unruly protest against an eventually halted Bar Council forum on legalities in conversion issues and arguably the most outrageous ISA detention ever, of a member of Parliament, a popular blogger and

a journalist. SIS’s voice of protest joined many from the civil society calling for reason and justice to prevail, with most of the issues dying a natural death. Even the unexpected release of the three ISA detainees took place soon after.

SIS was also able to leverage on the column of its outgoing Executive Director, which appears monthly in the leading English daily The Star, providing reasoned and incisive commentaries on issues of the day concerning Islam, democracy and women’s rights. Zainah Anwar’s resignation was also covered by the same newspaper, while her win of a local women’s magazine Woman of the Year Award was covered by a local television channel and a Malay newspaper. The death of former Planning and Management Committee member, Manager and Chief Trainer Zaitun Mohamed Kasim (Toni), an outstanding human rights activist in her own right who had also left her mark internationally, was also covered by a few local media.

SIS’s international standing was clear, with coverage in Al Jazeera (thrice, including the online version), Astro, Washington Post, South China Morning Post, Adelaide Now, Australia’s ABC Radio National, Indonesia’s Radio 68H (twice), Germany’s Deutschland Funk, the online Asia Media Forum, and international news agencies Associated Press and Reuters.

Website

Having adopted a new content management system in 2007, the SIS website was projected to be fully running a year later upon the expected completion of data transference. Though this was delayed owing to the unexpected resignation of the person in charge, SIS was fortunate that an intern, Maira Sutton, could step in to do some updating work so that the website at least had information on SIS’s current activities. The transition affected somewhat the rate of visitors to the website, which dropped from an average 200 hits a day to 20. Most of the users were from within the country (some 80 per cent) while the rest came from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Looking ahead, plans are being made for a Malay section with its own editorial agenda – rather than merely functioning as a translation of the English section – and Muslim women from the working and middle classes as the target audience, in concert with SIS’s public education target, for the majority of whom Malay would be the preferred language of communication. It was also high time for SIS to catch up on using information technology as an advocacy tool in Malay – which

Resource Centre

has been sadly under-utilised in Malaysia, leading to a digital divide not just in urban and rural terms but also in language. The SIS Resource Centre serves to offer alternative reading materials by well-known and progressive writers and hence

stores a wide range of titles on women’s issues, contemporary Muslim concerns, jurisprudence and biographies. This little-known treasure trove of periodicals, conference papers, pamphlets, brochures, audio-visual materials and newspaper clippings has now grown to 4,000 materials, with an average of 10 books a month brought in from travelling contacts or received from partner organisations overseas. Besides SIS and Friends of SIS (FOSIS) members and staff, the Resource Centre is also open to the public for an annual fee of RM50 (students, RM30). Efforts will be made to promote the Resource Centre more, especially to researchers, tertiary students, scholars, SIS’s guests and visitors.

Public Education Calendar

Workshop		
1	19 Jan	Meeting with Women Leaders, Kelantan Trainers: Norhayati Kaprawi & Razlinawati Razali
2	20 Jan	Women's Rights in Islam with Flat Sri Pahang Residents' Association, Kuala Lumpur Speakers: Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah, Sa'adiah Din (practicing Shari'ah lawyer) & Zalina Hassan (social activist). Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
3	13 Apr	Know Your Rights with Biro Surau Al-Taqwa Setapak, Kuala Lumpur Speakers: Sa'adiah Din, Razlinawati Razali & Zalina Hassan Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
4	27 Apr	Know Your Rights with Relawati, Petaling Jaya. Speaker: Sa'adiah Din Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
5	31 May	Know Your Rights with Single Mothers Association, Shah Alam Speakers: Sa'adiah Din Facilitator: Norhayati Kaprawi
6	14 June	Know Your Rights with Wanita Islam, Terengganu Speaker: Nik Elin Zurina Nik Rashid (lawyer) Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
7	4 July	Training of Trainers on Islam & Gender with SIS members Trainers: Lies Marcoes (Indonesian activist) & Dr Nur Rofiah bil Uzm (Qur'anic Exegesis Lecturer, UIN Jakarta) Resource Person: Nyai Siti Ruqayyah (Indonesian woman scholar) Facilitator: Norhayati Kaprawi

8	7-8 July	Muslim Women Issues In Contemporary Society, Petaling Jaya Trainers: Norhayati Kaprawi & Lies Marcoes Resource Person: Dr. Nur Rofiah bil Uzm, Nyai Siti Ruqayyah & Zainah Anwar Facilitator: Norhayati Kaprawi
9	11-13 July	Training of Trainers with Muslim Women Leaders Trainer: Angela Kuga Thas (gender trainer) Resource Person: Dr. Nur Rofiah bil Uzm, Nyai Siti Ruqayyah, Sa'adiah Din & Zainah Anwar Facilitators: Norhayati Kaprawi & Rozana Isa
10	9 Aug	Know Your Rights with Malaysian Trades Union Congress, Kuala Lumpur Resource Persons: Sa'adiah Din & Rozana Isa Facilitators: Norhayati Kaprawi & Rozana Isa
11	23 Aug	Know Your Rights with International Transport Workers Federation, Malaysia Resource Persons: Sa'adiah Din & Mariam Abdul (President, Mutiara Single Mothers Association) Facilitators: Norhayati Kaprawi & Rozana Isa
Large Group Training Awareness		
1	29 Feb	Know Your Rights with BAKAT Darat, Kuala Lumpur Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya (Chief Shari'ah Judge of Terengganu), Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim & Razlinawati Razali Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
2	27 Mar	Know Your Rights with BAKAT Darat and NCWO Sarawak, Sarawak Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya, Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri & Razlinawati Razali Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi

3	20 Apr	Know Your Rights with KL Single Mothers Association Resource Persons: Sa'adiyah Din, Zainah Anwar & Roseniza Sidik (single mother) Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
4	5 May	Know Your Rights with NCWO Kedah Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya, Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri and Mariam Abdul Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
5	22 June	Know Your Rights with Persatuan Baidunita Perlis Resource Persons: Dato' Ismail Yahya & Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
6	28 June	Know Your Rights with NPWK & NCWO Pahang Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
7	2 Aug	Know Your Rights with Pemuda & NCWO Sabah Resource Person: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya & Sa'adiyah Din Facilitators: Rozana Isa & Norhayati Kaprawi
8	30 Aug	Know Your Rights with Perak Lawyers Committee & Women's Development Board, Perak Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya, Sa'adiyah Din & Mariam Abdul Facilitator: Norhayati Kaprawi
Study Session		
1	16 Feb	What Malaysians Can Learn from Nadhatul Ulama Speakers: Amin Fadlillah & Fathonah Daud (Nadhatul Ulama young leaders)

2	25 Feb	Basic Qur'an Speaker: Mustaqeem Al Radhi (Director of Middle Eastern Graduate Centre)
3	29 May	Young Minds Resource Person: Tricia Yeoh (Director of the Centre for Public Policy Studies)
4	22 July	Islamic Law Reform in the Light of Maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Shari'ah) Speaker: Prof. Malik Muhammad M. Al Awan (multi-disciplinary scholar of Islamic jurisprudence)
Meetings		
1	10 July	Dialogue with Muslim NGOs Resource Persons : Dr. Nur Rofiah bil Uzm (Qur'anic Exegesis Lecturer, UIN Jakarta) & Nyai Siti Ruqayyah
2	18-19 Oct	Roundtable Meeting with Women Leaders & Grassroots Women Resource Persons: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya, Sa'adiyah Din, Zarizana Abdul Aziz (lawyer), Zainah Anwar & Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah Moderator: Prof. Datin Dr Rashidah Shuib
3	4 Dec	National Symposium on "Creating a Happy, Stable and Just Family" Co-organised with GAHWI and Joint Action Group on Gender Equality (JAG) Officiated by Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as chairperson of SENADA Panelists: Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya; Haji Walid Abu Hassan (Head of Islamic Family Law and Shari'ah Judiciary Unit, Attorney-General's Chambers); Mohd. Asri Tahir, (Senior Assistant Director, Policy and Research Division, Shari'ah Judiciary Department) , Zarizana Abdul Aziz (JAG), Hamidah Karim (NCWO); Nazreen Nizam (SIS Legal Officer), Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah and Prof. Norani Othman

Study Tour		
1	25 Oct- 1 Nov	Study tour to Bondowoso & Jakarta, Indonesia Resource Persons: Kyai Hussein Muhammad, Ustaz Nakhoie (Indonesian scholars) Facilitators: Norhayati Kaprawi & Dr. Nur Rofiah bil Uzm
Public Lecture		
1	9 Aug	The Future of Islam: Reformation or Stagnation? Speaker: Prof. John L. Esposito (Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies, Georgetown University)

Advocacy and Networking: International and National

SIS's activities have empowered women's rights activists to engage effectively with matters regarding religion and women, particularly in the area of Personal Status Law of Women in my context and within a broader political context, the resources, knowledge building and sharing of experiences and best practices among ourselves and beyond. I feel more confident engaging patriarchal scholars in making the case for women. However, while we have been doing outreach to sensitise women, limited resources are a major constraint. The poor women in the rural areas need to be empowered to fight their cases and be informed to challenge their subordination. This can only happen by reaching out to them and there is the gap between feminist activists and grassroots activism. I need your support to close this gap.

Isatou Touray
Executive Director
Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP)
& Musawah Planning Committee Members

International

SIS's repute continued to put the organisation in high demand at international forums where its input is much valued, such as the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and the Coalition on Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR). However, SIS's international advocacy and networking efforts during the year was concentrated on its biggest international initiative – Musawah, a global movement for reform of Muslim Family Law within the framework of justice and equality – the inaugural meeting of which was set to be held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2009.

Musawah: A Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family

2008 was a preparation and growth period for Musawah. First up, there were reports to complete from the December 2007 conceptual and planning committee meetings in Cairo, Egypt. Most importantly, the Framework for Action – the principles and conceptual ideas which would serve as the foundation for the movement – was further developed through consultations with scholars and activists (including SIS members) and finalised in August for circulation in the last months of the year. Theoretical papers that were presented at the conceptual meeting were edited and revised as a publication for launching at the global meeting to come. Since Arabic and French will be used at

the global meeting for the benefit of participants from the Middle East and North Africa who may not be well-versed in English, the completed Framework for Action and theoretical papers were sent for translation into these languages and, in acknowledgement of the host country, Bahasa Malaysia as well.

In the second and third quarters of the year, a branding exercise was completed and the name “Musawah” was agreed upon with finality, together with the tag line “For Equality in the Family” and a logo, after obtaining feedback from focus group discussions. A brochure outlining the objectives and principles of Musawah and a PowerPoint presentation were created that could be shared with national groups trying to better understand the movement. In addition, work also began on the Musawah website.

In August 2008, the planning committee held a three-day meeting in London to discuss the next steps of Musawah, including the national outreach process and the launch of the global meeting. They also updated each other on the situation in their respective countries and the outreach work they have done for Musawah. A detailed draft of the Kuala Lumpur programme and participant list was developed, the media outreach plan discussed and plans for outreach to national groups outlined.

In September 2008, Musawah began to reach out, by e-mail and phone, to national-level groups from a list of NGO and activist contacts in approximately 50 countries compiled by the committee, with the objective of obtaining input on the salient issues related to family laws and practices in their countries. A part-time staff member of SIS, Rozana Isa, was engaged in June to prepare and execute the outreach. As of December, contact was made with at least 45 groups, most of which held national-level informal or formal discussions about Musawah, based on the guidelines set by the planning committee for national consultations, and nominated participants for the global meeting. Small grants (approximately USD1,000) were given to Gambia, Nigeria and Singapore to help support their national consultations. The groups were also asked for national reports for compilation into a global report on equality and justice in the Muslim family, which will form an important output of the Musawah Global Meeting.

Incidentally, the Musawah project was already producing an impact through the national outreach process:

-  The national reports that Musawah received showed that women's groups are thinking about and working on these issues and starting to frame their work in the same ways as

Musawah (in terms of the “equality and justice are necessary and possible” slogan). It was also indicative of a growing international network of women's groups empowered to speak out on issues related to family laws and practices.

-  A number of national groups held consultations that represented the first time ever or first time in a long time that different factions in that country have come together to work for equality in the family. In the Gambia, their consultation (attended by both women and men, including religious scholars and activists) was reported positively in a number of newspapers. Nigerian individuals from all regions of the country came together in an October 2008 national consultation. In Singapore, Musawah provided an incentive for a women's group to bring together people from the government religious body, women's groups and universities. In Kenya, where it has always been difficult to find Muslim women willing to come together on Muslim women's issues, the Kenyan Muslim Women Family Rights Movement was founded in response to the Musawah outreach. In Malaysia, where SIS's national public education and awareness raising programmes focused on grassroots women in nine of Malaysia's 13 states, a national network of grassroots women's groups, called Gabungan Hak Asasi Wanita Islam (GAHWI), was founded to speak out on Muslim women's issues.

In the United Kingdom, the Muslim Institute, religious scholars, community leaders, national and regional Muslim organisations (progressive, mainstream and conservative), launched a Model Marriage Contract (ta'liq) based on principles of mutual love, mercy and kindness in August 2008. A Musawah planning committee member was intimately involved in the consultations leading to this draft, and at the press conference launching the contract used the Musawah slogan of "Equality is necessary and possible" to promote the contract.

There were also logistical arrangements with the hotel and travel agents; finalising the participant list and contacting participants; further developing the programme and inviting key resource persons; beginning meetings with a creative team to plan the opening gala dinner and multimedia and live performance; and developing the plan for media outreach before and during the meeting.



Musawah Planning Committee had a meeting in London for the Global Movement Initiative

In November 2008, SIS Board member Zainah Anwar attended the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) triennial international forum in Cape Town, South Africa, together with more than 1,500 women's rights leaders and activists.

Zainah organised a panel session with Musawah planning committee members Cassandra Balchin and Asma'u Joda, along with Qur'anic scholar Amina Wadud, to introduce Musawah and its Framework for Action. She also hosted an informal networking dinner with about 25 activists who were interested in being part of Musawah and who planned to participate in the Musawah Global Meeting.

National

The impact of SIS's advocacy, especially in the larger gender context, has been greatly enhanced through its collaboration with other leading local women's rights groups through the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), whose other members are All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Empower, Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

and Women's Centre for Change (WCC) (a sixth member, Women's Development Collective, ceased operating during the year).

With high expectations of a general election year, and driven by the spate of sexist remarks by Parliamentarians in the previous year, JAG embarked on an electoral campaign to push for gender issues to be highlighted, foremost of which were sexual harassment and the Ninth Malaysia Plan's target of 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making positions. The importance of making such an electoral point was later underscored by the significant coincidence of polling day falling on 8 March – International Women's Day.

JAG's demands were for all political parties to nominate at least 30 per cent women candidates, who must be allocated 'winnable' constituencies, and the same quota went for local council appointments. Disappointingly, when nomination was finalised, the quota was not reached. Furthermore, 11 out of the 12 sexist members of Parliament (MPs) identified by JAG were renominated.

In response, JAG went to the ground to distribute leaflets in four local languages highlighting several sexist comments that had been said by these elected representatives and urged voters to reject them while educating others on gender sensitivity.

The campaign started at Sungai Siput in Perak and, with the help of other NGOs and supportive political parties, spread to the constituencies of others on the JAG blacklist. JAG's press conference in Sungai Siput was attended by only one of the three electoral candidates, who shared with JAG the main issues of single mothers and the lack of childcare services in the constituency; happily, this candidate eventually triumphed over the sexist incumbent. JAG was pleased to note that five out of the 11 on the list were unseated in the unprecedented results of the elections which shook the hegemony of the ruling party that has been in power since Independence. However, women representation in Parliament was a dismal six per cent.

Post-elections, JAG went to Parliament on a new campaign, themed "Kotakan Kata" (Keep Your Promise), during which women activists managed to personally hand over to a score of MPs, including a few on the blacklist, specially designed folder kits of a list of JAG's demands for legislative reforms and a ruler to drive home the point that the MPs' performances would be measured.

JAG also had a meeting with the Parliamentary Gender Caucus that was rejuvenated by the appointment of a new head. In addition, JAG introduced itself formally to the new Selangor state government at a meeting with the Menteri Besar

Dato' Khalid Ibrahim and Executive Committee of women members state, during which JAG restated its electoral demands. Subsequently, the Selangor state government formed among others, a women's rights task force to look into advancing the status of women in the state.

Topmost on JAG's list of priorities were the Islamic Family Law (IFL) initiative and a review of the laws pertaining to the rights of non-converting wives and children vis-à-vis the Federal Constitution, the Law Reform Act and other related legislation. JAG's recommendations on the IFL, submitted by SIS, were conveyed to the National Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM), which forwarded them to the Islamic Affairs Department (JAKIM). In JAG, SIS is spearheading the lobby for a government-established Child Support Agency for all women, regardless of religion and ethnicity, while each JAG member organisation, working with Protect and Save the Children (PS The Children), has been tasked with researching best practices locally and internationally to produce a proposal for the government.

2008 also saw the formation of a new collective of women grassroots advocates as an outcome of SIS's public education programme. Gabungan Hak Wanita Islam (GAHWI), or Coalition for Women's Rights in Islam, consisted of Federal Territories Muslim Single Mothers Association (PITI), Wijadi, Lembah Pantai Residents Association and Puteri

UMNO, Single Mothers Entrepreneurs Association, Desa Rejang Single Mothers Welfare Association, Sabah Women's Association (PEWASA), Tupong PBB Women's Movement, Sisters in Islam and individual Muslim single mothers. The support SIS received in forming the coalition indicated that many grassroots women, an important demography with a potentially powerful voice, subscribe to the principles of justice and equality within the family.

The inaugural Monash University NGO Fair in July 2008 was an opportunity for SIS and 14 other NGOs to showcase their organisations and educate the students about their work. The two-day event was aimed at broadening the scope of its students for career options beyond the traditional corporate world. SIS's Senior Manager Maria Chin Abdullah introduced the organisation and explained its legal services, which led to a discussion on polygamy. A few students signed up at the SIS booth to volunteer for the organisation. SIS also set up booths to promote the organisation and SIS publications at the International Islamic University of Malaysia's public forum on The Issue of Single Mothers in Malaysia and at the UMNO Club headquarters during its meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

A more creative opportunity to engage with the public was found in KOMAS's 2008 annual Freedom Film Festival theme, Democratic Space: Making Room for Human Rights. SIS Manager Norhayati Kaprawi provided answers to the

questions that followed the screening of the winning film, 'Who Speaks For Me?', which explored the freedom to speak on Islam from the viewpoint of a few young Muslims.

SIS also continued work on an other creative platform for a public exchange of ideas – the highly successful Fiesta Feminista jointly held by JAG and the Gender Studies Programme of Universiti Malaya for the first time in 2007 – thrashing out further guiding principles toward the next fiesta in 2011. However, owing to the urgent demands of the Musawah Global Meeting preparations, SIS could not participate in the 16 Days of Activism coordinated by JAG partner WAO.

Recognising that overall political and policy reforms are also needed to advance SIS's cause, the organisation maintained keen support for the initiatives of other civil society efforts, such as the Coalition of Good Governance, for which SIS provided input to the Gender Equality Taskforce and IFL reform; Article 11, which seeks to uphold the supremacy of the Federal Constitution as regards equality in citizenship rights; Gerakan Mansuhkan ISA (Abolish ISA Movement), which wants to abolish a law that violates fundamental and democratic rights; and the Centre for Independent Journalism and other NGOs working on freedom of information.

Organisational and Financial Matters

As a non-Muslim, I am nevertheless moved to know more about Islam. SIS is a place in which I can do that without feeling defensive, fearful or showy. I find the people there to be strong without being rigid, and inclusive like an embrace. So it is well-named: the best big sister you could ever have.

Ann Lee
Writer and Director

Staffing

While recruiting and retaining personnel who are able to keep up with the demanding work of SIS remain a challenge, the Operations and Finance Unit was able to mitigate the situation to a large extent with farsighted planning and constant recruitment drives as well as reshuffling of designations.

There were 11 recruitments to fill various vacancies during the year. Months prior to the resignation of the executive director, a senior manager was hired to lead the management team with the assistance of the Board. To address the acute staffing gap in the Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform Unit, an officer initially recruited for the Research and Publications Unit, but having a grounding in law, assented to allocating four-fifths of her time there toward assuming full duties as legal officer the following year. Joining her was an officer, as well as a junior officer, and a programme assistant much later. The newly created Research and Publications Unit was staffed by a returning former SIS staff – a manager and an officer – joined by a new programme assistant. The Operations and Finance Unit received a boost from the recruitment of an officer and an accounts assistant.

There were four resignations, two of which were within the same year of employment. The unit was

able to find a replacement for one of the positions soon after – that of a research and publications programme assistant. Full-time staff numbered seven at its smallest and 13 at its biggest. There were eight part-time and project-based employees, one of whom was recruited into full-time position upon expiration of her contract while two others were full-timers before opting to work part-time.

SIS had two interns from the United States, Oluwafemi Adedoyin and Maira Sutton, and one from Egypt, Hadil el-Khouly, reflecting the continued interest it draws overseas, attracting among others bright young women who recognise the wealth of learning that SIS's work offers. Adedoyin assisted on the polygamy research project under the Research and Publications Unit; Sutton provided support to the various projects of the Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform Unit including preparation of a policy paper for Muslim women's rights; while Hadil was assigned to the project for a Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family, working as the Arabic coordinator as well as organiser of the Young Women's Caucus, on top of assisting on the general logistical arrangements for the inaugural meeting in 2009.

Besides ensuring the smooth running of the office, the Operations and Finance Unit was also tasked with improving staff capacity, in keeping with

the SIS masterbrand value of constant pursuit of knowledge.

Accordingly, it organised in-house training on skills identified as pertinent:

- ✦ a Coaching and Leadership Workshop for board members and managers;
- ✦ weekly English classes for those who wanted to improve their command of this global language;
- ✦ a class on thinking for members and staff, conducted by SIS Board member Prof. Norani Othman;
- ✦ a Counselling Phone Ethics Workshop open to all; and
- ✦ a Handling Clients Workshop for the Advocacy, Legal Services and Reform

Senior personnel were also encouraged to present or attend relevant conferences and workshops for firsthand exposure to external developments. To help spread personal gains in knowledge and experiences all round toward a common frame of reference that will enhance the staff's ability to function as a unit as a whole, 10 Nasi Bungkus Lunch (NBL) sessions were held during the year. Conceived in 2007, these are lunch gatherings during which staff discuss prevailing issues or new developments, or report on conferences and workshops they have attended, and are aimed at building staff confidence in public speaking and presentation skills, while at the same time providing a semi-formal space for staff to share information and ideas.

To meet the chronic human resources shortage in legal services, two staff received both a study loan and a scholarship to pursue a diploma in Shari'ah law. Also of concern to management is the physical and mental well-being of the staff; hence, SIS continued to arrange, at a minimum fee for interested members and staff, the popular weekly yoga classes that started last year. Not forgotten was SIS's network of supportive individuals, Friends of SIS (FOSIS) (see description in Membership), for whom an orientation course was conducted by SIS Board member Prof. Norani Othman, to initiate new members to the organisation's history and cause, with volunteers, interns, members and staff joining in.

To celebrate the major Islamic festival of Aidilfitri, SIS held an open house in October 2008, which also provided an opportunity for members, staff and friends to gather and touch base on the cause of Muslim women in general.



Zainah Anwar with a friend at her farewell party as an Executive Director of Sisters in Islam

The organisation bade farewell to two SIS icons during the year – one over retirement; the other, a first death in the family. In March 2008, a farewell party was held for Executive Director Zainah Anwar, who had successfully steered the organisation to the standing it has today. More than 100 well-wishers came for the event at a private restaurant.

In June, SIS lost to cancer a former Planning and Management Committee member, Chief Trainer and Manager, Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, affectionately known as Toni. SIS held two tahlil sessions for members and staff, led by SIS senior member Sharifah Zuriah AlJeffri. An interfaith remembrance was also held at the office, with more than 100 guests turning up to honour Toni. Board member Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim led the tahlil, SIS staff Adibah Mohammad Jodi led the prayers, and members and friends read the eulogies. SIS underwent a few major changes in governance to strengthen the organisation ahead of Zainah Anwar's resignation.

✦ Governance

In January, in accordance with the Extraordinary General Meeting decision the previous year, the Board and Planning and Management Committee were merged to streamline the responsibilities and accountability of both bodies toward a policy-making role for the Board. The new Board of five members met four times during the year to execute its revised mandate as the oversight body for strategic planning, organisational policies and



Friends were commemorating and reciting tahlil for late Zaitun Mohamed Kasim which was held at SIS office

development, programmes, finances, projects, membership, work plans and staff welfare. In addition, it was to contribute to the evaluation and monitoring of the overall progress of SIS, play an active role in fundraising, appoint Board members elected by SIS members and provide the Executive Director with supervision, consultation, annual appraisal, and appointment of managers. The Board's term of service is capped at three years, renewable once consecutively with re-election permitted after a one-term break.

A strategic planning meeting was held the same month as a follow-up to the November 2007 evaluation and planning (E&P) meeting. It was held separately from the E&P meeting for the first time, in part to allow for more time for reflection on the plans made. SIS Board, managers and officers met to review the organisation's

direction vis-à-vis the current environment, and also contribute content to its three-year Strategic Plan. They reflected on the issues and strategies identified in the E&P meeting, evaluated the objectives of each unit and identified ways of operationalising the new brand promise – “Empowering Voices for Change” – and brand essence – “Seekers of knowledge, advocates for justice and equality”. Afoot are efforts for more active involvement of volunteers and all levels of members, such as through subcommittees, as per their area of interest and skills.

An important item on the agenda, which was carried out in March 2008, was the implementation of the transition plan following Zainah Anwar’s resignation. A new organisational structure was established, elevating the Advocacy Unit headed by Senior Manager Maria Chin Abdullah, who also took on several tasks of the Executive Director. In addition, a new unit was created, combining the research component, which had been under Zainah Anwar’s purview, with the “information” component that had been under the Public Education and Communications Unit. The new management team consisted of all heads of units, led by Maria Chin Abdullah.

Also new is the Financial Planning Committee, consisting of Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim and Rozana Isa representing the Board, and the operations manager and accounts officer, which held its first meeting in January and met thrice more during the

year as per its mandate. The committee is tasked with setting up a fundraising committee, reviewing monthly financial reports and expenditures as well as recommending to the Board investment options for any fund excess and establishing guidelines for this.

Financial Highlights

SIS held its annual general meeting in July, with the Audited Report of 2007 as an output of the meeting. A check-in was done at the annual Evaluation and Planning meeting in November, during which members and staff reported comprehensively on all activities, giving analyses on the impact and obstacles as well as suggestions for improvements and follow-ups. Members also discussed a court challenge to the banning of SIS’s Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism.

Both local and foreign funding continued to increase, indicating support from within and outside the country for SIS’s work. For the financial year ending 31 December 2008, SIS received RM797,132 in local grants and donations, a rise of 40.4 per cent from last year, and RM1,750,362 in foreign grants, an increase of 18.8 per cent over the same period.

The increase in local grants was particularly heartening given that SIS had not requested for them via its annual letters of appeal since the Board had decided not to crowd the limited

local funding pool in view of SIS’s solid financial footing that year, and had merely sent letters of commitment to pledged donors identified by the Board. The continued contribution to SIS’s coffers indicated that SIS work had genuine local support and was in concurrence with the aspirations of a sizeable number of, if largely silent, citizens, corporations and foundations.

Also encouraging was a whopping increase in income from SIS publications, which soared 99.4 per cent year-on-year with an earning of RM19,907.

SIS’s major foreign funders continued to be the Canadian High Commission, Ford Foundation, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Oxfam Novib and Sigrid Rausing Trust.

SIS’s total expenses was RM1,890,347, an increase of 61.1 per cent from the previous year. This included a 35.98 per cent rise in programme funding, which was largely allocated to a three-day planning committee meeting in London for the Musawah Global Meeting set for 2009; a Study Tour to Jakarta on Understanding Women’s Issues in Malaysia and Indonesia; and the increase in SIS Public Education programmes in preparation for the Musawah Global Meeting.

Membership

SIS continues to prioritise commitment over quantity as regards to membership. With membership only by invitation and subject to an annual review of members’ activity in the organisation, SIS members remained a select few, numbering 20 in 2008, less eight from the previous year. Also held to the same high standard of contribution were associate members – consisting of gender-sensitive men committed to advancing SIS work – who grew by one, making it a total of three. Friends of SIS (FOSIS) – who are former members or new supporters of any (or no) faith and gender, whose annual membership fee of RM50 entitles them to join SIS functions and receive Baraza! as well as other privileges – grew by 15 to 24. Also gaining in numbers, SIS volunteers totalled 21 after the admission of 15 newcomers who were recruited mostly from interested participants of the organisation’s public education activities.

The SIS Organisation in 2008

Board of Directors

Rashidah Abdullah
Rozana Isa
Zainah Anwar
Prof. Norani Othman
Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim

Senior Programme Manager

Maria Chin Abdullah (Advocacy & Legal Services and Reform)

Managers

Rashidah Hashim (Operations)
Norhayati Kaprawi (Public Education, Information and Communications)
Masjaliza Hamzah (Research and Publications)

Officers

Razlina Razali (Legal, resigned May 2008)
Mariam Ramli (Legal, resigned December 2008)
Nazreen Nizam (Legal)
Sufiah Mansurdin (Legal)
Azareena Abd Aziz (Public Education)
Syarifatul Adibah Mohammad Jodi (Research and Publications)
Erzalina Shahabu Ramali (Administration, resigned November 2008)
Aireen Suryana Arbai (Administration)
Hartini Abdullah (Accounts)

Programme Assistants

Nur Faezah Mohammad Fazil (Research and Publications)
Nur Azrine Abd Razak (Legal)
Nur Izzati Abdullah Suhimi (Accounts)

Project/Part-time Staff

Jana Rumminger (Musawah Project Coordinator)
Nafhatun Athirah Mohamed Azri (Information)

Getting Involved

SIS is a constant hive of activity. We strive to provide a bright and cheerful volunteer environment, and welcome those who share our vision and commitment to make this world a better place, in big and small ways. Volunteers help to accompany SIS's clients to court, monitor court proceedings, assist at SIS campaigns and outreach activities, and catalogue books and newspaper clippings.

If you have the right experience or a willing spirit we welcome your help in research, writing, editing, filing, cataloguing, fundraising, legal advice, website management, and public outreach events. If you just want to show your support for SIS and its work, become a Friend of SIS (FOSIS) for just RM50 a year.

Call our Operations Manager Rashidah Hashim at 03-7785 6121, drop by our office at 7, Jalan 6/10, off Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya, or e-mail us at sistersinislam@pd.jaring.my

Our volunteer and FOSIS forms are also available on our website at www.sistersinislam.org.my

In Memoriam: Zaitun Mohamed Kasim (Toni) 1966 - 2008

Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, or “Toni” as she was affectionately called, was invited to join SIS in 1996, at a most providential time for the organisation. Having existed close to a decade as an informal group that survived largely on the strength of eight founding members operating out of one of their homes, SIS was then expanding in terms of membership and into a physical, legal entity, complete with an organisational structure and office, with by-laws, financial management, funding, accountability and organisational development issues to be worked out. In Toni, SIS found not only an energetic and experienced organiser who worked with a few other founding members to iron out these details, but also a recruiter who injected new blood into the organisation by bringing in several other outstanding young Muslims, including SIS’s first associate male member. Her sparkling wit, intelligence, compassion and sense of fun made her an irresistible ambassador for all the causes she supported, especially among the younger generation.

Toni was an experienced and highly regarded human rights and gender activist, trainer and facilitator who had worked for Community Aid Abroad and the United Nations Development Programme in Malaysia. She was also actively involved in local NGOs, as in All Women’s Action Society and SUARAM, and Amnesty International Malaysia, and later even stood for Parliament as the first issue-based candidate under the Women’s Candidacy Initiative. For SIS, her commitment was such that

she would end up serving in various voluntary and paid positions – in the Programme and Management Committee, Legal Sub-Committee, and as Chief Trainer and Legal and Campaigns Manager, facilitating workshops and meetings, and training countless activists and scholars, local and abroad. In the 12 years of her membership in SIS until she died unexpectedly of gallbladder cancer, SIS would have expanded organisationally and gained new ground in advocacy, public education and engagement with the broader civil society and human rights concerns, and escalated its reach internationally thanks in large part to her multiple skills, interests, activities and networks.

Born in Ipoh, Perak, Toni studied at Flinders University, Australia, returning 10 years later with the intention of making a difference in Malaysia. Possessing an innate sense of justice, she found personal resonance in the SIS cause of empowering Muslim women and Muslims in general.

From the outset, Toni was concerned with strategising ways of using SIS’s limited resources to exponential effect – specifically, to create a bigger constituency who would speak up and influence change. Fully cognizant of the causal link between education and empowerment, Toni devised a cohesive set of training modules that catered to various audiences and objectives toward the same goal, starting with basic awareness of the issues before advancing to knowledge of Islam

and women's human rights, and later capacity building for advocates. With input from SIS founding Executive Director Zainah Anwar and SIS Legal Consultant Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah, the underlying idea was to jolt participants out of the familiar and expose them to the diversity of opinion and interpretations as well as the very human construction of law, as a counterpoint to prevailing entrenched patriarchal and conservative views that everything to do with Islam is divine and unchangeable.

Hence, from regular small-group study sessions, SIS training expanded under Toni to include workshops tailored for moderate-sized groups, which strategically targeted opinion makers and shapers such as lawyers, human rights activists, journalists and NGO leaders. That SIS is reaping the harvest from the seeds sown is apparent in the continued advocacy of those trained, in their various capacities, to publicly speak up for Islam as a religion of peace and justice. The more recent large group training awareness (LGTA) module, designed to reach bigger, grassroots groups, is already consistently demonstrating its effectiveness in getting participants to understand SIS's central message in just one day.

The modules were praised for their depth, balance and freshness – for Toni kept updating them with the latest developments around the world and took care to present varied viewpoints while keeping to her feminist perspective – not only by progressive

international peers, but also Terengganu Chief Shari'ah Judge Dato' Haji Ismail Yahya, who was the state mufti when he was first introduced to SIS training. So impressed was he that he wanted to replicate the module for his own talks! The fact that he continues to be an important resource for SIS's LGTA sessions speaks volumes of his regard.

Complementing Toni's ability to design effective training modules were her legendary training and facilitation skills which, combined with her friendly personality, made her a favourite trainer/facilitator/speaker in the activist circle. Toni believed in the capacity of anyone, especially youths, to "change the world" with some coaching which she was always happy to give, whether in a brief moment of a few memorable words or taking as long as a three-day workshop that she could always complete on a high note for all. Right Livelihood Laureate Anwar Fazal called Toni the best trainer he knew – passionate, caring and competent – and SIS is extremely fortunate that she managed to pass on some of these skills through three milestone Training of Trainers workshops that produced the present batch of trainers.

With Toni's unmatched set of skills, which she also demonstrated in various parts of the world from Asia to the Middle East and Great Britain to Africa, SIS training was able to expand internationally, the success of which generated more demand in turn. She designed the SIS short

course for Muslim women leaders, Understanding Islam from a Rights Perspective, which was held for the first time in Bellagio, Italy, in 2006, and eventually adopted for the Musawah project following high praise for its transformative effect. Another hit was the study tour to Malaysia training programme, which began in 2005 as an outcome of SIS's growing international presence. Participants at the first tour, which was co-facilitated by Toni and SIS associate member Shanon Shah, said they treasured most the freedom to speak their minds, with opposing and alternative views given space in a beautiful exercise in tolerance and inclusivity. Toni's presentation and negotiation skills were such that in another training, a mufti from India who had initially disagreed with every bit of information as "unIslamic", reconsidered after listening to Toni's input and told her in Hindi, "You have all the stars and rainbows of the universe in your eyes, what more do you want?"

Toni also introduced a systematic workplan based on objective-oriented outcome planning to ensure that SIS activities were in concert with its vision and mission. Furthermore, given her generosity in sharing her wide knowledge and many skills, Toni was naturally dedicated to inspiring and building the capacities of every SIS staff. She would find time to address their grievances, though she might not have succeeded in solving them all. Taking a leaf from the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, she came up with SIS's own Nasi Bungkus Lunch talks, which are monthly

internal discussions to thrash out frequent problems and to share new knowledge, connecting domestic issues with the big picture outside while providing a safe space for staff to build their public-speaking and presentation skills.

An activist's activist, Toni was always concerned with getting new blood to join the fray. The inaugural NGO Fair at Monash University, which SIS participated in, stemmed from an idea of hers conveyed to friends teaching there, to show young adults that there were options beyond a career in the corporate world and that they could have a fulfilling life working for the improvement of communities and civil society.

Though her time in this world was too short for the many people whose lives she had touched, Toni was able to make the difference she had wanted, making her mark in areas as diverse and related as progressive Islam, religious freedom, feminism, minority and marginalised rights, sexual and bodily rights, indigenous rights, urban settler rights, detention without trial, tsunami disaster relief for Aceh, globalisation, urban transportation and rights of people with disabilities, among other causes.

For SIS, she left a precious legacy of knowledge and hope, in the training modules she created and training of trainers workshops she conducted, that will live on in each trainer and those they will continue to train.

Toni is survived by two loving sisters and many other friends whom she regarded as family, regardless of ethnicity, religion, nationality, age and gender, as well as those who were fortunate to have known her as a Sister in Islam. She will be deeply missed.

Zainah Anwar, *Founding Executive Director:*

Toni was full of energy and ideas, indefatigable and selfless in always wanting to solve a problem. She was involved in an amazing range of issues – that was something she did, not just because she cared for others, but also for her own sense of well-being; it was her purpose in life. What I admired most of Toni were her training and facilitation skills – she had the ability to amass all opinions and synthesise them; she could validate every opinion, even those she disagreed with, and was patient in challenging the latter in a positive manner. I’m grateful we had her even for a short while; she strengthened SIS and brought skills and assets that we did not have. She introduced new young members and was instrumental in SIS reaching out to a wider, supportive audience, through her many connections.

Sharifah Zuriyah Al Jeffri (Ka’ Zu), *Founding Member:*

Toni Kasim was a caring and loving person. She provided moral support, love and care to those whose homes had been demolished, the underprivileged and minorities. She was an excellent

facilitator especially on gender and sexuality issues. As a trainer, Toni had the ability to steer participants to the objectives of the workshop. Her untimely death is a great loss to Sisters in Islam. May her soul rest in peace. Al-Fatihah.

Rashidah Hashim, *Operations Manager:*

Toni was always buzzing with ideas and nothing was a problem to her. She gave her heart and soul to the work she did, with passion and commitment.

Syarifatul Adibah Mohammad Jodi, *Research and Publications Officer:*

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Toni for teaching me many good lessons about life and activism, and instilling in me the passion to help the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Although she is no longer with us, her spirit is still alive and as inspiring as ever.

Shanon Shah, *Associate Member, former Baraza! Editor and Campaigns Officer:*

As a campaigner, thanks to her wealth of networks, local and international, she could move things quickly when the situation merited a campaign where there was none. She would not run away from any problem, no matter how much it irked her or how difficult a confrontation it was, and she could be as stubborn as the best of people! But with Toni, it was always about principles. And that is a good benchmark for anyone with any decision to make in any situation.

Jana Rumminger, *Musawah Project Coordinator:* How can you summarise someone so beautiful, inspirational, thoughtful, caring, smart, funny, clever, and all the rest? She was a brilliant trainer/leader, someone who always had open arms and an open heart, who taught me a lot about life and activism just by being herself – asking questions, thinking through problems, laughing at the small stuff, etc. She was the one person in SIS who made me feel the most welcome at all times, simply because she always greeted me with that huge hug and huge smile.



Acknowledgements

Writers

Chuah Siew Eng
Maria Chin Abdullah
Jana Rumminger

Contributors

Rashidah Abdullah, Prof. Norani Othman, Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim, Rozana Isa, Zainah Anwar, Maria Chin Abdullah, Rashidah Hashim, Norhayati Kaprawi, Masjaliza Hamzah and Syarifatul Adibah Mohammad Jodi.

Editor

Emilda Pereira

Designer

Ili Farhana

Cover Image

“Summer Interlude” by Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri

Printer

Vinlin Press

Funders

Friends of Sisters in Islam

Sisters in Islam

No. 7, Jalan 6/10, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA.

Tel: 603-7785 6121 Fax: 603-7785 8737

E-mail: sistersinislam@pd.jaring.my URL: www.sistersinislam.org.my