

Rights at Home

Advanced Training Manual

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The ISIM "Rights at Home" Project rounded up its activities on 1 October 2005. The four-year Project focused on challenges and opportunities facing human rights activists in Muslim societies and communities. The overall purpose of the Project's sounding board meetings, regional workshops, advanced training workshops, and follow-up programmes was to rethink strategies, theories, and histories of human rights and Islamic legal theory. The Advanced Training manual gives a good impression of the process of reflection throughout the years. It includes the approaches developed to thinking about and struggling for human rights, its methodology, results, and findings.

The Advanced Training manual was developed in the run to the Advanced Training, the most important training component of the programme that took place in 2004 in Lebanon. During the training, the manual was intensively used, and in the aftermath evaluated and adjusted by the Advanced Training programme director/manual developer Cassandra Balchin, and all advocacy oriented trainers and Islamic Legal Theory experts involved. Significantly, the input of cases by the 43 participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Tanzania, and Yemen to the Advanced Training manual reflects the daily reality of local activist organizations and agents of change. The cases make clear that human rights were not to be understood exclusively as social, political, and intellectual goals: living human rights demands, above all, a personal transformation. Legal codes might go a long way to ensure rights in social and political contexts, but it was the appropriate disposition and commitment that could turn societies around.

The story of Khadija

The life story of Khadija from Tanzania is one of many examples given in the Advanced Training manual. The very young Khadija was married off to a middle-aged man who seemed respectable. He introduced himself as a businessman, but what Khadija and her family did not know was that he was a widower having lost his wife earlier to AIDS. Khadija gave birth twice, but both children died three months after birth. Soon thereafter, her husband's health deteriorated. He admitted his HIV status and asked Khadija for forgiveness for knowingly infecting her. Not only was Khadija a widow before twenty but she was also childless and infected with the HIV virus. Moreover, her in-laws took all her property, including her cooking pots! When she challenged the matter in a religious institution, her in-laws ended up with a bigger share than she got. She did not even get her entitled quarter of the property.

The distribution did not take account of the fact that her husband could not work for a significant period in which they were married. Actually, it was Khadija who had paid all the bills and looked after the home from her catering business. While she had expected justice, her in-laws and religious institutions did not think she was entitled to claim

her contribution in the matrimonial property or to be compensated for the harm deliberately done to her. Khadija now is one of the few people in Tanzania who are open about her HIV status and is a member of a national network of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Human rights and Islamic legal theory

The Rights at Home Advanced Training manual uses cases like these as starting points for the examination of the relationship between human rights and Islamic Legal Theory. The programme carefully discusses the best way to get a direct hands-on approach to a creative understanding and application of Islamic Legal Theory, which would take the rights of the marginalized like Khadija into consideration. It contains a useful

appendix entitled Outline of the Islamic Legal Theory Component that gives an overview of the approach adopted. In this view, the Islamic tradition provides some fundamental resources for thinking and acting on human rights. However, in order to draw on these resources, there was an important need for a paradigm shift in how Muslims think about the Sharia. Social justice must be the key or main value in the reconstruction of Muslim laws.

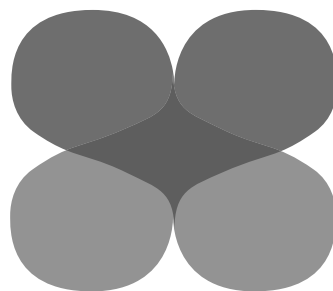
Two bottom-line goals for the Rights at Home Advanced Training programme have been identified: there are no easy answers in Muslim law; and, you can trust yourself to use the same tools to advance legal theory that others have used in the

past. These goals have been thoroughly integrated in the structure and contents of the Advanced Training manual. But the Manual does not only propose new strategies for Islamic law. Basically, it describes an intensive training programme of 14 days—each training day focusing on a theme and providing a time schedule, interactive exercises, handouts and relevant documents to treat this theme. The programme consists of a unique balance of elements of Islamic Legal Theory and practical strategies and skills ranging from sessions on hadith and gender as a social construction, to workshops on the development of advocacy plans. Experiences of both trainers and participants during all parts of the training are given in "How it worked" sections throughout the whole manual.

Results of the Rights at Home Project

The Rights at Home Advanced Training manual is one of the main results of the project as a whole, to be used in broader settings, and in accordance with the attempt to sustain and further refine the Rights at Home approach through ongoing critical debate, and exchange of creative and constructive solutions. In Summer 2005 the Advanced Training manual was temporarily attached to the ISIM website, after which the Rights at Home website took it over. For those target groups of the Rights at Home Project, which could not gain easy access to the Internet to download the Advanced Training files, hard copies were printed and dispersed. Next to the training manual, video recordings of several parts of the Rights at Home Advanced Training were put on CD-ROM's and made available for future trainings. Moreover, complementary documents on the priority issues of the Rights at Home project can be found on the Rights at Home website. Some of the documents are available in Arabic and Swahili.

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– **Cassandra Balchin** (Compiler/Editor), *Advanced Training Manual for Social Agents of Change in Human Rights Advocacy and the Family*. 23 June-8 July, 2004, Zahlé, Lebanon, Leiden: ISIM 2005. ISBN-10: 9090197117 ISBN-13: 9789090197117

– The manual can be downloaded at www.rightsathome.org or ordered through info@isim.nl.