

Institute
ISIM

A Short Description of the ISIM

The International Institute for the Study of the Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) was founded by the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University and Utrecht University. The Institute is funded, in addition to these latter, by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OC&W) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Development Cooperation. The constitutional documents were signed on June 30 of this year.



The ISIM develops and conducts research on social, cultural, economic, political and intellectual developments in the Muslim world and Muslim communities in the West. Although the emphasis is laid upon recent and contemporary developments, historical dimensions are taken into account. The ISIM's research approaches are expressly interdisciplinary and comparative, covering a broad geographical range encompassing all relevant geographical areas: North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia and the Muslim diasporas in the West.

Borne out of a national initiative in which cooperation with Dutch universities and research schools is paramount, the ISIM is also clearly international in orientation. The ISIM will integrate existing expertise in the Netherlands in its programmes and will combine resources and expertise of academic institutes in the West and in the Muslim world.

ISIM sounding board meetings

One apparent expression of the national/international interaction is the ISIM sounding board meetings. The opening day of the Institute is to serve as the first such meeting. With the support of the Minister for Development Cooperation subsequent meetings will take place in cities of the Muslim world with respected centres of learning. These meetings are fundamental to the ISIM for they serve as a medium for introducing the ISIM to relevant scholarly audiences, as well as for reflecting upon institutional plans and policies. The second meeting is scheduled for March 1999 and will take place in Cairo.

Research

Research constitutes the core activity of the ISIM. The Institute follows open and flexible research policies aimed at mobilizing scholarly interest and support at both national and international levels. The ISIM research agenda contains:

- Long-term joint research programmes;
- Ateliers, short-term joint research projects;
- Individual ISIM research projects.

The research is to be executed by the academic staff of ISIM in conjunction with PhD, Post-doctoral and other fellows, who are recruited nationally and internationally. ISIM Chair-holders comprise the main academic staff of the Institute. The Chair-holders are to select, design, and execute long-term research programmes in con-

sultation with the ISIM Academic Committee and the participating universities and research schools. They cooperate with staff of other national and international institutes, in particular research schools and project-proposing bodies. Suggestions and proposals for research are invited from all interested parties through announcements in the ISIM Newsletter. Joint proposals which link up with research in various regions are to be given preference. Application forms and information about the criteria for evaluation and selection will be made available.

Long-term Research Programmes

Long-term research programmes constitute the core of the ISIM research. They will be designed to stimulate interdisciplinary research that concentrates on social, socio-economic, political, and intellectual developments in the Muslim world, particularly those that have so far been under-researched. The programmes are comparative in the sense that they encompass two or more geographical regions of the Muslim world. Each programme consists of a number of thematically linked projects. The programmes will be set for a maximum period of five years. The selection, design, and execution of these programmes are the responsibility of the Programme Director, who preferably is an ISIM Chair-holder. PhD students are sponsored within the framework of these programmes. The output of the programmes will comprise PhD theses, monographs, and/or major works summarizing the research. A report, translating the results for a wider audience, with recommendations for future policies and research, will be made available.

Ateliers

ISIM organizes ateliers: short-term research projects in which a small number of researchers work closely together for a maximum period of three months. The ateliers are designed to stimulate cooperation between scholars from different disciplines, regional specializations, and scholarly traditions. They aim at the strengthening of interregional cooperation in research.

Individual Research Projects

ISIM offers scholars of international standing the opportunity to engage in research work in the Netherlands for a maximum of three months. These distinguished fellowships promote cooperation with leading figures and institutes in the field of the study of Muslim societies and communities. Junior researchers who have demonstrated the ability to conduct innovative research will be given the opportunity to engage in individual research.

Academic Staff

There will be a nucleus of three ISIM Chair-holders who form the backbone of the Institute, headed by the Academic Director. These full-time professors will be appointed at participating universities in the Netherlands. The ISIM Chairs have been created to support and attract highly-qualified scholars of international standing who have the task of placing the Institute firmly on the map. They will constitute a firm link between the participating universities/research schools and ensure a strong national base for the ISIM. The Academic Director is appointed to the ISIM Chair at Leiden University. The Director is in charge of the various functions of the ISIM and supervises all of its activities. In close consultation with the Academic Committee and the participating

research schools and institutes the ISIM, the Academic Director and the other ISIM Chair-holders will select, design, and execute research. In addition they will coach, tutor, and supervise the ISIM students at the Advanced and PhD Degree levels. Some may be involved in supporting the educational programmes at the participating universities/research schools. They will supervise, when necessary, visiting fellows and other guests of the Institute in their research.

Fellowships

A constant influx of researchers serves to ensure that the horizons of the Institute are constantly broadened and that high academic standards are upheld. The ISIM will support research fellows at various levels and in a number of capacities. They will contribute to the long-term joint research programmes, create ateliers for the execution of short-term research, or conduct individual research. There will be ample room for visiting fellows who will serve as bridges between the ISIM and the outside world. Sabbatical stays will be made available for staff of participating universities and research schools. Application forms and information on the criteria for evaluation and selection will be distributed.

Education

The targets the ISIM has set in the field of education are to create a pool of expertise on developments in the fields of Islamic societies, institutions, practices, and doctrines upon which the academic community, policy makers, and society at large can draw. The activities add a substantial new initiative to current PhD research programmes in the study of modern Islam and Muslim societies. The ISIM seeks to attract talented students from the Netherlands and from abroad. In cooperation with the participating universities/research schools, ISIM is planning to develop three instruments by which to reach its educational goals:

- Educational programmes and courses at various degree levels and in various formats, in particular at the Advanced and PhD degree levels;
- Support for existing international programmes and for new initiatives in the field;
- Grants for graduates from the Netherlands and abroad.

Library Support, Documentation and Information

The ISIM aims to strengthen existing library collections in the Netherlands related to Islam and Muslim societies and communities, in view of improving the availability of reference and research material on recent and contemporary developments thereof. The Institute intends to establish library/documentation exchange agreements with universities in the Muslim world. The aim is to exchange costly works of references for materials that are difficult to access by scholars outside of the Muslim world.

ISIM has its own website (<http://isim.leidenuniv.nl>) and WWW server and is developing a database. The creation and maintenance of an Internet gate to pertinent academic sites on the Internet is another undertaking of the ISIM, improving access to digital data, in particular to libraries, documentation and information services, news agencies, periodicals and other publications in the Muslim world and/or by Muslim organizations. The database will provide up-to-date information on researchers and specialized institutes in order to stimulate international

cooperation and, in particular, to facilitate access to expertise and documentation.

ISIM's central mode of disseminating information about its activities as well as other activities in the field of contemporary Islamic studies will be through this Newsletter, which can also be found on the ISIM Website.

Outreach activities

In addition to the academia, ISIM addresses itself to non-university educational institutes and public bodies. Dissemination of information to society at large is a vital aspect ISIM's public service function. Expertise on contemporary Islamic issues is to be made available to various audiences through the following means: issuing reports which render scholarly research results accessible to all; training and refresher courses for those who require knowledge about Islam and Muslim societies and communities in their work; and support for institutes which initiate training for those who have frequent contacts with Muslims in their profession.

Organization

The Board is the highest authority of the ISIM. It is responsible for establishing strategy and approving activity plans, budgets, and accounts. The Board consists of the presidents of the participating universities. For the year 1998 the Board has appointed Prof. W.A.L. Stokhof as Director in Charge. He has drafted the constitutional documents which were signed by the Founding Partners on June 30, 1998.

Working Group

The Director in Charge is assisted by a Working Group consisting of:

- Dr M. M. van Bruinessen (Utrecht University)
- Prof. P. T. van der Veer (University of Amsterdam)
- Prof. E.J. Zürcher (Leiden University)

Apart from the drafting of documents, they are involved in the search for an Academic Director and in the formation of the Academic Committee and the International Advisory Committee, which will be appointed by the Board later this year.

The Academic Committee will advise the Board and the Director on all academic affairs, in particular on the design and execution of the research. The International Advisory Committee will serve to anchor the Institute in society and to provide advice on the strategies to be adopted by the Institute in its national and international environment.

A small office staff supports the director and Working Group. Dr D. Douwes (Leiden University/Nijmegen University) acts as academic coordinator and ISIM Newsletter editor and Drs M.E. Bakker as administrative coordinator. ◆