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Rights at Home Tanzania Sounding Boards

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Report

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The ISIM programme 'Rights at Home: An Approach to the Internalization of Human Rights in Family Relations in Islamic Communities' held its second series of Sounding Board Meetings in Tanzania from 19 until 23 June 2002. The venue was in Dar es Salaam from 19 to 20 June, and on the island of Zanzibar from 22 to 23 June. The meetings were organized together with the NGO Sahiba Sisters Foundation in Dar es Salaam, a Muslim women's network to promote a positive role of Muslim women in Tanzanian society.

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Pupils at
Madrasat al-Nour,
Zanzibar.

Sahiba Sisters was represented at the Sounding Board Meetings by its executive director, Salma Maoulidi, and several young staff members. The two permanent members of the project team of Rights at Home, Abdullahi An-Na'im (Emory University, Atlanta, and Visiting Professor ISIM) and Laila al-Zwaini (Programme Coordinator), were this time accompanied by Farish Noor, a young Malaysian scholar and fervent human rights activist, at the time also an ISIM Visiting Fellow. The Zanzibar meetings were co-organized by Saleh Mreh Salim from Mreh Tours and Safaris. Involving an organization of this particular kind draws attention to the lack of connections between the women's organizations on the mainland and on Zanzibar, which in its turn is dictated by the still current political distance between the two formerly separate territories, an issue that was to come up repeatedly during the discussions.

The concept of the meetings, similar to the first Sounding Board Meetings in Yemen (see *ISIM Newsletter* 10, p. 4), was to bring together representatives from different re-

gions, gender, and professional and personal backgrounds, such as human rights activists, scholars, ulama, social welfare officers, teachers, lawyers, childrens' rights advocates, and others in order to discuss themes related to 'Rights at Home' from different perspectives, and jointly explore strategies and activities to promote autonomy for women and socialization of children.

Each session started with a short presentation by one of the local participants, followed by a general discussion in which the group focused on identifying priority issues, strategies, and actors. Presentations were held on women's emotional and reproductive health, family law legislation and debates, the application of Islamic principles in court, Islamic and cultural practices, and street children. Also, participants addressed some concrete domestic violations, and examined attempted strategies for relief.

The often frank discussions eventually narrowed down to two main concerns: the difficulties that the Muslim community in Tanzania faces as a minority group (e.g. in acquiring emission time in the public media



PHOTO: SALMA MAOULIDI, 2002

and the creation and operation of Islamic schools), as well as the lack of, but strong desire for, an adequate programme for Islamic education in its broadest sense.

In addition to the meetings, the project team visited several NGOs and other grassroots organizations in Mwanza, a large city on the southern shore of Lake Victoria, to gain more realistic insight into their activities and difficulties. The non-religious NGO Kivulini ('In the Shade'), for instance, deals

specifically with the issue of domestic violence and has developed a model for cooperation with street leaders, community officers, and Islamic authorities to find redress in cases of domestic abuse. Its experience shows that the Muslim community and the Islamic authorities in Mwanza (as in other localities) often do not react and even turn their backs on female victims of domestic violence. The woman then faces the dilemma of standing up against her husband at the cost of being expelled from her own community, or suffering the abuses in silence.

Another (Islamic) NGO in Mwanza, Tawfiq Islamic Women Organisation, aims at the creation and support of Islamic institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages. Their work is mostly voluntary, and their main concern is the lack of support from the Tanzanian government. Their present teaching material and methods are mainly inspired and provided by Wahhabi organizations. Historically, Tanzanian Muslims predominantly belong to the Shafi'i *madhhab*, with also flocks of Hanafis, Ismailis, Ibadis, and Bohras. An example of a madrasa that is exercising its own best efforts to compile a school curriculum with a specific view to the local Muslim culture, is the very lively Madrasat al-Nour on Zanzibar, which offers education up to the intermediate level. Interestingly, this school was created in 1967 by a Yemeni from the Hadramawt, underscoring the existing connections between Muslim communities around the Indian Ocean.

In its next phase, 'Rights at Home' will establish closer cooperation with several local partners to jointly engage in developing and implementing activities as proposed during our visit, such as pre-marriage education for youths; an education programme for women on their basic human rights in Islam and within their society; the drafting and effectuation of a model marriage contract that specifies rights and obligations for both spouses (e.g. an HIV/AIDS test, maintenance); sensitization meetings for area leaders, sheikhs (Islamic scholars), and *qadis* (Islamic judges); and the establishment of a network of Muslim groups to promote human rights.

The third series of 'Rights at Home' Sounding Board Meetings will be held from 15 to 17 January 2003 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and will bring together participants from several countries of the Southeast Asian region.

DEBATE SERIES

Islam, Authority, and Leadership

Four meetings, following the first, have taken place within the ISIM and Felix Meritis lecture and debate series 'Islam, Authority, and Leadership' in recent months. The venue was Felix Meritis, European Centre for Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam. The themes and speakers of these meetings were the following:

- 'Would the Muslim Intellectual Please Stand Up!', 20 June 2002
Speakers: Nathal Dessing (ISIM), Hacı Karacaer (Director, Milli Görüş, the Netherlands), Saoud Khadje (Dar al-Ilm, Institute for Islam Studies), and Fouad Laroui (researcher and writer).
Moderator: Ab Cherribi.
- 'A Lonely Planet Guide for Muslims', 19 September 2002
Speakers: Tariq Ramadan (College of Geneva and Fribourg University, Switzerland) and Abdulkader Tayob (ISIM Chair, University of Nijmegen).
Moderator: Peter van der Veer (ISIM Co-Director).
- 'Your Constitution is Not Mine!', 10 October 2002
Speakers: Famile Arslan (lawyer), Sadik Harchaoui (public prosecutor), and Marc Hertogh (Associate Professor of socio-legal studies, University of Tilburg).
Moderator: Steve Austen (cultural entrepreneur, publicist, and consultant).
See also Sadik Harchaoui's article in this *Newsletter*, p. 12.
- 'The Rib of the Man', 7 November 2002
Speakers: Gijs van der Fuhr (Amsterdam Centre for Foreigners), Seyma Halici (Women's group, Milli Görüş), and Fenna Ulichki (Moroccan Women's Association in the Netherlands).
Moderator: Steve Austen (cultural entrepreneur, publicist, and consultant).

The concluding meeting of the series will be held on Monday, 27 January 2003. A report of these five meetings will be published in ISIM Newsletter 12.

CONFERENCE

ISIM at WOCMES

The First World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES) took place in Mainz (Germany) from 8 to 13 September 2002. The conference was held jointly by the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies (EURAMES), the Association Française pour l'Etude du Monde Arabe et Musulman (AFEMAM), the British Society for Middle East Studies (BRISMES), the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO), and the Italian Società per gli Studi sul Medio Oriente (SeSaMO).

The ISIM co-organized two panels at WOCMES. Annelies Moors (ISIM) and Blandine Destremau (CNRS/IEDES – University Paris I) organized a session on 'Migrant Domestic Workers to/in/from the Middle East'. This panel presented the ISIM research project 'Cultural Politics of Migrant Domestic Labour' to an audience working on the Middle East, and engaged in discussion with researchers recently working on migrant domestic labour. Apart from an outline of the project by Moors, Destremau discussed the emergence of a domestic labour market in Yemen; Amira Ahmed (American University, Cairo) presented her research on domestic work as a survival strategy amongst refugee women in Cairo; and Joy Borkholder (The Protection Project, Johns Hopkins University) together with Mohamed Matar spoke on domestic service as a form of trafficking of persons in the Middle East. The session launched a network on migrant domestic labour in the Middle East. Those interested in joining this network under construction may contact Annelies Moors (moors@pscw.uva.nl).

In cooperation with Amr Hamzawy (Free University of Berlin) and Roel Meier (International Institute of Social History, IISH), Dick Douwes (ISIM) organized the panel 'Taking Islamist Debates and Discourses Seriously: New Avenues in Research and Collection'. This panel aimed to broaden the scope of critical discussion on contemporary discursive and programmatic changes in the Islamist spectrum. It also introduced a new joint initiative of Egyptian and European research centres aimed at collecting and analysing contemporary publications (including pamphlets, grey literature, tapes, and websites) of Islamist movements with respect to controversies on: democracy and civil society, implementation of the *shari'a*, issues of social welfare, and authenticity and cultural identity. Amr Hamzawy introduced the initiative. The panel included papers by Gamal Sultan (al-Manar al-Jadeed), 'Critique and Self-Critique in Egypt's Islamist Movements'; Dina al-Khawaga (Cairo University), 'New Spaces, New Languages: The Islamist Discourse on the TV-Channel Iqra'; and Roel Meijer (IISH), 'The Role of IISH in Collecting and Preserving the Heritage of Islamist Movements'.

Karin van Nieuwkerk (ISIM post-doctoral fellow) presented a paper on 'Female Converts to Islam: A Comparison of Online and Offline Conversion Narratives' in the panel 'Women and Modernity'.