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**The Role of Religion in the Socio-Cultural Transformation of West Africa**  
ISIM,

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# The Role of Religion in the Socio-Cultural Transformation of West Africa

A regional conference for religious scholars of the subregion of West Africa will explore the relationship between social and cultural institutions and religious practices in contemporary West African societies. The ongoing wars, civil disturbances and turmoil in West African nations provide a unique opportunity to investigate the role of religion in the social and cultural transformation of the region. The conference will offer a multidimensional analysis of these issues and thereby revitalize the discussion of the place of religion in the social and cultural development of Africa.

Religion and the state have had a checkered relationship since independence. In one respect, the separation between religion and state has been the dominant discourse. At the same time, the state has tried to control religious discourse or to guide it in one way or another. For example, it has often been involved in the application of customary law and Islamic law. The conference will try to ask questions about all aspects of state relations (legal, constitutional and political) with religious institutions. What does religion tell us about the state in West Africa, and vice versa?

**The three-day conference of the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) will be held from February 5-8 2004, and hosted by the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, at Legon. It will be an important forerunner of the next International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) Congress planned for March 24-30 2005, in Tokyo. The conference is sponsored by the IAHR and the ISIM.**

Another theme that will be addressed by the conference is the nature and role of voluntary organizations (NGOs) in the development and articulation of religions: a comparison of youth organizations, women's movements, self-help schemes that have developed, sometimes as a direct outcome of secularization, or the collapse of the state. What is the texture of religion under the impact of NGOs, local and interna-

tional, and other voluntary organizations?

West Africa has also been affected by international developments. It has contributed to and been affected by globalization. How have West African religious developments been influenced by global and regional networks: West African based trading networks, human rights organizations, Islamic and Christian networks, geo-political interests, criminal syndicates, etc? Case studies or comparative studies can highlight and reflect on the globalizing effects on religions and religious developments.

*More information can be obtained from the three co-organizers: Elom Dovlo at edovlo@ug.edu.gh in Ghana, Abdelkader Tayob at a.tayob@let.kun.nl in the Netherlands, or Matthews A. Ojo at matthews\_ojo@yahoo.com in Nigeria.*

## NEW FELLOWS

The ISIM welcomes the following new fellows:

### Ph.D. Fellows

- **Alexandre Caeiro, M.A.:**  
'The Construction of Islamic Authority in Western Europe: an Analysis of the Production and Consumption of Fatwas'
- **Yuniyanti Chuzaifah, M.A.:**  
'Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers in the Gulf: Transnational Relations, the Dynamics of Religion, and the Construction of Identities'

### Post-doctoral Fellows

- **Dr Roel Meijer:**  
'Islam and Violence; The National and Transnational Islamist Debate on the Legitimacy and Strategic Value of Violence'

### Visiting Fellow

- **Dr Morad Saghafi:**  
'A Century of Political Involvement: Iran's Islamic Movement Revisited'

## ISIM POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

The International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) invites applications for ISIM post-doctoral fellowships. The fellowships are available to scholars who have recently (within 5 years) obtained a Ph.D. degree in anthropology, sociology, religious studies, cultural studies and political science.

The ISIM conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on contemporary social, political, cultural, and intellectual trends and movements in Muslim societies and communities. The ISIM welcomes research proposals which are informed particularly by a social science perspective and fit in with the research profile of the ISIM in general, or related to the specific research programs of the ISIM Professors, in particular. The current ISIM research programs and projects include: Islam, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere; Muslim Cultural Politics; Debating Family Dynamics and Gender; Islamic Family Law in Everyday Life; the Cultural politics of Domestic Labor; the Politics of Representation in the Muslim Societies; The Production of Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe; Islam and the Public Sphere in Africa; Religion, Culture and Identity in a Democratic South Africa; and Socio-Religious Movements and Change in Muslim Societies.

ISIM post-doctoral fellowships are awarded twice per year. The deadlines for applications are 1 March and 1 September of each year.

ISIM post-doctoral fellowships at a glance:

- granted for a period of up to two years
- monthly stipend
- office space, a personal computer, telephone on the premises of the ISIM in Leiden
- travel expenses to and from the country in which fieldwork will be carried out
- research facilities including library and photocopy privileges, normal stationery and office material

Post-doctoral Fellows are stationed in the historic city of Leiden with convenient links to the coast, the airport, and major European cities. Fellows have full access to fine libraries, research centers, and the facilities of the participating Universities in the ISIM: University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, University of Nijmegen and Utrecht University.

For details on ISIM post-doctoral fellowships and to download an application form, please refer to the ISIM web site ([www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl)) under the link 'Fellowships' or contact the ISIM office at:

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