

Migration Expert Workshop (#2)

A Follow-Up Capacity Building Programme Deriving from the 1st Malaysian International Studies Association Conference (MISAC 1) & Migration Expert Workshop (#1) held from 14 to 15 February 2024, UKM

Role of Religion and Religious Networks Shaping the Everyday Life of Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia and Beyond

Date / Time: 7 November 2024 (830am to 415pm)

Venue: Bilik Mesyuarat Perdana, Aras 4, (Bangunan Baru) Bangunan Pentadbiran Fakulti Kejuruteraan dan Alam Bina (FKAB), UKM, Bangi

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Background

Religion and religious community play an important role in various aspects of refugees' everyday life and survival. In countries of origin, religious leaders and networks are pivotal in facilitating refugee movements by providing material and social support. Churches, mosques and synagogues provide a range of supports such as financial aid, temporary settlement and transportation, enabling refugees to move and navigate their journey from one place they deem unsafe to another place for safety and protection. When refugees arrive in transit and destination countries, religion and religious communities offer a range of emergency relief support, temporary settlement, financial aid and capacity building. This indirectly strengthens the sense of belonging and togetherness between the host society and refugees, while also helping refugees cope with the traumas and experience of discrimination associated with forced migration. Beyond physical support, religion and faith offer a sanctuary and space of relief, and a source of inspiration for space making especially in times of hardship.

Despite the remarkable role of religion and religious networks in the everyday life of refugees, they can also serve as a driver of persecutions, violence and eventually lead to forced migration. Specifically, religious persecution remains one significant factor in forcing vulnerable individuals and communities to flee. The case in point is the Rohingyas' exodus for over a half century due to continuous religious persecution and violence committed by the Myanmar's Junta military against this ethnic minority in the state of Arakan, Myanmar. In recent years, religion and religious networks – in the name of "*saving Muslims brotherhood*", have allegedly been attributed to the rising (otherwise the reemergence of) Rohingya armed and militant groups in refugee camps in Bangladesh. This fuels a range of transnational crimes and threats such as drug and human trafficking) and insurgencies, further endanger the life and future of nearly one million Rohingya refugees temporarily settling in the country, as well as Rohingya diaspora.

What does this mean is that – religion can be a double-edged sword. It can be directed towards supporting and protecting refugees' life and well-being, but it can also be abused as a tool to propagate hatred, trigger violence and eventually lead to religious persecution against vulnerable communities. When refugees arrive in transit or destination countries, again, religion can also serve as a tool to discriminate against refugees, inspire hatred and extremism, and manipulate facts for self- or group-interests. This further contributes to nonacceptance and social exclusion, vicious cycle of violence and other unintended consequences. This demands serious attention and examination of the role of religion and religious networks and their influence on the everyday life of refugees in Malaysia and elsewhere.



Justification – Why Focusing on the “Role of Religion and Religious Actors”?

Focusing on religion and religious networks is not only sensitive but risky in the sense that it can easily be manipulated to further propagate differences, hatred and isolation. It can also be used to associate the Rohingya presence in Malaysia with religious extremism, hence fueling the sense of “security threats”, that can also lead to undesirable actions might be taken against them.

It is important to underline that the overarching vision of this workshop (and the subsequent outcome and activities) is to recognize the role of religion and religious leaders and networks in the everyday life of Rohingya in Malaysia and beyond. If their role is recognized and facilitated, they can act as agents of peace by building and bridging stronger solidarity and integration pathways, vis a vis removing undesirable risks of misinterpretation or misuse of religion, for self- or group-interests by unscrupulous others.

To recognize and facilitate their role in the community, it is important to first understand who the Rohingya leaders and networks are (e.g., in what forms they exist and where they operate), and what do they do (e.g., their functional capabilities), and why they do what they do (e.g., their motives and interests). This workshop aims to unpack these questions for further deliberation.

Overarching Objective

The overarching aims of this workshop are twofold.

- First, it aims to bring together Rohingya leaders, religious networks, academic researchers and experts to engage in dialogue, focusing on the role of religion, religious leaders and networks among Rohingyas in Malaysia, and how they are connected with the broader Rohingyas’ diaspora and solidarity building efforts.
- Second, to raise awareness and build capacity among academic researchers on a range of contemporary Rohingya issues in Malaysia and beyond, and to be able to contribute effectively to building positive narrative and policy change in Malaysia.

Role of Religion and Religious Networks Shaping the Everyday Life of Rohingya in Malaysia and Beyond

Date / Time: 7 November 2024 (Thursday)

Venue: Bilik Mesyuarat Perdana, Aras 4, (Bangunan Baru) Bangunan Pentadbiran Fakulti Kejuruteraan dan Alam Bina (FKAB), UKM, Bangi

Provisional Agenda

Time	Agenda
830-900	Registration
900-940	<p>On-Boarding Notes by Dr Andika Ab. Wahab, Institute of Malaysia and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)</p> <p>Du’a Recitation by Sheikh Ayatullah Noorul Bashar, Imam Masjid Nurul Islam, Kampung Desa Pahlawan, Desa Pandan, Kuala Lumpur (5 mins)</p> <p>Welcome Remarks by YBr. Prof. Dr Sufian Jusoh, Director, IKMAS, UKM (5 mins) (tbc)</p> <p>Remarks by YBr. Prof. Dr Zarina Othman, President of the Malaysian International Studies Association (MyISA) (5 mins)</p> <p>Remarks by Simraatraj Kaur Dhillon, Head of Social Policy and Human Rights, Bait Al-Amanah (5 mins)</p> <p>Officials Address by Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Malaysia (10 mins) (tbc)</p>
940-1000	<p>Poetry Recitation by a Rohingya Poeter, Mr Rashid Ullah Shomshu</p> <p>Proceeds to group photo session</p>
1000-1015	Tea Break and Networking
1000-1130	<p>Dialogue Session 1: “The Role of Religion and Religious Networks in Building Greater Solidarity – Building from What Works in Malaysia”</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuan Hj. Azril Mohd Amin, Chairperson of the Centre for Human Rights Research and Advocacy (CENTHRA) • Mr Rahmat, President of the Rohingya Society Malaysia (RSM) • Dr Aslam Abd Jalil, International Institute of Public Policy & Management (INPUMA), University Malaya (UM) • Ms. Syedah Bi, Community Leader, Rohingya Women Development Network (RWDN) (tbc) • Representative from UNHCR, Humanitarian Affairs Division (tbc)

	<p>Moderator: Associate Prof. Dr. Bakri Mat, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)</p> <p><u>Abstract:</u> In this workshop, we refer to “solidarity” as a sense of unity, cohesion and mutual support among the Rohingya refugees, and between Rohingya refugees and the hosting society. It is characterised by shared interests, values, beliefs and obligations to help one another, especially in times of difficulty and/or injustice. Building a stronger solidarity can take many forms, including through our daily interaction, as well as in community and educational programmes that connect us. Important to highlight that religion often promotes such values as compassion, justice and service to others, and this fosters a strong sense of common purpose and obligations to help each other. This session delves further into the intersection between the role of religion and religious leaders, and the efforts in building a stronger solidarity.</p> <p><u>Indicative questions to address:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of religion and religious actors in building solidarity? • What is the role of the Rohingya women network in building faith-based (or beyond) cohesion and solidarity? • Who is key in building such solidarity and in what ways solidarity can be best built? • How do community activities build on or strengthen solidarity? • How can local NGOs, the Rohingya leaders and community groups can work together in building solidarity? What has already been done by community groups on the ground that has built solidarity, either by design or consequential in nature, and how best to support such efforts? • What challenges and barriers exist in fostering greater solidarity, and how can such barriers be removed? <p><u>Note: Each speaker will be given a 10 mins slot to speak in response to some of the indicative questions listed above, after which the floor will be open for interaction with participants. Each speaker may choose to use any form of visual presentation, or speak verbally.</u></p>
1130-1300	<p>Dialogue Session 2: Building Peace through Education and Dakwah – Role, Issue and Challenge?</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cikgu Husnah, Teacher of Rohingya Learning Centre, Ampang • A Rohingya Poeter, Mr Rashid Ullah Shomshu • Hj Khairil Annuar Khalid, Malaysian Relief Agency (MRA) • Mr Joshua Ericsson, Executive Director of HOST International <p>Moderator: Dr Aizat Khairi, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)</p> <p><u>Abstract:</u> In this workshop, we refer to “peace” as the state of harmony and strong social cohesion among Rohingya refugees, and between Rohingya refugees and the hosting society. Peace is also referred to as the absence of conflict, violence, and hostility, with the presence of justice, equality, and community</p>

	<p>stability. In the meantime, <i>dakwah</i> plays a very important role in fostering peace, by encouraging dialogue, offering spiritual guidance and emotional support that help individuals cope with personal and communal challenges. Education plays an equally important role by teaching younger generations of Rohingya refugees about empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution and mediation, and respect.</p> <p><u>Indicative questions to address:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does religion define peace and build pathways to achieve peace? • What role does Rohingya education play in fostering a culture of peace, and how does <i>dakwah</i> complement these efforts? • How best to empower Rohingya teachers and ways to incorporate the culture of peace and respect into the Rohingya’s educational programmes? • Beyond Rohingya educational and religious programmes, who else can serve as actors of peace, and how have they done it (or can do that)? What can we do to support and recognize these efforts? • How can we use <i>dakwah</i> to strengthen tolerance and promote inter-cultural dialogue? <p><u>Note: Each speaker will be given a 10 mins slot to speak in response to some of the indicative questions listed above, after which the floor will be open for interaction with participants. Each speaker may choose to use any form of visual presentation, or speak verbally.</u></p>
1245-1400	Lunch
1400-1430	<p>Keynote Address by YBhg. Datuk Ahmad Azam Ab Rahman, Commissioner to the independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), titled “<i>How does religion teach us in fostering solidarity, peace, and an inclusive society?</i>”</p>
1430-1600	<p>Dialogue Session 3: “The Role of Religion and Religious Actors in Building a Stronger Community”</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheikh Ayatullah Noorul Bashar, Imam Masjid Nurul Islam, Kampung Desa Pahlawan, Desa Pandan, Kuala Lumpur. • Ustaz Hilal, Representative of Rohingya Society Malaysia (RSM) • Datin Nur Azlina Abdul Aziz, Executive Director of Persatuan Jaringan Islam Global Masa Depan • Pn. Roha Hassan, Pengurus Besar Operasi MyCARE <p><i>Note: Sheikh Ayatullah Noorul Bashar will begin his slot by reciting a Du’a.</i></p> <p>Moderator: Dr Nik M. Hasif, Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)</p> <p><u>Abstract:</u> In this workshop, we refer to “a stronger community” as a social group with a high level of trust, connectivity (or connection), social cohesion and solidarity among Rohingya refugees, and between Rohingya refugees and the hosting society. Beyond the common places of worship, religion plays an important</p>

	<p>role in gathering people, instilling a set of shared values and promoting community services - all of which often unifies people and guides their behaviors and actions to one another. Religious leaders and networks among Rohingya refugees, and a range of local actors play pivotal roles in building a strong Rohingya community in Malaysia.</p> <p><u>Indicative topic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific roles do Rohingya religious leaders play in addressing the social and community needs of the refugee population? • Are there any examples of successful programmes or initiatives that have led to significant improvements in community development and cohesion? How does religion shape and influence the outcomes of these programs? • What challenges do Rohingya religious leaders face when engaging with other institutions to address community issues, and how can these challenges be overcome? • What role do local NGOs play in strengthening the Rohingya community, and in what ways does religion inspire and sustain their involvement? <p><u>Note: Each speaker will be given a 10 mins slot to speak in response to some of the indicative questions listed above, after which the floor will be open for interaction with participants. Each speaker may choose to use any form of visual presentation, or speak verbally.</u></p>
1600-1615	Tea Break
1615-1630	Wrap Up by Dr Andika Ab. Wahab, Institute of Malaysia and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)