



Sisters In Islam

empowering voices for change



Annual Review 2007

*Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom
And holy teaching, and reason with them by ways
That are the best and most gracious...*

Surah An-Nahl, 16:125

Annual Review 2007

Our Mission & Objectives

Mission Statement

To promote an understanding of Islam that recognises the principles of justice, equality, freedom, and dignity within a democratic nation state.

Objectives

To promote and develop a framework for women's rights in Islam, which takes into consideration women's experiences and realities.

To eliminate injustice and discrimination against women by changing practices and values that regard women as inferior to men.

To create public awareness, and reform laws and policies within the framework of justice and equality in Islam.



Contents

Message from the Executive Director	07
Research	11
Legal Services, Reform and Advocacy	15
Public Education, Information and Communications	21
Advocacy and Networking: International and National	35
Organisational and Financial Matters	41
Getting Involved	49
Acknowledgements	50

Message from the Executive Director



✧ Message from the Executive Director

In 2007, SIS intensified its work in the areas of research, public education and international networking. Our legal clinic, too, recorded a 20 percent increase in cases.

In order to cultivate mass support for our Islamic Family Law reform efforts, we expanded our work at the grassroots level, connecting with those who were most affected by the legislation. Our aim was to educate women on their rights within Islam, thus empowering them, as well as to deepen our alliances at the national and international levels. Our strong relationship with grassroots women proved useful in the face of rising extremist voices in 2006 which saw a campaign directed against “liberal Islam” and attempts to undermine our credibility by labelling SIS a “liberal” group.

2007 was an opportune year. Besides being the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's independence, it coincided with public concern over rising extremism and racial and religious tensions. This led to the proliferation of new civil society groups and voices that organised events and spoke out on these issues.

Within the Islamic tradition, we saw the emergence of new progressive voices such as the Mufti of Perlis, the Mufti of Terengganu, and the Director General of the Institute for Islamic Understanding (IKIM), several of whom openly expressed their views about apostasy and freedom of religion in the media. This

was a breath of fresh air for the many Malaysians concerned with the intolerance and belligerence of those groups that claimed to speak in the name of Islam and that aimed to silence the dissenting and differing voices within society.

It is promising that voices from within the religious establishment have begun to speak out on issues of fundamental liberties, reflecting the diversity of opinion within Islam. This has challenged the hold of the religious conservatives over Muslim minds and provided an important impetus for the silent majority who are generally moderate, reasonable and rational to call for an inclusive and progressive Islam—particularly when dealing with issues, such as those concerning Shari'ah law and the Constitution—that is so necessary for the survival of this nation.

The controversies of 2006, and the widening public debate on race relations and the place of Islam in public policy and law have resulted in an increased awareness and recognition of the importance of the SIS work. It also led to a 124 percent increase in local donations to support the SIS work in different areas.

SIS' groundbreaking research on the impact of polygamy on the family was finally ready for fieldwork by the end of 2007. Much of the year was spent on fine tuning research methodological issues, testing the questionnaires, fundraising and training research assistants and enumerators to begin the interviews.

The central zone team, covering Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, began their fieldwork and reported challenging and revealing interviews. Many of the respondents were speaking for the first time to someone outside of their immediate family on the impact of living in a polygamous relationship. For some, it was a therapeutic exercise to be able to unburden their innermost feelings to a non-judgmental outsider.

In the area of public education, our focus was on developing support and awareness at the grassroots level. We organised large workshops on women's rights in Islam—in Johor, Perak, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Each workshop was attended by 100-200 women. More than 90 percent of the participant feedback forms cited that the SIS training had given them their first exposure to knowledge on rights within Islam and rights under the Islamic Family law.

As a result of this raised consciousness, the women supported SIS' call for reform of the Islamic Family law, the standardisation of laws, the setting up of a Child Support Agency to deal with the problem of non-payment of maintenance, and the gender sensitisation of court and religious department officials.

Telenisa, the SIS Legal Clinic, received an increased number of calls for help in 2007—proof that SIS was fulfilling a need within the Muslim community that had,

until then, remained unfulfilled. As a legal counseling service providing information specific to Islamic Family Law and Shari'ah law matters, SIS served 747 clients that year. The gender sensitive support and legal advice which SIS provides and the success of our trainings at the grassroots level are believed to have led to the bigger demand for our services.

In the area of media and communications, SIS enjoyed good coverage in 2007 in both the print and electronic media, nationally as well as internationally. We maintained a high profile on critical issues with our statements on religious freedom broadcast on Al-Jazeera and the Malaysiakini.com website. These were used as advocacy tools by the civil society group, KOMAS (Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat). In 2007, we published our first annual report, which included an article on the history of SIS, and the 3rd issue of our bulletin on Islam and human rights, called Baraza!.

At the international level, SIS was invited to be involved in and to provide input for several new initiatives. These initiatives aimed to study the issue of rights and empowerment in Muslim contexts and also the impact of fundamentalisms on women, democracy and human rights. SIS provided input into the Association of Women in Development's (AWID) Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative. The AWID research team received more than 1,600 responses to its survey and conducted 51 in-depth interviews in order to understand how women's rights

✧ Message from the Executive Director

activists from different parts of the world experience and define the complex phenomenon of religious fundamentalisms.

In late 2007, SIS began conducting research on the causes of politicisation of morality in Malaysia as part of the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies' (CSBR) International Comparative Research Project. CSBR is a network of NGO representatives, activists and academicians who are involved in advocacy and in lobbying for the promotion of sexual and bodily rights in Muslim societies.

SIS is also providing advisory input into another major research project on Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts (WEMC) which studies how women—even those living in oppressive and undemocratic conditions—develop ways to challenge, change or circumvent the forces that restrict and obstruct their efforts to empower themselves. This research covers women's strategies for empowerment in Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and China.

In 2007, we intensified preparations for the launch of Musawah—the Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family. The international planning committee of Musawah met for the first time in March in Istanbul to agree on the objectives and activities of the movement. There was a need to develop a conceptual foundation and framework for the movement and to root it in national-level

women's groups that were working on Muslim family law reform and issues of equality and justice.

In December, SIS organised a three-day conceptual meeting in Cairo to develop a clear and accessible conceptual framework and a statement of principles for the protection and advancement of women's rights in the Muslim family and to develop strategies to take the movement forward. The meeting was attended by 25 experts and activists from 15 countries. Five of them presented theoretical papers on Qur'anic interpretation, construction of fiqh and family laws, and trends in family law reform which will provide the grounding for the possibility of and necessity for reform and for the principles of equality and justice in the Muslim family.

Much of the work begun in 2007 will intensify in 2008 and further enhance SIS' objectives of reaching out to new groups and empowering new voices to speak out on issues of equality and justice at the national and international levels. The continuing demand for SIS' input and involvement in various projects gives us confidence that, at the end of the day, it is the voices that are demanding justice and equality that will prevail.


Zainah Anwar

Executive Director

Sisters in Islam



Research



“The polygamy research is an invaluable collaboration for me because it not only helps me build my capacity as a researcher in doing large-scale national studies but also, and more excitingly for me, it can be anticipated that the research outcome will trigger divergent discourses in our contemporary society, which may, in turn, spur much needed reforms.”

*Dr. Noraida Endut,
Senior Lecturer, Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA),
Universiti Sains Malaysia; and Lead Researcher, SIS Polygamy Research project*

Polygamy

In 2007, SIS moved into the second phase of its national research project on the Impact of Polygamy on the Family in Malaysia. This extensive research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the way polygamy affects families, particularly in the areas of family and social relationships, emotional well-being, financial situations as well as the adequacy of available State support. At this juncture, much of the work has been focussed on building networks, refining methodological issues, testing and finalising questionnaires, establishing work processes and responsibilities, as well as additional fundraising.

The scope of the project has been far broader than originally anticipated. The necessary foundations of the research included a pilot survey, conceptualisation of the research framework, hypothesis building, development of questionnaires that reflect important indicators in the five research areas, and training of enumerators and field assistants. While the initial funding received from Global Fund for Women was critical in establishing these activities, it was insufficient for the implementation of the entire research. Fundraising efforts were thus intensified during this second phase to ensure the successful completion of the project. These included a Charity Film Premiere at the beginning of 2007, applications to national universities for short term research grants by research team members, as well as applications

to local and regional philanthropic foundations in the region.

SIS has received a large amount of response and feedback from the media coverage on this research project—a testimony to the social and political significance of the issues involved. Some of these feedback were from members of polygamous families who shared their experiences and enquired about participating as respondents. Some were from members of the public who felt compelled to express their overt disagreement with the research initiative, while others were from supporters of the project, who felt that it was a timely and necessary effort. Notably, SIS also received feedback from non-Muslims, who were beginning to feel increasingly invested in all aspects of the nation's development. In particular, the many high-profile court cases related to the issue of conversion that have been widely reported in the media, have made it evident to Malaysians that to claim the right to engage in matters related to Islam—regardless of personal faith—is an important matter of civil and political right.

SIS has also received numerous requests for collaboration and information exchange from researchers in Malaysia and other parts of the world, who are working on the issue of polygamy. Of particular significance is the support that SIS provided to KOMNAS Perempuan Indonesia in their advocacy effort during a Constitutional Court case

on polygamy. In a groundbreaking judgement, the Court ruled that regulation of polygamy was not against the constitution, and emphasised that the principle of marriage according to Indonesian law is monogamy.

In 2007, SIS formally established a team of lead researchers with academics from Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia. Six workshops were held to deliberate on methodological issues, conduct testings of the



Chief researcher Prof Norani Othman (with hand extended) joins SIS Executive Director Zainah Anwar and Programme and Management Committee member Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim (extreme left) at a press conference to launch SIS' "Berbagi Suami" charity film premiere for SIS' national research project - A Study on the Impact of Polygamy on the Quality of Family Life among Muslims in Malaysia.

questionnaires, finalise research frameworks and work processes, and determine the areas for focus studies. These focus areas will be subject to closer examination and analysis; and include issues of masculinities and femininities, financial impact, social capital and discursive constructions of family, identity and autonomy.

Three training sessions were conducted for research assistants and enumerators; and fieldwork, primarily in the Central zone, began in March 2007. The interviews were both challenging and revealing, with several respondents recounting their experiences for the first time to someone outside of their immediate family. Issues such as safety, violence in the home, financial needs, overcoming stigma and survival strategies were some of the complex subjects that surfaced during the initial stages of the fieldwork.

During phase three of the research in 2008, all energies will be focussed on data collection and fieldwork. One of the biggest challenges faced by the researchers is that of establishing contact with respondents who are, or were, members of polygamous families. Although a social and legal norm in the country, polygamy is, nevertheless, still a contentious issue with multiple layers of discomfort and negotiation amongst the Malaysian public. Coupled with the fact that there are many polygamous marriages which are not registered in the courts, locating polygamous family members through the usual formal channels is

a difficult task. As such, trust is an important factor at this stage of the research, where informal networks of respondents are sought and established, and standards of strict confidentiality are enforced.

This research project remains a pioneering initiative, both in its scope and its objectives. It is anticipated that the findings will enrich current academic analyses on polygamy, in addition to making a great impact on and providing benefit to policy and law-making with regards to the practise of polygamy in this country. The outcome will also provide invaluable insight and foundation to the work that SIS is doing to promote the rights of women within the framework of Islam, based on the principles of equality, justice and freedom.

Legal Services, Reform and Advocacy

***“Working with Sisters in Islam has been a challenging and enriching experience.
Challenging in the level of commitment required irrespective of the many obstacles.
Enriching in the knowledge gained and the ideas suggested
to address the obstacles we encountered.”***

*Stephanie Bastian,
Executive Director
Kuala Lumpur Legal Aid Centre*

Legal Services

✧ Legal Clinic

SIS rebranded and relaunched its helpline as Telenisa or Women's PhoneLine in April 2007. This rebranding, together with several public events such as a legal awareness week and appearances in talk shows, led to a rise in the number of cases handled.

Telenisa, which was started in 2003, offers legal advice on Shari'ah laws and other issues faced by Muslim women. The advice provides Muslim women with greater access to justice and, at the same time, raises their awareness with regard to their legal rights. The provision of this service affords a grounding influence to SIS work and helps the organisation connect to women's lived realities.

In 2007, the SIS legal clinic served 747 clients, an increase of 24% as compared to 2006. Table 1 shows how the cases were received by Telenisa between the years 2006 and 2007. Most of the cases were still received through telephone calls, which recorded an increase of 61.3% between 2006 and 2007. Contact with clients took place via phone, mail and face-to-face meetings, with more phone conversations than mail or face-to-face meetings registered every month except June and July.

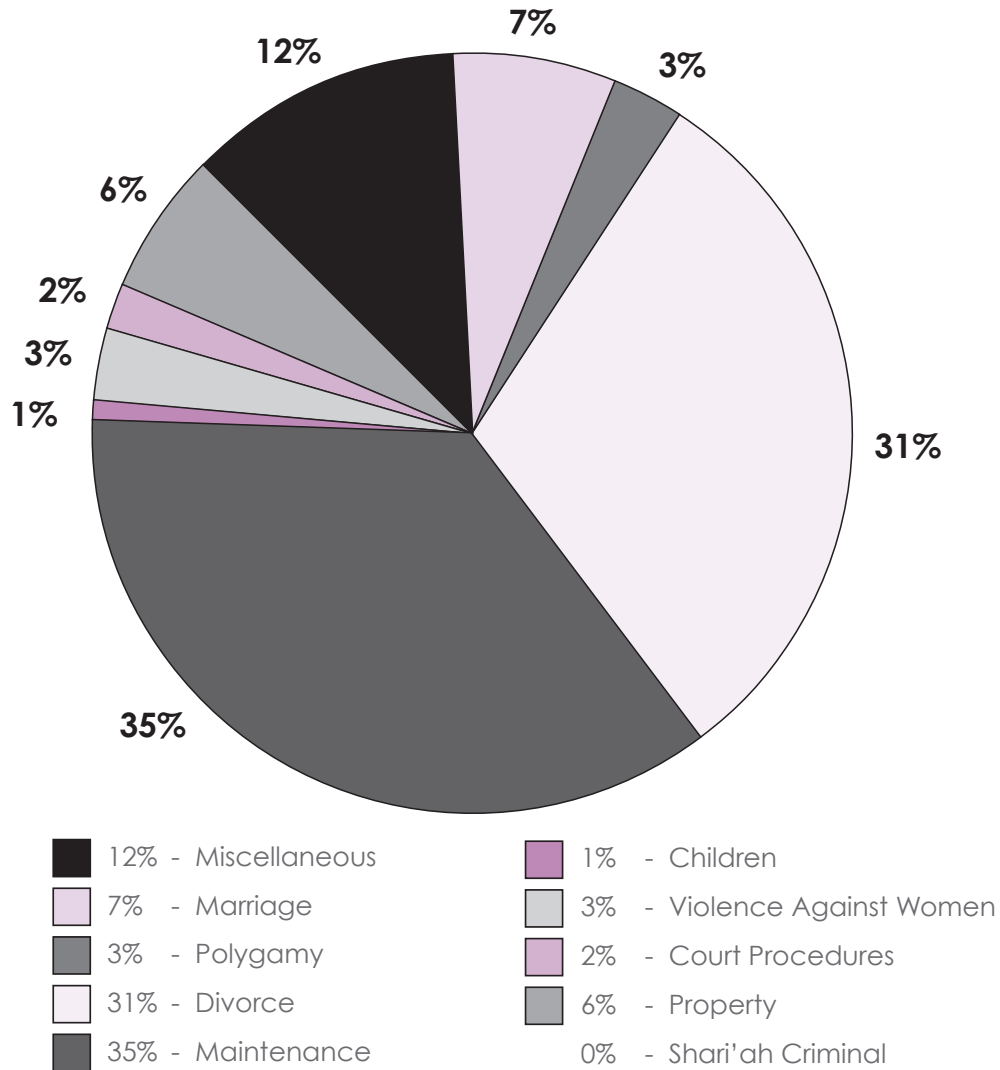
The most common types of cases received by Telenisa

were maintenance (35%) and divorce (31%). Thanks to the publicity generated by the SIS Child Support campaign, 2007 saw an increase in the number of maintenance cases. It was proposed that a Child Support Agency, with the role of collecting child maintenance payments and empowered to go after defaulters, be set up to ensure that non-custodial parents fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. This move was well covered in the media with TV3's "Selamat Pagi Malaysia" programme running a 30-minute poll on, "Should a father who defaults on child maintenance be jailed?". An overwhelming 88% of the callers agreed that fathers who default should indeed be jailed; an outcome that inspired a SIS client to post a petition online on the issue.

Table 1: A comparison of cases received: 2006 and 2007

	2007 Total	2006 Total	Variance (%)
Telephone	379	235	61.3
Mail	299	300	-0.3
Face-to-Face	69	67	2.9
Total	747	602	19.4
Female	659	522	26.2
Male	84	80	5.0
Unknown	4		
Total	747	602	

Table 2: Types of Cases Received Through Telenisa



The legal advice that is offered by Telenisa is handled by SIS lawyers who are trained in feminist legal theory and practice. SIS lawyers work with the Bar Council Legal Aid Centre and women NGOs to conduct training workshops for chambering students before they are permitted to handle cases on behalf of clients. They are provided with a knowledge of feminist principles and an understanding of the laws and skills required to deal with clients. These are emphasised and shared with the chambering students so that they, too, become sensitised to women's concerns and issues. Chambering students are given the opportunity to observe different cases and procedures in both the Shari'ah and civil courts as well as at police stations, welfare departments, shelter homes, and immigration offices.

Volunteer lawyers help out with SIS' e-lawyers online service by answering e-mail queries, reviewing SIS responses to e-mails, and accompanying people to court, whenever necessary.

SIS Legal Services plans to conduct outreach activities in areas with large Muslim populations. It is recognised that grassroots communities often have difficulties accessing legal assistance and obtaining information on laws and simple procedures. A mobile legal clinic has been proposed as a possible way of bringing legal advice and services to the women in these communities. The mobile clinic hopes to establish a programme where people without legal background

can be trained to be paralegal helpers, responding to common basic queries.

✧ Court Watch

A Court Watch programme, designed to monitor court proceedings and identify problems that women encounter with the legal system, was started in 2007. Chambering pupils and volunteers participated in this programme which documented the legal practices in court and kept a check on whether there was any bias. A special questionnaire was formulated as a guide for this court monitoring exercise.

One of the difficulties faced by the programme was the lack of volunteers to attend court sessions, which resulted in the Court Watch missing its target of 100 cases in 2007. The programme will continue in 2008 and time will then be allocated for chambering students to conduct the Court Watch survey.

✧ Legal Literacy

Telenisa's outreach programme was boosted by a regular column in the *Utusan Malaysia* newspaper, which also helped to publicise SIS services. Our legal column was published every Friday, and it would generally cover a simple case pertaining to marriage, divorce, faraid, and other issues and concerns of Muslim women. Phone cases received by Telenisa always increased after the column had been published. The support provided by *Utusan* is

much appreciated—it gives SIS some much-needed space in the media and indicates the newspaper's commitment towards the free dissemination of information for all. The published *Utusan Malaysia* columns have been uploaded to the SIS website (www.sistersinislam.org.my) for easy reference.

✿ Legal awareness week

SIS started a *ta'liq* literacy project to promote the concept of *ta'liq tambahan* (additional *ta'liq*) so that prospective brides are not only aware that such a right is available to them but they can also be protected by this knowledge in the event of any dispute. The SIS Legal Officer interviewed with *Majalah Wanita* in April, and the Family and Law columns on additional *ta'liq* ran in March. Samples of additional *ta'liq* agreements in both English and Malay have also been uploaded to the SIS website (www.sistersinislam.org.my). The campaign was aimed at getting the attention of the policymakers who are responsible for the registration and enforcement of the terms agreed on by both parties, so that these policymakers recognise additional *ta'liq*.

Reform and Advocacy

In 2007, amendments to the 2005 Islamic Family Law were still being held back and had not been tabled in Parliament. After the Cabinet decided not to gazette the amendments, a consultation was held with the Shari'ah community (comprising

government religious bodies and NGOs) to discuss the necessary amendments to be made. Members of SIS and the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) were actively involved in these discussions. To date, there have been no news on the status of the amendments.

Admittedly, the process of law reform has been frustrating because it is dependent on decisions made by policymakers. The Parliamentary Gender Caucus has not played an adequate role in advancing women's rights issues. For example, when two male Members of Parliament passed sexist remarks at a Parliamentary debate, the chair of the Parliament



SIS legal officer Nur Fadhlin Mohd Yusuf (holding letter) addressing queries at the Legal Awareness Week.

✧ Legal Services, Reform and Advocacy

Gender Caucus did not protest or comment.

Moving ahead

A Legal Sub-committee was established to help shape and strengthen the legal services and advocacy functions of SIS. The sub-committee will deliberate on ideas and help plan and monitor the progress of projects and activities. The Legal Services, Reform and Advocacy Unit will continue to build on its existing services, promote legal literacy, strengthen its Court Watch survey and continue to work towards Islamic Family Law reform. It intends to expand its outreach programme to include a Mobile Legal Clinic so as to be able to reach out to more women who may not have access to legal information.

SIS will continue its collaborative efforts with other NGOs in activities such as participating in the Bar Council's efforts to promote human rights; working with the Centre for Independent Journalism on the issue of freedom of information, and working closely with JAG members to promote and advocate women's rights issues, especially in the area of law and policy reform.

The work to promote and defend the freedom and rights of Muslim women will continue to be challenging, but it is heartening to note that Muslim women and men are beginning to speak out and reclaim their rights. It is when women participate in



SIS legal officers Nur Fadhlina Mohd Yusuf (extreme right) and Razlinawati Razali attending to visitors at the SIS booth during Legal Awareness Week.

changing their realities that their perspectives, needs and concerns can be fully considered within the process of transformation.

Public Education, Information and Communications

***“The workshop has left a deep impression on me.
I am beginning to understand the issues involved and can now inform and
help my family members and friends who have problems.”***

*Normah binti Muhamad,
participant in Sri Semarak workshop, 30 Dec 07*

✧ Public Education, Information and Communications

In 2007, SIS Public Education programmes continued to be directed at Muslim women, at both the grass-roots and professional levels. The programmes were focussed on raising their awareness of the issues surrounding Islamic Family Law; while continuing to engage in the current development of progressive Islamic knowledge.

During the year, SIS successfully conducted a total of nine workshops, three Large Group Training Awareness (LGTA) sessions, seven Study Sessions led by five international and two local speakers, and a Study Visit programme for a delegation from Pakistan.

Apart from reaching out, specifically, to Muslim



Terengganu Mufti, Dato' Ismail Haji Yahya, speaks at a Large Group Training Awareness session in Johor.

women at the grassroots level, SIS continued to engage with people from other faiths—both male and female—including young people, activists, scholars and professionals.

SIS public study sessions were open to all who were interested in the topic under discussion and were normally conducted at convenient times such as after working hours or on weekends.

SIS events often generated lively discussions among the participants and many enjoyed attending them not just for the enlightening discourses but also for the conducive atmosphere generated that allowed them to comfortably express their opinions and concerns and share their personal experiences.

Workshops and Large Group Training Awareness Sessions

In 2007, SIS organised workshops on various topics. Besides Islamic Family Law, there was a workshop on blogging to encourage young people to set up their own blogs and engage in the current issues affecting the rights and lives of Malaysians.

SIS also held a Gender and Human Rights workshop, together with the personnel of several embassies. The discussions centred around issues such as how Islam influences the political climate in Malaysia, the legal framework and relationship between Shari'ah

Law and Civil Law, as well as other contemporary Malaysian issues.

The workshops and Large Group Training Awareness (LGTA) sessions on the rights of women in Islam proved to be very popular among the grassroots Muslim women. The LGTAs were conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak and Johor and were very well attended, with the number of participants ranging from 100–200. Their active participation and encouraging verbal and written responses proved that Muslim women are enthusiastic about receiving alternative information and keen on knowing their rights and bringing about change.

The participants were generally happy with the sessions, with many saying that before this, they had not been able to get much information about their rights within Islam and had not been legally aware. SIS received numerous requests to hold more such sessions and also to set up branch offices in their areas!

During the sessions, the Muslim women came up with various proposals, including:

- 1) Reformation of the Islamic Family Law (IFL);
- 2) Appointment of female judges;
- 3) Standardisation of the IFL and the Shari'ah Court System in Malaysia;
- 4) Setting up of a Child Support Agency;
- 5) Gender sensitivity training for government officers and religious leaders.

Apart from having local scholars as resource persons, SIS also invited three Muslim scholars from Indonesia to share their knowledge and views on issues such as reproductive health and gender equality from the Qur'anic perspective. Local participants benefitted tremendously from their encounters with the Indonesian scholars, who impressed them with their progressive views. SIS also organised for the scholars to meet and have dialogues with young people of other faiths and members of other Muslim groups. These meetings and dialogues helped to foster better relationships between Indonesian and Malaysian scholars and activists. They also provided a wider perspective on the diversity of opinions within Islam.

SIS also co-organised a workshop for the volunteers of Urgent Arrests, together with Suaram (Malaysian human rights group). SIS is committed to the Abolish ISA campaign and stands against the government crackdown on freedom of assembly. About 20 people, representing various civil society groups and political parties, attended this informative session led by S. Arutchelvan and Tah Moon Hui of Suaram.

✧ Study Sessions

SIS hosted seven Study Sessions, facilitated by local and international scholars, on various topics such as spirituality, faith and feminism, ethnicity and religion, and the hate discourse in Malaysia. All of these sessions generated healthy debate amongst the participants,

who had come from diverse backgrounds.

A session on *Understanding the Nature of Religious Hate Discourse: Why Context Matters in the Working of Conspiracy Theories* by Dr Farish Noor drew a lot of interest not only from fellow Malaysians but also from foreigners living in Malaysia. The open discussion that followed helped give the participants a sense of the current debate in Malaysia and a better insight into the Malaysian context vis-à-vis the broader discourse and developments in the Muslim world.

A session with independent researcher Rosey Ma helped participants to better understand the history of the Chinese Muslims, especially those in Malaysia. Most of the participants appreciated the historical facts that she had unearthed, as these have rarely been presented in public. It helped to break down the perception of an existing dichotomy between Chinese and Islam, both amongst Muslims and non-Muslims.

SIS was also honoured to have renowned Canadian writer Camilla Gibb, named by the jury of the prestigious Orange Prize as one of 21 writers to watch in the new century, to talk about her latest novel *'Sweetness in the Belly'*, which is based on her work as an anthropologist in Ethiopia, Canada and England. She talked about how one's culture and language shaped one's experience of religion, and how that understanding is affected by immigration and the

politics of the immigrant's new home country. The participants, particularly those who had read Ms Gibb's writings, took the opportunity for an in-depth discussion with her on creative writing, research work and on the challenges faced by Muslim women living in the West.

✨ Study Tour

SIS hosted a Study Visit on Gender, Islam and Reproductive Health for a group of medical practitioners and activists from Pakistan. In recognition of SIS' work on reproductive health in Islam, the group sought to study SIS' advocacy work including its training methodologies and network building processes.

SIS organised their visit to several organisations and government departments to expose them to the current laws and policies of Malaysia, the level of discourse and realities in the country, and for them to appreciate the real challenges of advocacy work in this area.

SIS invited Indonesian scholar Kiyai Husein Muhammad as a resource person. Besides being impressed with him, the delegates benefited immensely from his deep insights into the subject, which took into account the Islamic perspective and human rights principles.

Kiyai Husein's visit to Kuala Lumpur also resulted in fruitful meetings with local Muslim scholars, activists and individuals interested in the issue of reproductive health and sexuality as well as in progressive Islamic views.

✨ Media

SIS continued to work closely with the media to impart its views and positions on different issues as well as to publicise its various activities. Throughout 2007, SIS received both national and international coverage with about 50 printed news articles in the national and international mainstream papers. SIS statements touched on a variety of subjects including multi culturalism, freedom of religion and, specifically, issues relevant to Muslim women. Several SIS TV interviews with Al-Jazeera and Malaysiakini on issues of freedom of religion have been used as advocacy tools by other NGOs such as KOMAS. SIS position, based on justice and equality, and which promotes an inclusive society that recognises diversity, is welcomed by many people at the national and international levels.

✨ Publications

SIS is proud of its first annual report published in November 2007. Apart from highlighting SIS activities, this first annual report provided an historical background of SIS and elaborated on SIS objectives and aspirations.

✧ Public Education, Information and Communications

SIS 3rd *Baraza!* bulletin, which focussed on the topic “Islam and Human Rights: Conflicting or Complementary” received positive feedback from the general public and many national and international government officials, scholars, human rights activists and legal practitioners, who all found it to be useful for their work. The bulletin studied the developments of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including the level of debate amongst Muslim countries and the impact on Muslim women.

SIS' latest publication *Early Women in Islam* was published and distributed in October 2007. It highlights the lives of prominent women who lived during the time of the Prophet and the ensuing period. It is hoped that the book will add another dimension to the traditional versions of these women's lives and reveal them to be true models for today's Muslim women.

All SIS publications are distributed to numerous organisations, donors, scholars, activists, government agencies, universities and state libraries.

✧ Website

As part of SIS' continual efforts to provide the public with easy access to alternative and progressive perspectives on Islam, particularly on women's rights, SIS upgraded its website HTML software to the Content

Management System (CMS). To this end, SIS consulted several IT experts, explored the most efficient and practical system to meet the objectives, and studied the work and cost involved in the upgrading. Seacem of Malaysiakini offered their technical expertise and assisted SIS in expediting the new system, which is scheduled for implementation in 2008.

✧ Resource Centre

The resource centre in SIS has more than 3,000 books, including periodicals, conference papers, pamphlets, brochures and leaflets, audio-videos, newspaper clippings and loose articles. SIS is grateful to Sunway College for encouraging its students to work as volunteers at SIS. They have been very helpful in assisting SIS staff with cataloguing and maintenance.

✨ Public Education Calendar

Workshops		
1	3 Mar	Blogging for Beginners, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam Trainer: Jac Kee (social and gender activist)
2	20 Apr	Women For Women Workshop: Property Management in Marriage, Petaling Jaya Organised by Sisters in Islam Trainer: Norhayati Kaprawi <i>Speakers: Dato' Ismail Haji Yahya (Mufti of Terengganu), Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah (SIS Legal Consultant) and Razlinawati Razali (SIS Legal Officer)</i>
3	23 March	A Rights-based Understanding of Islam, with foreign diplomats in Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam and Australian High Commission Trainers: Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, Zainah Anwar and Shanon Shah
4	17 June	Women For Women Workshop: The Path Less Taken, for Fiesta Feminista, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam and the Fiesta Feminista team Trainers: Rozana Isa and Razlinawati Razali
5	27-29 Jul	Gender Equality from the perspective of Al-Quran, Petaling Jaya Organised by Sisters in Islam Moderator: Norhayati Kaprawi <i>Speakers: Indonesian Scholars Nyai Ruqaiyyah (woman ulama) and Dr Nur Rofiah bil Uzm (Qur'anic exegesis lecturer, Universiti Islam Negeri Jakarta)</i>
6	6 Oct	Demystifying the Syariah: A Rights-based Understanding of Islam Organised by Sisters in Islam Trainers: Zaitun Mohamed Kasim and Rozana Isa

✧ Public Education Calendar

Workshops		
7	8 Dec	Women for women Workshop with residents from Jalan Jelatek flats, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam Facilitator: Norhayati Kaprawi <i>Speakers: Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah, Sa'adiyah Din (practicing Shari'ah lawyer), Zalina Hassan (social and woman activist) and Nur Fadhlin Mohd Yusof (SIS Legal Officer)</i>
8	24 Dec	Workshop for Volunteers for Urgent Arrests, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam, SUARAM (Malaysian human rights organisation) and the Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Trainers: S. Arutchelvan and Tah Moon Hui (Suaram staff)
9	30 Dec	Women for Women Workshop with residents from Jalan Semarak flats, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam Facilitators: Rozana Isa and Norhayati Kaprawi <i>Speakers: Sa'adiyah Din (practicing Shari'ah lawyer), Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah & Zalina Hassan</i>
Large Group Training Awareness		
1	6 Jan	Know Your Rights: Property Management in Marriage, Kuala Lumpur Organised by Sisters in Islam Facilitators: Prof Rashidah Shuib and Zaitun Mohamed Kasim <i>Speakers: Nia Dinata (Indonesian film director), Shireen Muhiadeen (Financial Consultant), Dato' Ismail Haji Yahya (Mufti of Terengganu), Zainah Anwar, Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah, Prof Noraini Othman and Razlinawati Razali</i>

2	25 Aug	Women's Rights in Islam, Ipoh, Perak Organised by Sisters in Islam and Perak Bar Facilitators: Nik Elin Zurina Nik Rashid (lawyer) and Kenny Lai (lawyer) Speakers: Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi (UiTM lecturer and Constitutional expert), Zarizana Abdul Aziz (lawyer), Zainah Anwar, Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah and Razlinawati Razali
3	24 Nov	Women's Rights in Islam, Kluang, Johor Organised by Sisters in Islam and Wanita Umno Bahagian Kluang Facilitators: Rozana Isa and Norhayati Kaprawi Speakers: YB Senator Sharifah Azizah Dato' Syed Zain (Chief of Wanita UMNO Kluang), Dato' Ismail Yahya, Prof Norani Othman & Razlinawati Razali
Study Session International Scholars		
c1	1 Apr	Islam, Culture and Place: Some Observations by a Writer Organised by Sisters in Islam and the Canadian High Commission Speaker: Camilla Gibb, prominent award-winning Canadian writer
2	8 Jun	Rainbow Feminisms of a Woman on Many Different Faiths Organised by Sisters in Islam Speaker: Dr Chun Hyung Kyung, Korean Buddhist-Christian feminist
3	9 July	The Legalism and Symbolism of Islamic Law - An Examination of Shari'ah as Law and Symbol of Political Identity Organised by Sisters in Islam and the Canadian High Commission Speaker: Dr Anver Emon, Islamic law lecturer, University of Toronto
Workshops		

4	14 Aug	Spiritual Transformation in Daily Life Means of Remembrances of Gratitude and Love Organised by Sisters in Islam <i>Speaker: Dr Alan Godlas, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion, University of Georgia</i>
5	13 Nov	Revolution and Betrayal Organised by Sisters in Islam <i>Speaker: Mahboubah Abbasgholizadeh, Iranian feminist</i>
Study Session Malaysian Scholars		
6	17 Jan	Understanding the Nature of Religious Hate Discourse: Why Context Matters in the Working of Conspiracy Theories Organised by Sisters in Islam <i>Speaker: Dr Farish Noor, researcher, National University of Singapore</i>
7	28 Feb	Chinese Muslims In Malaysia - History and Challenges Organised by Sisters in Islam <i>Speaker: Rosey Ma, independent researcher</i>
Study Tour		
1	7-11 Aug	Gender, Islam And Reproductive Health with medical practitioners and health activists from Pakistan Organised by Sisters in Islam Coordinators: Norhayati Kaprawi, Rozana Isa and Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri Trainer: Zaitun Mohamed Kasim Resource Persons: Kiyai Husein Muhammad (Indonesian ulama and expert on Shari'ah and Gender) and Rashidah Abdullah (SIS Board Member and consultant on Reproductive Health and Rights issues)

✧ *SIS In The Media*

1	6 Jan	<i>The Star</i> - Polygamy is everywhere!
2	7 Jan	<i>New Sunday Times</i> - Making it harder to get second wife
3	7 Jan	<i>Mingguan Malaysia</i> - 77 peratus berpoligami kerana takut berzina
4	7 Jan	<i>The Star</i> - From a woman's perspective
5	7 Jan	<i>Sunday Star</i> - Mufti: Prioritise assets division
6	7 Jan	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Bolehkah kita matang berbincang tentang poligami?
7	7 Jan	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Undang-undang tidak seragam punca kes cerai tidak selesai
8	10 Jan	MalaysiaKini.com - 'Berbagi Suami' - a polygamous tale
9	14 Jan	<i>Berita Harian</i> - Soal Jawab: Akidah luntur punca masyarakat Islam mundur
10	31 Jan	<i>Berita Harian</i> - Kenyataan Sisters In Islam dipertikai
11	9 Feb	<i>Berita Harian</i> - Sisters In Islam Perjelas Pandangan Dr. Norani
12	17 Feb	<i>New Straits Times</i> - 'Let men wear chastity belts, instead'
13	17 Feb	<i>The Star</i> - Shocked groups slam chastity belt for women proposal
14	22 Feb	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Cadangan pemakaian cawat besi diskriminasikan wanita
15	22 Mar	<i>The Star</i> - States must probe marital status of those applying to marry, says group
16	27 Mar	<i>The Malay Mail</i> - Abandoned Babies - Women shouldn't be ashamed

✧ *SIS In The Media*

17	2 Apr	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Menjelaskan realiti Islam
18	2 Apr	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Camilla beranikan diri tulis novel Islam
19	5 Apr	<i>The Star</i> - Raja Nazrin lauded for his concerns on unity
20	3 Apr	<i>The Sun</i> - Religious Council: Prayers not move to undermine Islam, Muslims
21	5 Apr	Malaysia-today.net - Sisters in Islam's statement regarding inter-religious issues
22	5 Apr	<i>The Sun</i> - Consider views of youth, policymakers urged
23	6 Apr	MalaysiaKini.com - SIS gesa kerajaan selesaikan isu tukar agama
24	6 Apr	<i>New Straits Times</i> - Nation-Building: Uphold supremacy of Constitution
25	11 Apr	<i>The Malay Mail</i> - NGOs stress on gender education
26	12 Apr	<i>The Star</i> - Be guided by Constitution
27	14 Apr	Asia Calling - MALAYSIA : Snoop squad armed with cameras
28	22 Apr	<i>Mingguan Malaysia</i> - Tubuhkan Jabatan Nafkah Anak
29	22 Apr	<i>The Star</i> - A third of cases brought to SIS clinic concern alimony
30	22 Apr	<i>The Star</i> - Courts urged to be strict with errant Muslim fathers
31	23 Apr	<i>The Star</i> - Muslim mums fed up with deadbeat dads
32	23 Apr	MalaysiaKini.com - Al Jazeera highlights M'sian apostasy case
33	27 Apr	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Talian TeleNisa membantu wanita bermasalah

34	10 May	<i>The Star</i> - Be guided by compassion and wisdom
35	10 May	Malaysia-Today.net - Exercise wisdom and compassion on freedom of religion issues
36	16 May	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i> - Jangan emosi perjuang isu 'bocor'
37	16 May	<i>New Straits Times</i> - Angry women demand apology from sexist MPs
38	16 May	<i>The Star</i> - Group hands over memo to minister, demands apology
39	16 May	<i>The Sun</i> - Women want 'bocor' MPs penalised
40	20 Jun	Malaysiakini.com - Hundreds light a 'candle of hope' for Revathi
41	18 Aug	<i>The Times, UK</i> - Islam's war on sin dims bright lights in a nation torn between cultures
42	29 Aug	<i>The Sun</i> - What does Merdeka mean to you?
43	21 Sep	TODAY Magazine - Silenced by More Powerful Voices?
44	7 Oct	<i>New Straits Times</i> - Playwrights exchange notes
45	3 Dec	MalaysiaKini.com - Hindraf arrests: Use of ISA slammed
46	9 Dec	<i>New Sunday Times</i> - Don't vote for sexist reps, says group
47	9 Dec	<i>Sunday Star</i> - Down with sexism, says JAG
48	9 Dec	<i>Mingguan Malaysia</i> - Larang wakil rakyat hina wanita bertanding
49	14 Dec	Malaysia-Today.net - ISA a disgrace to Islam Hadhari and mockery to democracy

SIS Publications Catalogue

✧ **Q&A Booklets**

In English

- Are Women and Men Equal Before Allah? 1991 (2nd printing 2003, 3rd printing 2006)
- Islam and Family Planning, 2001 (2nd printing August 2001, 3rd printing April 2003)
- Islam and Polygamy, 2002
- Hadith on Women in Marriage, 2004

In Bahasa Malaysia

- Adakah Wanita dan Lelaki Saksama di Sisi Allah? 1991 (2nd printing 2003, 3rd printing 2006)
- Adakah Lelaki Islam Dibenarkan Memukul Isterinya? 1991 (2nd printing 2003)
- Islam dan Perancangan Keluarga, 2001, (2nd printing 2002)
- Islam dan Poligami, 2003

✧ **Seminar Books**

- Shari'a Law & The Modern Nation State: A Malaysian Symposium, 1994 (2nd printing 1998)
- Hudud in Malaysia: The Issues at Stake, 1995
- Islam, Reproductive Health and Women's Rights, Report of Proceedings, 1999 (out of print)
- Islam, Reproductive Health and Women's Rights, 2000 (out of print)
- Islamic Family Law & Justice for Muslim Women, 2003

- Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism, 2005

✧ **Working Paper Series**

- Guardianship Law & Muslim Women, 2002
- Women as Judges, 2002

✧ **Other Books Published By SIS:**

- Muslim Women in the Family & the Society, Dr. Fathi Osman, 1996
- Islam & Women's Reproductive Rights, Masdar F. Mas'udi, 2002
- Wanita Muslim dalam Keluarga dan Masyarakat, Dr. Fathi Osman, 2002
- Fiqh Wanita: Pandangan Ulama Terhadap Wacana Agama dan Gender, K.H. Hussein Muhammad, 2004
- Al-Quran untuk kaum Wanita, Nasaruddin Umar, 2004
- Paradigma Baru Teologi Wanita, Nasaruddin Umar, 2004
- Unveiling the Ideal: A New Look at Early Muslim Women, Shayan Afzal Khan, 2007

✧ **SIS Bulletin: Baraza!**

- Trends in Islamic Family Law Reform, 2005 (2nd printing January 2006, 3rd printing June 2006)
- Diversity of Opinions: An Islamic Legacy, 2006
- Islam and Human Rights: Conflicting or Complementary?, 2007

Advocacy and Networking: International and National

“I work as a freelancer and, therefore, need to be careful about prioritising any unpaid voluntary work. From my past collaboration with SIS, I know that they do a good job mobilising, energising and organising women’s rights activists. I also know that they are able to bring together many extraordinary scholars and activists. I joined Musawah because I knew that being part of this global movement would be an effective use of my time and that what I learn would be valuable to the women with whom I network in the Muslim Women’s Network-UK.”

*Cassandra Balchin,
Musawah Planning Committee member
and Board member, Muslim Women’s Network-UK*

INTERNATIONAL

A key objective of the work that SIS does on an international level is to create and build a global public constituency to support the demand in scholarship, law and practice for an Islam that upholds the principles of justice and equality within a democratic nation-state framework.

Over the years, many international groups—women's groups, funders, governments, academics, and others—have sought assistance from SIS in the areas of capacity-building, networking and consultation. SIS staff and members have played important roles as

speakers, facilitators, and resource persons for these organisations, all in an effort to advance a rights-based understanding of Islam.

In 2007, SIS provided input to the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD); the Coalition on Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Contexts (CSBR); the Carter Center; the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting; the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS); the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Women's Learning Partnership (WLP); and others.

✧ Musawah: A Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family

A major SIS initiative in 2007 was the initiation of Musawah, a movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. Musawah is a product of SIS' long years of research and advocacy as well as its regional and international networking efforts on family law issues.

In 2006, SIS organised an international consultation on Trends in Family Law Reform in Muslim Countries to study new arguments, strategies and challenges for the reform of Muslim family laws. One of the resolutions adopted at the meeting was the bringing together of groups from around the world that were working on family law reform. The idea was to build



Musawah's Conceptual Meeting on Equality in the Family, held in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2007, brought together 25 experts in Shari'ah, fiqh, Muslim family laws, and activism, from 15 countries.

a global voice, presence and movement in order to effect justice and equality within the Muslim family. Musawah wanted to build on the decades of effort by women's groups and activists to reform those Muslim family laws that discriminate against women and to resist regressive amendments demanded by conservative groups within society.

The resolution was met with keen interest and enthusiasm wherever it was introduced. As a result, SIS requested for and received an initial grant from Oxfam Novib to form a planning committee consisting of activists and academics and to convene an initial planning meeting in March 2007 in Istanbul, Turkey.

There were 12 members in the planning committee. They were: Amal Abdel Hadi (Egypt), Amira El-Azhary Sonbol (Egypt/Qatar/United States), Asma'u Joda (Nigeria), Azza Soliman (Egypt), Cassandra Balchin (United Kingdom), Isatou Touray (Gambia), Kamala Chandrakirana (Indonesia), Pinar Ilkkaracan (Turkey), Rabéa Naciri (Morocco), Sohail Akbar Warraich (Pakistan), Zainah Anwar (Malaysia) and Ziba Mir-Hosseini (Iran/United Kingdom).

During the Istanbul meeting, the following objectives and activities were outlined for the movement by the planning committee:

- Strengthening women's voices for demanding equality and justice in the family at the national,

regional and international levels;

- Building analyses and strategies that bring together scholarship and experience regarding Muslim jurisprudence, human rights principles, fundamental rights guarantees, and the lived realities of families today;

- Providing those advocating for rights in the family with tools and resources, including a Framework for Action; and

- Raising the visibility of initiatives that advocate equality and justice in the Muslim family.

The movement is meant to be pluralistic and inclusive, bringing together NGOs, activists, scholars, practitioners, policy makers and grassroots women and men from around the world. Participation will be based on proven commitment to the promotion of rights within Muslim families, whether from a religious, secular or other perspective.

The committee decided that much preparation was required before the movement would be officially launched. It would first commission theoretical background papers and hold a small meeting to develop the conceptual foundation and framework for the movement. The committee would then reach out to national-level groups working on family law issues to share resources and present the conceptual framework as well as gather information and ideas from them regarding the situation in their respective

countries. Following this, additional resources would be developed, including a website and a kit outlining the arguments for reform. The movement would then be launched at a larger Global Meeting.

In December 2007, SIS organised a three-day Conceptual Meeting on *Equality in the Family* in Cairo, Egypt. This was funded by the Global Fund for Women with local logistical assistance provided by the New Woman Foundation.

The primary objectives of the meeting were:

- To develop a clear and accessible conceptual framework and statement of principles for the protection of women's rights in the Muslim family;
- To discuss the next steps and, strategies for taking the movement forward, and to identify the ways in which the conceptual framework can be distributed and used.

The meeting was attended by 25 experts in Shari'ah, fiqh, Muslim family laws, and activism from 15 countries in Muslim contexts. Scholars and academics including Amina Wadud, Muhammad Khalid Masud, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Amira Sonbol and Cassandra Balchin presented theoretical papers that spawned discussions which explored the social and historical context for the possibilities of family law reform. Against this background, the participants worked on articulating principles and justifications to

support Muslim family law reform and the concept of justice and equality within the family. The group also discussed plans for the movement for 2008 and 2009 and ways in which participants can be involved at the national, regional and international levels.

The discussions from this meeting were included in a draft Framework for Action that will guide the work of Musawah. The Framework outlines the sociological and historical context behind current Muslim family laws, and provides a critical explanation of the construction of fiqh, gender and family laws, and a set of principles on equality and justice in the Muslim family. After the Framework for Action is finalised, it will be shared with national-level organisations and activists as part of the movement's national outreach efforts.

The conceptual meeting was followed by a two-day planning committee meeting, which was attended by 10 committee members, who discussed activities and a timeline for 2008. Plans for 2008 included finalising the Framework for Action, reaching out to national-level groups, developing the website and a resource kit, and preparing for the February 2009 Global Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. In late 2007, Oxfam Novib awarded SIS a three-year institutional grant that helped to partially fund the movement and SIS planned to seek additional funds in early 2008 from Ford Foundation, Sigrid Rausing Trust, and Global Fund for Women.

NATIONAL

As a long standing member of the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), SIS, together with other women's organisations, has played an active role in advocating the reform of laws that discriminate against women and in raising awareness on the issue of gender equality.

In 2007, SIS, as part of JAG, led other civil society organisations in a protest against sexist comments made by a few elected representatives in Parliament. MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin's comment "Where is the leak, the member for Batu Gajah also leaks once a month"—made in response to fellow Parliamentarian Fong Po Kuan, while debating the issue of a roof leak at the Parliament house—sparked a public outcry. His statement was further supported by two other male MPs who denigrated the incident as a joke.

The civil society protest was held outside the offices of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. SIS Executive Director Zainah Anwar read a JAG statement of outrage at the sexist and discriminatory behaviour against women MPs exhibited by our elected representatives. The statement pointed out that these MPs were insensitive and did not understand the true meaning of gender equality and non-discrimination, even more so as they were part of the newly formed Gender Caucus.



SIS Executive Director Zainah Anwar (far right), WAO president Meera Samanther (middle) and others at the JAG-led protest against sexist and discriminatory behaviour of a few Malaysian Members of Parliament. On the left is Women, Family and Community Development Minister Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

The JAG statement also questioned the judgment of the Deputy Speaker in dismissing a disciplinary action against the MPs in question based on technical grounds, and demanded that the Prime Minister; the Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Gender Equality; the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development; and the Parliament Gender Caucus take immediate action to end all forms of sexism and discrimination in Parliament.

In 2007, SIS also played an active role in the first Fiesta Feminista, a platform for exchanging ideas, and raising awareness on issues surrounding feminism, women's rights, development and democracy. The

✧ *Advocacy and Networking: International and National*

theme of the event, jointly organised by JAG and the Gender Studies Programme of Universiti Malaya, was Embracing Diversity—a recognition of the need to acknowledge and celebrate diversity and to view it as necessary in addressing and bridging differences.

Held over two-and-a-half-days, the Fiesta activities were organised around four broad areas—Feminism, Gender and Development, Human Rights and Democracy, Social Movements, and Women Organising—and attracted some 400 women and men participants.

Future plans for Fiesta Feminista include the organisation of an Inter-Movement Dialogue between women's movement and other movements, and building the capacity and knowledge of feminists along Fiesta Feminista's Guiding Principles of anti-patriarchy, anti-fundamentalism, anti-neoliberal globalisation, anti-ethnocentrism/racism/xenophobia and being environmentally friendly. SIS will continue to play an important role in the next Fiesta Feminista scheduled for 2010.

As in previous years, SIS also lent its support to coalitions and campaigns that promote civil and political rights; expand the space for debate and dialogue; defend the right to assemble; and encourage a host of other civil society concerns.

In 2007, SIS' staff participated in the KOMAS 50:44 event held at the Central Market Annexe in Kuala Lumpur. 50:44 is a coalition of 60 civil society organisations set up to commemorate 50 years of Independence and 44 years of the formation of Malaysia. SIS staff staged a monologue performance on the issues affecting Muslim women such as divorce, maintenance, polygamy and domestic violence. Their performance generated a lively discussion among the participants and they held a rousing encore performance at the Central Market café.

SIS also supported the activities of Article 11, a coalition of civil society groups founded in 2004 to uphold the supremacy of the Federal Constitution and the principles of equal citizenship, regardless of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender.

In 2007, in response to the gag order imposed by the Malaysian Government on public forums held by Article 11, the group resorted to the use of alternative media to disseminate information about its discourse on the Malaysian Constitution, in particular on religious freedom. The group compiled interviews with progressive Muslim scholars, legal practitioners and activists in VCD format and distributed them to the public. The Article 11 group also held a dialogue session, which was attended by more than 50 participants, during the KOMAS 50:44 event in September 2007, where an Al-Jazeera interview with SIS Executive Director Zainah Anwar was screened.

Organisational and Financial Matters

“In our country where so many are eager to promote their own arrogant brand of Islam, SIS is doing vital work in bringing back the Islam preached by the Prophet (Peace be upon Him) - the Islam that teaches thinking instead of blind submission; the Islam that guarantees equality for all regardless of colour or gender; the Islam that wins followers by example, not by force. As a Muslim, I consider it my ‘ibadah’ (act of worship) to support this work.”

*Rafidah Abdullah,
scriptwriter, actress, TV personality and SIS individual donor*

✧ Staffing

SIS had 12 full-time staff in 2007: the Executive Director, three managers, six programme officers, one accounts officer and two programme assistants. Four programme officers (two were still under probation) left for greener pastures and a recruitment drive was undertaken for their replacement in 2008.

SIS also employed part-time staff on a project by project basis. They included a lead researcher cum coordinator for the polygamy research project and a coordinator for Musawah, the international movement for Muslim family law reform.

In an effort to help staff develop, both professionally and personally, SIS started monthly Nasi Bungkus lunch sessions—the Malaysian version of the brown bag lunch. Staff members took turns to make presentations over lunch in the office. The presentations often featured interesting books that they have read, projects that they have coordinated or seminars, workshops and training sessions that they have attended. These informal lunch presentations in front of colleagues and SIS members helped build their confidence in public speaking.

SIS also provided regular English classes for staff to help them improve their language skills. In addition, SIS held time management and photography workshops

in 2007. During the year, 14 staff and members attended various training courses and workshops, aimed at improving administrative, management and financial planning skills, and also at enhancing the understanding of human rights, women's rights and feminist legal theory. SIS also initiated a wellness program by providing weekly yoga classes for staff and members.

✧ Governance

In 2007, SIS' organisational structure remained the same as in previous years. SIS is governed by a Board made up of two members and a Programme and Management



From left: SIS Programme and Management Committee member Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim, SIS members Prof Datin Dr Rashidah Shuib and Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri, and veteran Malaysian actress/director/producer Datin Hajjah Rosnani Jalil at the Charity Film Premiere of Indonesian award-winning film 'Berbagi Suami'.

Committee (PMC) made up of four members.

The PMC met four times in 2007 to monitor the programmes and activities organised by SIS. It also supervised SIS' financial planning and fundraising, its organisational development, staff welfare and development and its transition process. In addition, the PMC provided support and guidance to the Executive Director in managing the organisation.

SIS staff and members meet once a year at a two-day Evaluation and Planning meeting where they evaluate the organisational vision and direction and develop an 18-month strategic plan. These meetings help strengthen the commitment and ownership of SIS while promoting transparency and accountability. In planning for the 2007 retreat, SIS organised a strategic consultation meeting for members and staff to discuss ways in which they could strengthen the SIS work and ensure that it remained relevant to the evolving needs and concerns of Malaysian society. SIS staff prepared for the retreat by going through a comprehensive reporting process of all activities, and measuring the successes, failures and suggestions for improvement.

Changes to the SIS governance structure were proposed at the 2007 Evaluation and Planning meeting—the current Board of Directors and PMC will be merged into a new Board that will have greater oversight of all SIS programmes.

✧ Transition Process

In 2007, SIS Executive Director, Zainah Anwar, made the decision to step down by March 2008. Although SIS launched a recruitment drive for an Executive Director, no suitable candidate was found.

SIS will, therefore, undergo a transition period until the Executive Director's position is filled. During this transition period, the organisation will be run by a management team assisted by the new Board. The management team, led by a Senior Programme Manager, will undertake all additional responsibilities until a new Executive Director is appointed.

✧ Change Management

In order to reach out to the general public in an effective manner, SIS underwent a change management exercise that revisited our mission, vision, objectives and values.

A meeting was held to explain the exercise and to identify members, staff, friends and partners who were interested in taking part. Eight SIS members, five staff members and seven friends and partners were identified. Some were interviewed while others answered questionnaires. Fourteen SIS members and staff also attended a two-day workshop to understand and brainstorm for ideas on change management.

The exercise resulted in a new SIS motto: “Empowering voices for change”. The motto reflects the SIS work of speaking out and of helping others voice their concerns and work towards positive change. These efforts are evident in both the small and large aspects of the organisation's internal and external work. The motto also reflects SIS values of freedom, equality, respect for self and others, and the constant pursuit of knowledge and justice.

✧ Financial highlights

For the financial year ending 31st December 2007, foreign grants received by SIS amounted to RM1,473,149, which is a 69.5% increase over foreign grants received in 2006. SIS' key foreign funders for 2007 included the Global Fund for Women, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Ford Foundation, Asia Foundation, Oxfam Novib, Sigrid Rausing Trust and Canadian High Commission.

SIS is pleased to report that funds received from Malaysian citizens, corporations and foundations in 2007 amounted to RM567,718, a 124.1% increase compared to local donations received in 2006. These include contributions received from a Charity Film Premiere, *Berbagi Suami*—RM166,456 of which will be used for the Polygamy Research project.

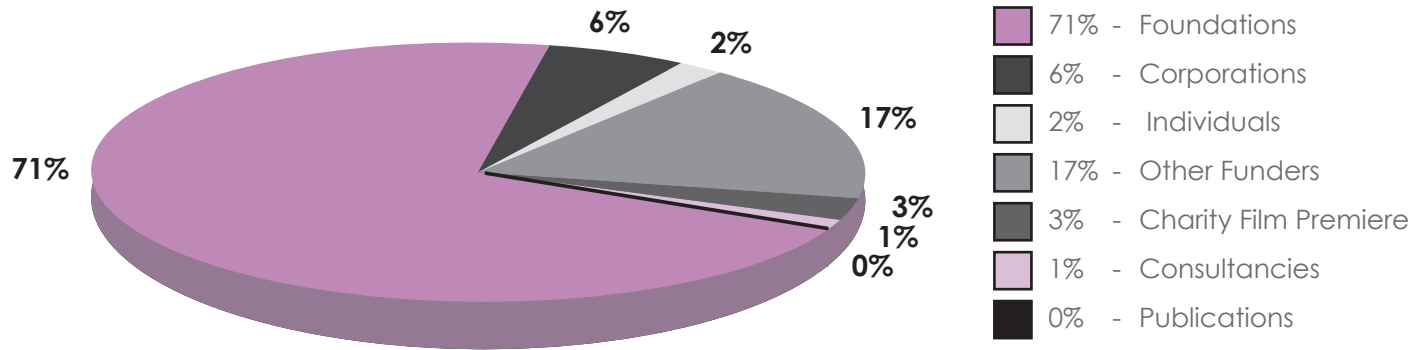
The premiere of this Indonesian film was attended by writer/director Nia Dinata and leading actors Jajang

C Noer, Shanty, Dominique, Ria Irawan, Lukman Sardi and Reuben Elishama Hadju. The patron of the event was Malaysia's Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister, Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim, and his wife Datin Seri Masnah Mohamed. All nine cinemas which screened the movie were filled with people, both young and old, from all walks of life. The premiere was made possible through the generous support of Redfilms, which distributed *Berbagi Suami*.

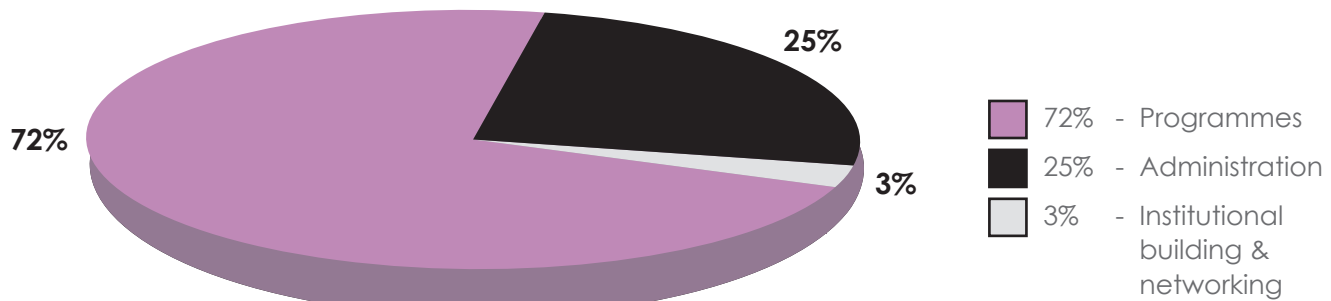
SIS' total expenses in 2007 amounted to RM1,173,107, an increase of 10.1% compared to expenses in the previous year. There was a 112.9% increase in programme funding, largely due to two planning meetings for Musawah, held in Cairo and Istanbul respectively.

What is clear from these figures is the fact that SIS' programme areas are growing very swiftly based on the needs of the public and the communities that we serve, both nationally and internationally.

✿ Total Income



✿ Total Expenses



✧ SIS Membership

There were not many changes in the SIS membership in 2007, which was not surprising, given our demanding membership criteria: new members have to be recommended and each member is expected to make a significant contribution to the organisation and its activities.

The number of associate members—a category for gender-sensitive men who play an important role in support of the SIS work—also remained the same. Friends of SIS (FOSIS), a category that is open to men and women of other faiths (or no faith), saw a 40% increase from the previous year to reach 21 members in 2007.

✧ The SIS Organisation in 2007

Board of Directors

Rozana Isa
Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri

Programme and Management Committee

Prof Norani Othman
Puan Sri Jamilah Ibrahim
Rozana Isa
Rashidah Abdullah
Zainah Anwar (ex-officio)

Executive Director

Zainah Anwar

Managers

Rashidah Hashim (*Operations*)

Norhayati Kaprawi (*Public Education, Information and Communications*)

Zaitun Mohamed Kasim (*January – July 2007*)

Officers

Razlinawati Razali (*Legal*)

Musfiza Mustafa (*Information*)

Syarifatul Adibah Mohd Jodi (*Information, resigned February 2007*)

Nur Fadhlin Mohd. Yusuf (*Legal, resigned December 2007*)

Ili Farhana Norhayat (*Public Education, resigned November 2007*)

Mariyana Esdet Zaidel (*Administration*)

Hartini Abdullah (*Accounts*)

Programme Assistants

Erzalina Shahabu Ramali (*Legal*)

Nurul Amani Faizal (*Public Education, Information and Communications*)

Project/Part-time Staff

Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah (*Legal consultant/Muslim Family Law researcher*)

Jac Kee (*Polygamy Research Coordinator*)

Jana Rumminger (*Musawah Project Coordinator*)

Project/Part-time Staff

Shanon Shah Mohd Sidik (*Annual Review, Baraza!*)

Azni Iffah Abdul Aziz (*Legal*)

Noordura Mohd. Din (*Legal*)

Azareena Abdul Aziz (*Public Education*)

Polygamy lead researchers

Prof Norani Othman, Head Researcher (*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*)

Zaidah Mustapha (*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*)

Assoc Prof Dr Shanthi Thambiah (*Universiti Malaya*)

Prof Datin Dr Rashidah Shuib (*Universiti Sains Malaysia*)

Dr Noraida Endut (*Universiti Sains Malaysia*)

Jac Kee

Volunteers

14 students from Sunway College who helped to catalogue books and newspaper clippings

Getting Involved

SIS is a constant hive of activity. We strive to provide a bright and cheerful volunteer environment, and welcome those who share our vision and commitment to make this world a better place, in big and small ways. Volunteers help to accompany SIS clients to court, monitor court proceedings, assist at SIS campaigns and outreach activities, and catalogue books and newspaper clippings.

If you have the right experience or a willing spirit, we welcome your help in research, writing, editing, filing, cataloguing, fundraising, legal advice,

website management, and public outreach events. If you just want to show your support for SIS and its work, become a Friend of SIS (FOSIS) for just RM50 a year.

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