

**Dialogue for the Future between Japan and the Islamic World
(Amman, Jordan, 29 February-1 March 2012)**

Osman Bakar, IAIS Malaysia

Annual dialogues between Japan and the Islamic world on various themes have been going on since 2002 when the maiden dialogue event was held in Manama, the capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The general theme of dialogue among civilisations was adopted for the first series of these dialogue seminars, which came to a close in 2010 with a seminar in Tokyo. For the second decade of this century, a new series of dialogue seminars with a different general theme has been created. The new theme is “Dialogue for the Future between Japan and the Islamic World”.

The dialogue series is the result of Japan’s new initiatives towards establishing “multi-layered relations between Japan and the Islamic world.” The thrust of the dialogue is to discuss social and economic issues that are of common interest to Japan and the Islamic world, especially among intellectuals, youths, and journalists. Japan is not only the main initiator but also the main organiser of these dialogue seminars. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as the permanent secretariat of the dialogue series. Seminar venues have alternated between Tokyo and several capitals of Muslim countries hosting the seminars.

The latest dialogue seminar, which is the second in the new series, was held in Amman, Jordan, from 29 February to 1 March 2012. It was hosted by the University of Jordan. The new series kicked off in March 2011 in Abu Dhabi with Zayed University of the United Arab Emirates serving as the host. The Amman seminar was attended by more than 100 participants, mostly from Jordan and Japan. Its theme was “Capacity Development of the Youth to Build Prospects for their Future”.

Altogether there were five sessions, excluding the opening session and the keynote presentation, and thirty-two speakers. Jordan’s Minister of Culture, HE Professor Salah Jarrar officiated the seminar, and Mr Takamasa Sakurai, a Japanese media producer and author, delivered the keynote address on the topic “To the Youths in the Future: Culture Changes the World”. Speakers came from many countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain. Presentations by speakers from these countries aroused a lot of interest and curiosity as they dealt in detail with various aspects of the Arab Spring phenomenon in their respective countries. The leading Indonesian scholar, Professor Azyumardi Azra, and this writer were the only speakers and participants from Southeast Asia. As in his previous participations in these dialogue series, this writer was a guest of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This time I was invited to speak in two sessions on two different topics. In the first session, I made a presentation on the topic “Tradition Inherited and Recreated across Generations” which the organisers had selected. There were a few other panellists in the session

who dealt with this same topic but from different perspectives. The whole idea of the session was to emphasise the importance of transmitting time tested traditional human values to the future generations and understanding the nature of the challenges unique to each generation posed in the transmission process. My second contribution was in the final session where I presented a paper on the topic “The Arab Spring: Malaysian Perspectives”. Professor Azra complemented my presentation of Southeast Asian voices on the Arab Spring with his articulation of the spectrum of Indonesian responses to this interesting political phenomenon.

Viewed as a whole, the Amman seminar was meant to highlight the role of youth in contemporary Japan and the Islamic world in the light of tradition. In particular, it sought to understand the roles of youth in two different types of phenomena happening on two opposite sides of the world. One was the so-called Arab Spring, a socio-political phenomenon that swept the larger part of the Arab world. The other was the aftermath of a tragic natural catastrophe in Japan, which the Japanese themselves call “the Great Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami”. Japanese speakers one by one spoke of the kind of voluntarism among the youth in response to the tragedy that has not been seen for a long time in post-World War II Japan. They described the voluntarism as simply admirable, which ignited a fresh thinking about the meaning and role of traditional values and institutions in contemporary Japanese society. In their spirit of voluntarism these youths are seen as playing the role of revivers of the Japanese tradition, not unlike the traditional Malay/Indonesian spirit of *gotong royong* – a local conception of sociality based on reciprocity or mutual aid.

Seminar participants were told that the next dialogue seminar will be held in Tokyo sometime in early 2013.

**International Workshop on Faith and Power
(George Town, Penang, Malaysia, 5-6 March 2012)**

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

The workshop was organised by the Noordin Sopiee Chair in Global Studies at Penang’s Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

The speakers were:

- Professor Chandra Muzaffar (USM) and International Movement for a Just World (JUST) – “Faith and Power; Power as a Sacred Trust”
- Professor Wang Gungwu (National University of Singapore) – “Power and Faith in China: Past and Present”
- Professor Kim Yong-Bock (Hanil University, Wanju, South Korea) – “Faith and Power from a Christian Perspective on Liberation”