

and Fitwanita IIUM organised a virtual forum entitled *Wanita & Cabaran Era Pandemik Menurut Perspektif Islam* (Women & Challenges During the Pandemic According to Islamic Perspectives). The forum featured honourable panellists from the University of Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), University of Malaya (UM), and University of Technology MARA (UiTM), namely Professor Dr Saedah Siraj, Associate Professor Dr Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, and Dr Kartini Ilias. During the first round of the discussion, Saedah highlighted the pandemic's damages on women's life by increasing episodes of domestic violence, work overload, depression, and sexual abuse. The data and strategies are likely to be inaccurate and insufficient if Asian women continue to be embarrassed and reluctant to report incidents. In an attempt to untangle the issue, Sharifah stated Islam came to honour, protect, and raise the status of women. She stressed the intellectual capability of women in holding various positions and responsibilities. In response to the moderator's question, Kartini delineated the mental health issue among women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pressure of an undue vicious cycle of burden and stress has been detrimental to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and insomnia. She advised women to look closely at how they deal with emotions in terms of intensity, frequency, and duration. In the second round of discussion, Saedah depicted the role of women as being the spiritual teacher of the household. A woman has the quality of guiding her family to practise positive discipline, focusing on kindness, trust, and connection. Sharifah further mentioned the exemplary women in history: the four ladies of paradise; Khadijah, Fatimah, Maryam, and Asiyah. They have reached perfection through the trials that Allah had bestowed upon them and are worthy of following. At the end of the session, Kartini introduced the ABC Model, which is an acronym for activating events, beliefs, and consequences. It helps build women's awareness of their behaviour triggers and consequences, while belief plays a vital role in managing emotional stress by creating a conditioned response. Two hundred virtual participants attended the forum via zoom and Facebook Live and had over 1000 views overnight.

Webinar: Israel's Attempt at Normalisation in Nusantara (22 July 2021)

Wan Naim Wan Mansor

For the first time, online activism around the globe has driven a groundswell of support for the Palestinian cause, with even many global personalities

and Hollywood celebrities openly chastising Israel for their recent onslaught on Gaza and violence in Jerusalem. Throughout the barrage of international condemnations, however, Israel found an unsuspecting opponent in the form of Malaysian and Indonesian social media users, to the point that official mouthpieces of the IDF and other celebrity proponents of Israel felt the need to directly respond to them. The Malay Archipelago nations, often represented by the three Muslim-majority countries—Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei—have always been ardent supporters of the Palestinian cause. On 15 May, the three nations issued a joint statement condemning “in the strongest terms, the repeated blatant violations and aggressions, carried out by Israelis, targeting civilians.”

Under this backdrop, the IAIS forum featured three eminent speakers: Prof Dr Azyumardi Azra (Syarif Hidayatullah UIN Jakarta), Azmi Abdul Hamid (President of MAPIM), and Assistant Professor Dr Ahmad El-Muhammady (ISTAC-IIUM). Azyumardi, in his presentation, posits that because Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country, gaining its recognition and support has always been a priority for Israel. Nevertheless, Indonesians, both at the level of government and civil society, have consistently opposed having any kind of diplomatic relations with Israel. According to Azyumardi, this is due to Islamic sentiments by its Muslim majority regarding the Palestinian struggle. Azmi, representing the Muslim NGO perspectives, elaborated on the geopolitics surrounding Israel’s tireless attempts to normalise its position among Muslim countries. For the Nusantara countries, the appeal to forge relationships with Israel is mostly related to strategic and security reasons, especially given current developments in Southeast Asia involving China. Nevertheless, Malaysia, in line with other Nusantara nations, remains steadfast in resisting the normalisation of Israel. Ahmad, an expert in terrorism in the Southeast Asian region, recalled the history of Malaysian diplomatic ties with Israel and revealed the not well-known fact that Malaysia (then Malaya) used to have a close relationship with Israel, particularly in the years leading to Malaysia’s Independence in 1957. This relationship, however, did not extend past Independence due to multiple factors, such as government leadership, the opposition of Arab countries, internal oppositions, and geopolitical concerns. Nevertheless, according to Ahmad, these factors may have weakened over time and that Malaysia is now at a new crossroads regarding Israel.