A Short Description of the ISIM

The International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) was founded by the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University and Utrecht University. The Institute is funded, in addition to these latter, by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW&I) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Development Cooperation. The constitutional documents were signed on June 30 of this year.

The ISIM develops and conducts research on social, cultural, economic, political and intellectual developments in the Muslim world and Muslim communities in the West. Although the emphasis is laid upon recent and contemporary developments, historical dimensions are taken into account. The ISIM’s research approaches are expressly interdisciplinary and comparative, covering a broad geographical range encompassing all relevant geographical areas: North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia and the Muslim diaspora in the West.

ISIM sounding board meetings

One apparent expression of the national/international interaction is the ISIM sounding board meetings. The opening day of the Institute is to serve as the first such meeting. With the support of the Minister for Development Cooperation subsequent meetings will take place in cities of the Muslim world with respected centres of learning. These meetings are fundamental to the ISIM for they serve as a medium for introducing the ISIM to relevant scholarly audiences, as well as for reflecting upon institutional plans and policies. The second meeting is scheduled for March 1999 and will take place in Cairo.

Research

Research constitutes the core activity of the ISIM. The Institute follows open and flexible research policies aimed at mobilizing scholarly interest and support at both national and international levels. The ISIM research agenda contains:

- Long-term joint research programmes;
- Ateliers, short-term joint research projects;
- Individual ISIM research projects.

The research is to be executed by the academic staff of ISIM in conjunction with PhD, Post-doctoral and other fellows, who are recruited nationally and internationally. Contractors and contractors comprise the main academic staff of the Institute. The Chair-holders are to select, design, and execute long-term research programmes in consultation with the ISIM Academic Committee and the participating universities and research schools. They cooperate with staff of other national and international institutes, in particular research schools and project-proposing bodies. Suggestions and invitations for research may be made to interested parties through announcements in the ISIM Newsletter. Joint programmes which cover research in the various regions are to be given preference. Application forms and information about the criteria for evaluation and selection will be made available.

Long-term Research Programmes

Long-term research programmes constitute the core of the ISIM research. They will be designed to stimulate interdisciplinary research into all aspects of social, economic, political, and intellectual developments in the Muslim world, particularly those that have so far been under-researched. The programmes are comparative in character and will cover two or more geographical regions of the Muslim world. Each programme consists of a number of thematic sub-programmes. The programmes will be set for a maximum period of five years. The selection, design, and execution of these programmes are the responsibility of the Programme Director, who preferably is an ISIM Chair-holder. PhD students are sponsored within the framework of these programmes.

The output of the programmes will cover PhD theses, monographs, and/or major works summarizing the research. A report, translating the results for a wider audience, with recommendations for future policies and research, will be made available.

Ateliers

ISIM organizes ateliers: short-term research projects in which a small number of researchers work closely together for a maximum period of three months. The ateliers are designed to stimulate cooperation between scholars from different disciplines, regional specializations, and scholarly traditions. They aim at the strengthening of interregional cooperation in research.

Individual Research Projects

ISIM offers scholars of international standing the opportunity to engage in research work in the Netherlands for a maximum of three months. These distinguished fellows will promote cooperation with leading figures and institutes in the field of the study of Muslim societies and communities. Junior researchers who have demonstrated the ability to conduct innovative research will be given the opportunity to engage in individual research.

Academic Staff

There will be a nucleus of three ISIM Chair-holders who form the backbone of the Institute, headed by the Academic Director. These full-time professors will be appointed at participating universities in the Netherlands. The ISIM Chair will be created to support and benefit from the worldwide experience of the participating universities/research schools. The ISIM Chair will develop and manage a research network and supervise the ISIM’s activities in all its aspects. In close consultation with the Academic Committee and the participating research schools and institutes the ISIM, the Academic Director and the other ISIM Chair-holders will select, design, and execute research. In addition they will coach, tutor, and supervise the ISIM students at the Advanced and PhD Degree levels. Some may be involved in supporting the educational programmes at the participating universities/research schools. They will supervise, when necessary, visiting fellows and other guests of the Institute in their research.

Fellowships

A constant influx of researchers serves to ensure that the horizons of the Institute are constantly broadened and that high academic standards are upheld. The ISIM will support research fellows at various levels and in a number of different disciplines, regional specializations, and scholarly traditions. They aim at the strengthening of interregional cooperation in research.

A small office staff supports the director and Working Group. Dr D. Douwes (Leiden University) acts as academic coordinator and ISIM Newsletter editor and Drs M.E. Bakker as administrative coordinator. The ISIM wishes to strengthen existing library collections in the Netherlands related to Islam and Muslim societies and communities, in view of improving the availability of reference and research material on recent and contemporary developments in this field. The Institute intends to establish library/documentation exchange agreements with universities in the Muslim world. The aim is to exchange costly works of reference for new publications that will be either made available to scholars outside the Muslim world. ISIM has it own website (http://isim.leidenuniv.nl) and a highly-qualified database on the development of Islam in the modern world. The Institute will be available to all interested parties through the ISIM Website, which can also be found on the ISIM Website.

Outreach activities

In addition to the academia, ISIM addresses itself to non-university educational institutes and public bodies. Dissemination of information to society at large is a vital aspect ISIM’s public service function. Expertise on contemporary Islamic issues is to be made available to all, training and research courses for those who require knowledge about Islam and Muslim societies and communities in their work, and support for institutes which initiate training for those who have frequent contacts with Muslims in their profession.

Organization

The Board is the highest authority of the ISIM. It is responsible for establishing strategy and approving activity plans, budgets, and accounts. The Board consists of the presidents of the participating universities. For the year 1998 the Board has appointed Prof. W.A.L. Stokhof as Chairman to advise and provide advice on the strategies to be adopted. The Board will also be appointed by the Board of Partners on June 30, 1998.

Working Group

The Director is assisted by a Working Group consisting of:

- Prof. E.J. Zurcher (Utrecht University)
- Prof. E.J. van der Veer (University of Amsterdam)
- Prof. P.T. van der Veer (Leiden University)

Apart from the drafting of documents, they are involved in the search for an Academic Director and in the formation of the Academic Committee and the International Advisory Committee, which will be appointed by the Board of Partners on June 30, 1998.

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The Academic Committee will advise the Board and the Director on all academic matters, in particular on the design and execution of the research. The International Advisory Committee will be to advise the Institute in society and to advise on the strategies to be adopted by the Institute in its national and international environment.

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