The third Sounding Board Meeting of the ISIM’s Rights at Home Project was explicitly meant as a Southeast Asian regional consultative meeting. Forty participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand attended, including the Malaysian hosts Chandra Muzaffar, president of JUST, Farish Noor, member of JUST, and Zainah Anwar, executive director of SIS. The ‘Rights at Home’ project team, with its primary consultant Abdullahi an-Na’im (Emory University, Atlanta) and programme coordinator Laila al-Zwaini (ISIM), was joined by Muhammad Khalid Masud (ISIM Academic Director) and Martin van Bruinissen (ISIM Chair at Utrecht University). Cassandra Balchin (Pakistan) and Ebrahim Moosa (USA), members of the Rights at Home Advisory Board, were also present. Following the concept of the first two Sounding Board Meetings in Yemen and Tanzania, the Malaysia meeting brought together representatives from different regions, genders, and professional backgrounds, such as human rights activists, scholars, ulama, social welfare officers, teachers, lawyers, and children’s rights advocates, to discuss themes related to Rights at Home from different perspectives, and to jointly explore strategies and activities to promote the positions of Muslim women and children. In the first sessions, presentations by participants from the Southeast Asian region aimed at giving a general impression of the situation of women’s and children’s rights in their respective countries. Those presentations were enlivened more than once by anecdotes of personal experiences with gender and power relations in the family, at school, at work, and in public areas like the shari’a courts. The discussions that followed did not only elaborate on the factors in culture, religion, and upbringing that curtail women’s and children’s rights in the different Islamic settings.

The ISIM project ‘Rights at Home: An Approach to the Internalization of Human Rights in Family Relations in Islamic Communities’ convened its third Sounding Board Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 15 to 17 January 2003. This meeting was organized in close collaboration with its Malaysian counterparts: the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) and Sisters in Islam (SIS), an NGO committed to promoting the rights of women in the framework of Islam. Earlier sounding boards were convened in Yemen and Tanzania (See ISIM Newsletter 10, pg. 4, and 11, pg. 4).

One of the actions in the plan that will be taken into the next phase is the development of a website for an Islamic discourse on human rights. The aim of this Rights at Home website is to make easily accessible selected information from a wide range of sources – from articles, training manuals, guides, theory, methodology, position papers, books, and case law to a forum focusing on human rights within a progressive Islamic framework – with particular attention to the rights of women and children. In this way the website will not only provide powerful advocacy resources for community-based organizations, NGOs, grassroots activists, and individuals, but will constitute in itself a way to intensify their networking, lobbying, and mutual aid activities.

Another activity proposed is taking human rights messages right to the homes of Islamic families. Popular media, like television dramas, comics, novels, political literature, and syndicated newspaper columns can be utilized to this end. The host organization in Malaysia, Sisters in Islam, for example, has experience in this field: it published easy-to-read, low budget booklets in question-and-answer format, illustrated with cartoons.