

## ISLAMIC NGO AS ANOTHER ACTOR OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THE CASE OF PERTUBUHAN IKRAM MALAYSIA (IKRAM)

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### ABSTRACT

*The role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the development of society has been the focus of academic study since the nineteenth century based on the positive contributions of the private sector in spearheading the general and specific roles in the society. The post-Cold War world has witnessed the emerging of NGOs as an alternative to the states due to the liberalization of global economy worldwide. It was since then the academic interest on this phenomenon has risen in particular in the late 1980s when NGOs has managed to replace governments' role in reaching out to the people, or in other cases becoming the voice of the people before the governments. This study aims to explore the dynamic roles of NGOs in leading the change and reforms in the modern society and how Islamic organization could fit into the framework by critically looking into the experience of Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia (IKRAM), a Malaysian-based Islamic organization as a case study. While the results reveal some positive impacts on the society, they also exhibit some challenges and conflicts when the evolution reaches certain stages of time and space, illustrating the dynamic nature of IKRAM as both an Islamic organization and NGO with respect to strategies, resources and strategic actions.*

**Keywords:** *civil society, faith-based organization, da'wah, Islamic Representative Council (IRC), Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia (IKRAM), NGO, Pertubuhan Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)*

### Introduction

In the last few decades, the contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in development and reform agenda has gained recognition, both locally and internationally. The recognition of NGOs is through their engagement in extensive array of activities including philanthropic work for those left out of the developmental process as well as efforts in addressing problems of environmental destruction and other negative consequences of economic development, and efforts to institutionalize popular political participation (Shigetomi, 2002). Some view that NGOs play more effective role in development and humanitarian aids than their official counterparts (Pearce, 1993: 222). Extensive studies have shown that religious practices usually encourage development, charity and generosity. Therefore, if faith motivates people to plant seeds in goodness and social justice, would it pay for NGOs to align with a particular religious thought and practice to be agents of change in their sphere? This can be an

interesting issue to consider when deciding on the roles and actions of any NGOs.

NGOs appear to be important actors in many developing countries. NGOs are usually characterized as independent from the government, involved in non-profit making activities and fight for specific causes. Many agree that the definition of NGO is very broad and debatable, however, having these basic characteristics will make an NGO easily identifiable. Many scholars agree that NGOs play their roles as agents of change in the society based on their interests, ideologies and objectives (Klugman 2000; Siddiqui 1994). In the last few decades, non-governmental organizations and the private sectors had a great impact on the development process in a society, particularly in eradicating poverty, establishing learning centers and looking after the people's welfare. The roles of these organizations often times complement the official development assistance plan, though at times the NGOs do act as critics and watchdogs. In summary, NGOs are people-centered, and

created to expand the capacities of people (Korten, 1990). The roles of NGOs have experienced certain evolution and expansion, based on the broad field of development and positive values of the organizations in bringing change into the target groups. Some organizations may become more influential when the contributions leave significant impacts and changes. This phenomenon should be studied and analyzed in order to improve their standing in the society.

It is based on the aforementioned rationale that this study is directed with the aim to analyze the role of NGOs as agents of change in the holistic development and reform framework. This study will explore the role of NGOs as key players in the development discourses and the process of reform in one of the Asian countries, Malaysia. As the case study, the paper will critically appraise the role of one of the leading Islamic organizations in Malaysia, 'Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia' (IKRAM) established in 2010. Focusing on IKRAM, the study will evaluate its dynamic participation in the holistic process of development in Malaysia. The study seeks to measure the evolution of the NGO as an important actor in the international politics and developmental process based on religious ideology.

Similarly, the reason for this is that the process of development and reform in the developing countries urgently needs for an active and effective participation from the civil societies and NGOs. However, the study will show that one of the most convenient ways of ensuring active and effective participation is to plan the activities from the faith-based holistic perspective. The case studies in this research will show the extent of dynamic NGO participations in leading the change in society. Through micro-sociological case study on IKRAM, this paper will analyze the developmental processes and efforts towards a holistic reform in Malaysia. For this reason, a conceptual framework research design was adopted to explore the depth of existing knowledge on NGOs, their forms and roles. The study will involve both primary and secondary sources as well as interviews to gather empirical data and specific details of particular topics.

The study employs a case study approach in order to critically appraise and analyze the role of NGOs as an agent of change by focusing on IKRAM. According to Bell (2005: 10), case studies may be carried out to follow up and to put flesh on the bones of a survey. They can also precede a survey and be used as a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation, but the majority is carried out as freestanding exercises. Researchers identify an 'instance', which could be the introduction of a new way of working, the way an organization adapts to a new role, or any innovation or stage of development in an institution. Consequently, the study is divided into two main chapters; chapter one deals with the analytical framework of NGOs as agents of change; chapter two will focus on IKRAM as an agent

of change in Malaysia.

### **NGOs as Agents of Change: Understanding NGOs**

Academic studies on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) movements have increased in recent years (Klugman, 2000; Siddiqui, 1994). Debates and discussions (don't they mean almost the same – avoid redundancy) now appear in many literatures and textbooks on international relations and development studies (Edwards & Hulme, 1992; Clark, 1992. Ahmed and Potter (2006:9) characterize this field as 'new trends of international politics'. Defining the term NGO turns out to be a key problem in determining what they are and what they do.

The term NGO was first coined by the United Nations in 1945 (Omar, 2007: 1040) which defines NGO as 'any international organization which is not established by inter-governmental agreement shall be considered as an NGO' in Resolution 288 (X) of Economy and Social Council United Nations (Union of International Associations, 2012). The term NGO helped the United Nations differentiate in its charter the intergovernmental agencies from private organizations and their respective participation rights (Omar 2007: 1040). Ahmed and Potter (2006) note that the only constraints are that an NGO cannot be profit making; neither can it advocate the use of violence nor be a political party (Ahmed & Potter, 2006: 9).

Demirovic (2003: 214) defines NGO as a form of self-organization with the purpose of articulating particular interests and organizing around particular issues in a wide variety of fields such as education, women's right, food and water supply, environmental protection, health and transport. This definition provides a broader perspective, highlighting an NGO both as an organization and a movement, which particularly focusing on the role of NGOs as grassroots organizations implementing particular interests and activities.

In tandem, Fernando and Heston (1997: 10) agree that despite the lack of consensus about the meaning of the term NGO, a large literature has been produced on NGOs and many concerning their roles, as if there were a true and authentic NGO, consistent over time and context. For the purpose of this study, neither government agencies nor corporations are NGOs. The definition also excludes political parties, religious groups per se, hospitals and schools, which better fit the broader category of non-profit organizations. Finally, the term is not as broad as non-state actor as conventionally used in international relations (Ahmed & Porter 2006: 8).

### **NGOs and Civil Society Development**

Since the NGO's movements within the civil society framework act as agents of change of the bigger society, it is important to understand the relation between them.

Civil Society is a sphere situated between the state and the market which can serve as a promoter of democratic values, provide models of active citizenship and temper the power of the state (Kuchukeeva & O'Loughlin, 2003: 557-58). This sphere, Neace (1999: 150) argues, is made up of autonomous, freely chosen, intermediary organizations that bridges the gap between the state and individuals. Civil society also functions to make democracy work (Hale 2002) and provides opportunities for individuals to practise citizenship (Salmenniemi, 2005: 737).

In addition to that, Taylor (2006: 196) breaks down the democracy functions of civil society in facilitating civic engagement and participation into three aspects: first, civil society should teach citizens 'norms and values' synonymous with democracy; secondly, that 'autonomous voluntary associations' should act as a counterweight to the state and thereby hold it to account; and thirdly, 'autonomous voluntary associations' should be capable of working in a partnership arrangement, serving not only as a 'watchdog to the state, but also as a resource' in developing democracy.

Civil society works hard to promote political and social change. In achieving this goal, the civil society must be based on a common identity developed over time by participants in collective actions, and regular interaction with others outside of their organization (Crotty 2009: 86). Therefore, as the key players in the civil society movement, NGOs' and other pressure groups' activities should be consistent with the roles mentioned by Taylor and Crotty. NGOs are part of the bigger circle of civil society, which comprises clubs, religious institutions, trade unions and others. The civil society can contribute to change, as highlighted by Habermas, using the 'influence' to win the public support for their arguments and bully the political system which consists of bureaucracy, parliament and government (1992: 34).

Similarly, NGOs also play important roles in international relations and politics. In recent years, other than traditional roles namely relief, economic and social development roles, NGOs had expanded into political roles such as advocacy (including lobbying), agenda setting and public education, monitoring of international agreements, and interacting with international organizations. Figure 1 illustrates the key roles of NGOs as agents of change. Economic liberation from structural dependence in post-colonial milieu and the increased role of NGOs as global phenomena predated the end of Cold War and the recent attention focused on civil society and processes of democratization. NGOs are recognized for the important roles they play in the economic and social development planning, relief and charity, and providing room for complementing tasks. The NGOs sometimes become critics and watchdogs to the official governments.

### NGOs as Relief Agents

Relief aid is provided in conjunction with charitable and community-based development activities. The relief and charitable development play an important role in promoting justice, meeting the community needs, defending and advocating interest and upholding the development agenda. In the eighteenth century, the anti-slavery movement was founded in England, which led to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 (Ahmed, 2006: 38). Over the years, NGOs played active roles during emergency situations including relief from famine and disaster and relieving wound and disease. The scope of relief aid was also combined with religious and social work to include eradicating illiteracy and education, socio-psychological aid, eradicating poverty, sustainable development and advocacy work.

Based on practical and historical accounts, with a few exceptions, the relief aid and charitable practices and movements are normally faith and religion based, motivated by the religious principles which encourage the act of charitable and humanitarian giving. Ashley Tedham (2012: 5) argues that faith-based organizations (FBOs) are becoming increasingly dominant in the world of humanitarian aid and relief. World Vision International, a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization, for instance, which was founded in 1950, had in early days of its establishment sought to help children orphaned in the Korean War. It then progressed to the development of child sponsorship program and later has broadened its focus to encompass developing families; building sustainable futures and conducting advocacy works to ensure international development is fostered by others (Tedham, 2012: 10).

Islamic relief aid organizations, as another example are also increasingly playing an effective role in relief aid missions. It can be traced back to the Islamic tradition in the first century. Singer (2008) points out that the traditions of *sadaqa* (voluntary charity) have existed since the early days of the Islamic state of Medina. Later the *zakat* (obligatory charity) - which became obligatory in 662 A.D - and *waqf* (endowment) became important charity mechanisms among the *Muslim Ummah* (Muslim nation) (Petersen, 2012:129). Islamic Relief (IR) for example, is well known as the world largest Islamic humanitarian aid organization with a total annual budget of USD\$60 million (Petersen, 2012: 145). Founded in 1984, IR focuses its efforts on six main sectors: sustainable livelihoods; education, health and nutrition; orphan sponsorship and child welfare; water and sanitation as well as emergency relief and disaster preparedness (Tedham, 2012: 8-9).

### Economic and Social Development Roles of NGOs

Analysis in regards to the active role played by some NGOs in economic and social development needs to focus on the development activities initiated by NGOs in the selected (developing) countries. Ranging from the

short-term relief to the long-term support for sustainable economic and social development, numerous NGOs, are taking active part nowadays in societal changes. Poverty, economic inequality, unemployment, drugs abuse, moral decay, illiteracy and other social problems are the causes, which have summoned NGOs into the battle. For instance, several NGOs focus on economic development programs such as developing agriculture villages, building factories, providing micro-credit services and other investments to create more jobs in the community. Such programs may be implemented in times of peace or even in places of turmoil as in war torn Gaza and Afghanistan.

Shigetomi (2002: 10) argues that there are other systems for the distribution of resources in the society besides the two orthodox actors, namely the state and the market. For example, in the Chinese community, they often form associations of people from the same province or the same clan, through which they give charity to help out the poor members of the society. Increasingly, many affluent countries send their agencies and NGOs to the poor countries. For instance, USA deploys its USAID assistance, among others, for socioeconomic relief by providing technical advice, training, scholarships, commodities and financial assistance (USAID 2012). A numbers of NGOs focus on developing credit unions, cooperatives, enterprises and educational institutions as their show of support to economic development programs. This includes Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Kenya Rural Enterprise Program in South Africa and Zambuko in Zimbabwe. TUSCON, for instance, become a leading NGO of business and industrialist union to strengthen the economy in Turkey.

The arena for the NGOs to play their role in providing services to the people is indeed in great demand. In order to identify the economic space for NGOs, Shigetomi (2002) suggests that it is necessary to look at the flaws in the three existing sectors namely state, market and the community. When the systems of market, state and community fail to perform their resource distributing functions properly, there is room for NGOs to emerge as a fourth category of agents in the economic space. Social development agenda is part and parcel of many NGOs in the line of business. Edi Suharto (2010) points out that social development is a development approach, which aims to increase the human quality in a holistic way, fulfilling the human needs from physical to the social aspects. Ranging from the basic human needs for body, mind, heart and soul as well as social development which encompasses support activities for health, security, family building, interracial and interreligious building programs, orphan care, disabilities care, battling social problems and many more. In some Islamic societies, practising the concept of *Sadaqah* (voluntary charity) and *Zakat* (obligatory charity) helps as it works as an effective economic distributive operator for helping the underprivileged (Shigetomi, 2002: 11).

## NGOs and Politics

Ahmed and Potter (2006: 44) suggest that relief and development works tend to be regarded as non-political by government and the public alike. As they point out, many NGOs tend to see their work as specifically technical and therefore, not aimed at challenging the political, economic and social arrangement beyond their line of business. Increasingly, the approach is tending to be different when NGOs begin to define their development agenda in political rather than in economic term. For decades, NGO have played a key role in the development of civil societies. As a third wave and non-state actor, civil society participation in the political reform was greatly influenced by the political dynamics and continues to be phenomenon in many developing countries. The participation of NGOs in the political activities includes engagement in public education and awareness, advocacy and lobbying; and agenda setting activities which intended to influence the policies of governments and corporations. However, sometimes it is argued that NGOs do engage directly in politics and elections (Maran, 1998: 222).

## Conclusion on The Role of NGOs

To conclude, we might agree as afore-mentioned, the NGO definition varies. It can however, be generally termed as a form of self-organization with the purpose of articulating particular interests and issues. NGOs as presented in the previous paragraphs, play different roles in relief, social and economic development as well as political, each from its own angle based on various factors and considerations. Some NGOs have gained recognition and support from their home government and public; but some experience challenges either from state apparatus or other international organizations. NGOs from all spectrum of organizations are nevertheless gaining momentum, becoming a force to be reckoned with, and working together hand-in-hand to shape a better society.

In the following chapters, a critical and descriptive assessment will be made on how a faith-based organization could play its role within the framework of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and civil society frontier contributors of the development agenda since the early days of its establishments. This can be clearly seen from the brief explanation of the movement's discourse and activities in the subsequent paragraphs. The ensuing section will also embark from the period prior to the establishment of IKRAM) by looking at its origin until it evolved into an Islamic NGO. This is important to understand the philosophical root of IKRAM and its dynamism throughout the formative years as part of the effort to understand on how the organization could whether fit it or not into the framework of NGO as discussed earlier.

## Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia : A Case Study

### IKRAM: The Genesis

IKRAM is, but, a legacy of the Islamic revivalism phenomenon in Malaysia during the 70s. It rooted back to the Malaysian Muslim students' movement in the UK known as Islamic Representative Council (IRC) established towards the end of 1975 (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 9). Significant number of Malaysian Muslim students who had been sent abroad to further their studies as part of government policy after the 1969 racial riot, were exposed to the *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) movements and organizations, which were mainly based on the doctrine of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or the Pakistani Jamaat Islamiyah in the UK during that period (Chandra Muzaffar, 1988). It was during their brief stay in the UK that these students started to create their own ideals in spreading the doctrine taught by the MB and Jamaat movements amongst other Malaysian students (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 9). When the IRC members returned from the United Kingdom, together with other local and overseas graduates who shared similar MB's and Jamaat's ideals, they formed an informal organization known as the 'IRC Society' in Malaysia (Siti Hamisah, 2006: 153).

IRC society or what its member normally called themselves as '*al-Jamaah*' (the group) began to gain its momentum after the return of Malaysian Muslim graduates from other parts of the world who were exposed to the similar MB and Jamaat's vision like them. It was in Malaysia that these graduates from the United States, Australia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, India, Kuwait and many others began to form a larger community of MB-inspired informal organization to spread the Islamic *da'wah* and the doctrine of MB (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 9). Zaid Kamarudin (personal communication, 26 December 2012) explains that their common ground was having been under the guidance of and in the *tarbiyah* system of the Muslim Brotherhood members at their respective places of study. The collaboration particularly in *tarbiyah* activities was a milestone of the movement-oriented Islamic revivalism in Malaysia during the period of 70s and 80s, especially in campuses. Initially, most of the members of the IRC society were actively doing their *da'wah* activities through Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) or Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, an Islamic NGO at the forefront then while some others through Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS), an Islamic political party. Together they worked to build the ummah through *tarbiyah* activities (Siti Hamisah, 2006: 153-154).

In 1988, the IRC society members realized there was a need to rethink their position and roles to be able to effectively contribute to the *ummah* (Siti Hamisah, 2006: 154). Discussions with ABIM's and PAS' leadership led to a decision for the best of all involved – the formation of a new NGO. On 27 July 1990, the *Pertubuhan Jamaah Islah Malaysia* (JIM) was registered. Saari Sungib, one of the IRC spokesperson in the UK was

elected as its first president. The establishment of JIM was not to compete, instead to compliment other NGOs in the Islamic works. JIM being moderate and professional, with its unique *tarbiyah* approach was an alternative platform in facing the negative system in the modern society (Perspektif 1991: 20). Islamic revival during the 1990s needed Islamic workers working from all angles with various approaches. Diversity was the keyword in order to reach all strata of the society. According to Zaid Kamaruddin (Personal Communication, 26 December 2012), as a national NGO with 14 state branches and was active in more than 50 districts, JIM was able to position itself as the main *ummatic* reference besides other Islamic organizations.

With the motto "(Together) With Islam (We) Build the Society", JIM focused on reforming the society based on the Muslim Brotherhood's *manhaj taghyir* (means of reform), which starts with the building of individuals, then the families and ultimately the society (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 10). Championing the human capital development, JIM used the *tarbiyah* modules of the Muslim Brotherhood to develop more than 10,000 of its members. During the 1998 *Reformasi* era, the gross misconduct of the powers that be, the sacking and mistreatment of Anwar Ibrahim by the then Prime Minister had left JIM with no choice but to be involved in the civil society movement (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 10). However, according to Zaid Kamaruddin (Personal Communication, 26 December 2012), since 2003, there were series of discussions on how to best position the vast resources of other like-minded IRC Society platforms, namely *Ikatan Siswazah Muslimin Malaysia* (ISMA) a club for graduates, MUSLEH for the development of Islamic education, Medical Interest Group (MIG) and AUSIS (alumni of the Australasian Muslim Students). In 2006, it was agreed that an umbrella body be formed to lead the change and reform in Malaysia with the aim of consolidating all resources under one organization (Mohd Parid, 2010: 5). Alas, a non-profit Islamic NGO for *da'wah*, welfare and *tarbiyah* was registered on 22 October 2010 (IKRAM, 2010). Thus, IKRAM was born.

### IKRAM Ideology

As suggested by Zaid Kamaruddin (2012:5), IKRAM adopts the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology of *manhaj taghyir* (means of change) in its reform agenda. Similarly, IKRAM's first elected president, Mohd Parid (2010), in explaining the goals of IKRAM, said:

"The emergence of IKRAM is actually positioning us in the phase of societal reform (*Mihwar Ijtima'ie wa Sya'bi*), the phase of going into the society, interacting with the masses... We are broadening up our *da'wah* and Islamic influence, to develop the support and loyalty of *Muslim Ummah* towards Islam and its leadership, to stand strong as the reference of *Ummah* and to spearhead reform and change".

Mohd Parid (2010: 38) further emphasizes that: "IKRAM's agenda is to execute reform and change, to change the history, to change today's reality into a reality when Islam will dominate again. This ummah will be the best *Ummah*, this country will be a developed and prosperous country, the world with peace and order and Islamic civilization will glory again". IKRAM's change process is 'bottom-up' starting with the building of individuals, family and society, then to reform the government, to liberate the country from foreign occupation, to establish Islamic state and finally to establish *Ustaziatul Alam* (Islamic World Order). Non-violence, *da'wah* (calling people) and consensus approaches, among others, are its mean of change. This needs an organization that is *syumuliyah* (comprehensive) and *mu'asiroh* (contemporary).

Zaid Kamaruddin (2011: 34) explains that IKRAM is characterized by these traits: (1) its stand is based on the *manhaj taghyir* (means of change) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and a perfect *kitaran amal* (work-cycle); (2) it gives special attention to *tarbiyah* and self development of the members and; (3) the importance of *tarbiyah* levels of members; (4) consolidation of all resources (members and institutions) and assets; (5) very broad international networks; and (6) new entity with no liability. IKRAM was established on a strong foundation with ready resources - assets and members.

IKRAM's *tanzim* (organization structure) is lead by its highest authority, the legislative body and consultative council known as the *Dewan Perwakilan Nasional* (National Representative Council), which comprises of 121 members. The executive body, the *Jawatankuasa Pusat* (Central Committees), which act as the executive body of the organization, comprises of the President, Deputy President, two Vice Presidents, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Treasurer, Head of Women wing and twelve additional central committee members. The President is the highest leader/position in IKRAM who heads the implementation of its policies and planning. Currently, IKRAM is lead by its first president, Dr Parid Sheikh Ahmad. While Zaid Kamaruddin heads the secretariat office, the IKRAM secretary-general manages the Headquarters in Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia. IKRAM leaders come from diverse educational backgrounds, with different expertise. This is the essence of IKRAM being the all-encompassing organization, able to tackle various issues of the *ummah*.

As with memberships of IKRAM, Zaid Kamarudin (2012b) explains that members of IKRAM are categorized mainly based on their *tarbiyah* and commitment levels, gauged from their participations in programs of the *tarbiyah* modules. Every member has an equal opportunity to climb the 'membership ladder' with the first level consisting of ordinary members (normally new members), followed by active and core member

levels (IKRAM, 2010). The higher the level, the greater responsibility a member has to shoulder in realizing the objectives of the reform agenda.

#### IKRAM Roles as NGO and its Reform Agenda

As suggested by Mohd Parid (2012), the *tarbiyah* is IKRAM's core business. *Tarbiyah* is the process of preparing the members to be able to communicate with people, to lead the reform agenda. In the *tarbiyah* system of IKRAM, four prerequisites for its success are: (1) *murabbi* (*usrah* leader and educator); (2) *mutarabbi* (the group members); (3) *manhaj* (syllabus) and; (4) *bi'ah* (surroundings). The fulfilment of these requisites will ensure that IKRAM will reap the desired fruits of *tarbiyah*, which are the human resources who will be part of the reform agenda (Mohd Parid, 2010: 56).

The famous saying of '*Tarbiyah* is not everything, but everything begins with *tarbiyah*' amongst IKRAM members is the cardinal principle of IKRAM members which implies the importance of *tarbiyah* in preparing the right mindset, inculcating the Islamic values, to lead the change (Mohd Parid, 2010: 54). Mohd Parid (2012) further demonstrates that clear a understanding of Islam, positive leadership qualities and commitment; and strategic actions are the expected key value results of *tarbiyah*, and with the organization's ideology and methodology, IKRAM is ready to be at the forefront. It has been implied by Mohamed Hatta (2010: 98) that IKRAM's ideology and methodology of change and reform are adopted by its affiliates. These organizations' affiliations are identifiable by their ideology.

#### IKRAM and Education

In its social reform agenda, like some other NGOs, IKRAM puts significant emphasis on the field of education. Education in general is a continuous process in developing patterns of thinking and characteristics in the target groups, and therefore, is limitless. Islamic education is an added value to the aforesaid process where it is a continuous process in developing Islamic thinking and characteristics (*aqliyah wa nafsiyah islamiyah*) in perfecting the best moral character (*makarimul akhlaq*) (Musleh, 2012). In the formal educational system, MUSLEH, an educational agency under IKRAM continues the legacy of its predecessor JIM, pioneered an integrated Islamic education system, which runs 35 private Islamic schools nationwide. Their achievements have been a benchmark for private Islamic schools with integrated curriculum. The curriculum emphasizes students excellence in both the academic and religious subjects. The schools have shown great performance despite of their independency of the state fund (Zalmiah: 2001, 2007). Similarly, Islamic Pre-schools and kindergartens with IKRAM's branding have been set up to serve children's development and educational needs. There are now hundreds of these centers, owned and run either privately or by IKRAM.

Concurrently, Sharul Aman (Personal Communication,

19 October 2013), who is responsible of the IKRAM youth bureau and IKRAM students' recruitment since the establishment of IKRAM, argues that students and youths are a country's assets. They are the leaders of tomorrow. It is only right that they be given special attention. History has shown that most great leaders were once student leaders. The students' platform, IKRAMSiswa, set up on local campuses with IKRAM's aspirations, emulates its activities at students level (Sharul Aman, Personal Communication, 19 October 2013). Students abroad too, have similar opportunities to emulate IKRAM's aspirations at their respective places of study, by setting up IKRAM overseas students chapters. Among the more active ones are IKRAM United Kingdom and Eire, IKRAM Club (Egypt), Amir (Japan, Korea and China), Alif (Republic Czech), Azam (Russia), AUSIS (Australia and New Zealand) and MISG (United States). This is to ensure the continuity of IKRAM's thoughts and aspirations (Sharul Aman, Personal Communication, 2013).

#### IKRAM and Community Services

Alias Othman (2010: 2-3) agrees that one-way of serving the public is through medical and public health services. IKRAM establishes 'medical entities' to promote healthy lifestyle, educate medical practitioners and provide medical services to the public. Medical Interest Group (MIG), an agency under IKRAM was established as a platform for the medical entities to provide healthcare services and medical sciences education. In its website, An-Nur Specialist Hospital paved a landmark success of IKRAM in medical sector (An-Nur, 2012). Initially, before IKRAM was established, An-Nur Specialist Clinic was set up in 2001 in Bangi, and four years later, the clinic was expanded to a 32-bedded private hospital. MIG Chief Executive Officer, Shaharom Shariff (Personal Communication, 28 September 2010) explains that An-Nur Specialist Hospital was integrated into IKRAM under MIG, thus became a landmark achievement in incorporating the spiritual aspect in a hospital, where Islamic practice and ethics are the norms.

IKRAM members who are Cardiologists, Psychiatrists, Anaesthesiologists, Surgeons, Paeditricians, Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Dermatologists and Family Physicians contribute in their own ways towards the success of the hospital and clinics with more than five polyclinics serving the public (An-Nur, 2012). In 2014, An-Nur is expected to own a new 100-bedded hospital under its Bangi Medical City project. Fauziah Hasan, the Chairperson of Medical Interest Group Sdn Bhd (2001- present) (Personal Communication, 28 September 2012) acknowledges that this hospital will be a beacon of Islamic course in providing health care and also the crucible of the past glorious Islamic Medical Sciences and holistic Islamic medicine through its academic endeavor. Simultaneously, according to Hadzri Hasmoni (Personal Communication, 20 October 2012), a leading member of IKRAMHealth, another medical based NGO under IKRAM, the NGO also plays its role in training young doctors and medical practitioners;

providing public services and disaster relief; and organizing health talks and career guidance. With respect to public services, IKRAMHealth also organizes health carnivals offering free health screenings, talks and consultations.

IKRAM also plays an active role in serving the needs of those inflicted by catastrophe (Nahar Mohd Nor, Personal Communication, 20 November 2012). Under the banner of 'i-Bantu', IKRAM contributes to the emergency relief and aids. 'Disaster and Emergency Relief Unit' (DERU) is a special unit under 'IKRAM Community Service Bureau' rescuing and aiding the victims of floods, fire and landslides. Where disaster occurs, IKRAM will be among the first to render assistance. *Rayuan Ramadhan* and *Qurban Kasih Ummah* (QKU) are annual projects to seek donations for the poor and the needy across the Archipelago region, Palestine and Syria (IKRAM, 2012). In the same manner, as a community service, IKRAM collaborates with IKRAMHealth to give health talks and free health screening as well as organize 'Sunathon', a free circumcision service for children from poor families (IKRAM, 29 November 2010).

Realizing that youths are part of the human capital of any community, IKRAM initiated its own avenue to attract youth to the organization. Accordingly, a semi-autonomous wing for IKRAM youth called GEMA was established with the aims to spread the teaching of Islam, educate the youths in the community and recruit new members to IKRAM. GEMA President, Amir Rashid (Personal Communication, 19 October 2013) and its secretary general, Wan Muhammad (Personal Communication, 19 October 2013) explain that GEMA is IKRAM youth platform. To attract youths with diverse interests and talents, GEMA focuses on four sections; sport and recreation, young parent development, financial planning and advocacy of Muslim youths in Malaysia. Similarly, GEMA Football Club attracts the young generations through friendly matches and soccer leagues scheduled every month (Liga Jelajah Gema, 2012).

Similarly, IKRAM also put its emphasize on teenagers' development as part of its dakwah and tarbiyyah mission. In accomplishing the mission, IKRAM established its teenagers' wing called IKRAMTeens. In its website, IKRAMTeens appear to be as an exclusive club for teenagers, catering to the needs of the 13 to 17 year olds, boys and girls. IKRAMTeens, formerly known as Kelab Remaja JIM was officially launched in 2010 (IKRAMTeens, 2012). IKRAMTeens aims to mould teenagers with good Islamic characters and high leadership qualities through comprehensive, contemporary, balanced and continuous guidance to be able to benefit the society and the country (IKRAMTeens, 2012). To achieve this goal, its activities are based on several key aspects: character, knowledge, academic excellence, life skills development, leader and leadership, IT and media literacy, camping and outdoor

games, sport and recreation, entertainment, arts and culture, survival skills, writing and publication, ummah issues, interracial and interreligious interactions, enjoin goodness and forbid evils, and mosque-friendly teens (Sharul aman, Personal Communication, 19 October 2013).

Sharul Aman, (Personal Communication, 19 October 2013) further explains that the *Keindahan Bersama-Mu* (KBM), a motivational program as one of IKRAMTeens pilot projects to call teenagers to Islam. *Remaja Raikan Ramadhan* (3R) (Muslim Youths Celebrating Ramadhan) is IKRAM's Ramadhan trademark program for teens. During school breaks, training camps and short programs are organized in almost all localities where IKRAMTeens exist (IKRAMTeen, 2012). As appeared on its official website, among the yearly programs organized by IKRAMTeens are the '*Program Dua Tahun Pelajar Cemerlang*' (PRODUCE) or 'Two-years excellent Students Program', a two year teen development program: The series begin with '*Ekspedisi Remaja Kental*' (X-REK) or 'Adventurous Youths Expedition'; '*Ekspedisi Remaja Tahan Lasak*' (X-PERT) or 'Extreme Youths Expedition'; 'LEADERS', 'X-CELL', '*Madarasatul Hayah IKRAM*' (MHI), a month long program for school leavers and finally 'ERAT' in preparation for life in college (IKRAMTeens, 2012).

Taking into the consideration that science and technology are prime necessities in the current human society, IKRAM has taken a pro-active effort to bring these necessities within the framework of Islamic *da'wah* and *tarbiyah*. For such a purpose, Malaysian Muslim Scientists' Society (PERINTIS) as an institution established by IKRAM scientists takes its position in the reform agenda. PERINTIS was formed in 2011, to lead in the establishment, development, and utilization of science for the well-being of man and the environment. PERINTIS believes that science is the prosperity of creations and for that faith, it spearhead researches and awareness on science and Islam. Part of its activities is 'Science4Uth', an awareness campaign at schools to love and appreciate science as a method to bring prosperity to all creations (Perintis, 2011).

In the same breath, Malaysian Society for Engineering and Technology (MySET) as an avenue for Muslim engineers was established by IKRAM members as part of IKRAM's commitment to lead in the engineering and technological innovation and development (MySET, 2012). MySET focuses on professionals, industrialists as well as academia that are the key players in the industry. MySET promotes the advancement of engineering and technological innovation through trainings, career guidance, professional development and volunteerism. MySET reaches out to tertiary institutions and polytechnics to share their knowledge and awareness to the younger generations.

In tandem, in the field of civil society activism, akin to

other NGOs, IKRAM is actively involved in those activities to create awareness, among the members and society at large, on the principles of civil society, people empowerment, sovereignty, good governance, democracy, human rights and justice. Its civil-society niche wing, i-Madani was established to cater to this need (IKRAM, 2012). With regards to this, Mohd Parid (2012: 34) states that, "Engagements in multiracial society, crossing religions and races, is needed to create a civil state. Civil state is defined as a ruled state where consultation takes place between the ruler and the people. Civilized society is raised through the wisdom of mankind and divine guidance". Even before the establishment of IKRAM, its predecessor, JIM has long been involved in civil societal-based politics through MAFREL, a watchdog for the general and bi-elections in Malaysia (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 11). According to Syed Ibrahim, IKRAM's representative in MAFREL, and also a spokesperson for the organization, MAFREL engages with political parties and the government in its free and fair election campaigns. It also engages in discussions with relevant government agencies such as the Election Commission and other related NGOs and political parties (Syed Ibrahim, Personal Communication, 13 October 2013).

Equally, moving forward in the civil society agenda, with a few other NGOs, IKRAM initiated the setting up of *Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia* (GBM), a coalition of NGOs that aspires for a better Malaysia. GBM's mission is to advocate for human rights and justice in Malaysia regardless of the race, religion and culture (GBM 2012). Zaid Kamaruddin (2012), the secretary-general of IKRAM who is also the co-chairman of GBM defines GBM:

"...as a unique organization, and an avenue to find what people have in common to make Malaysia better. In spite of the differences in background, religion and ideology, people have to strive to work together as Malaysian citizens."

Essentially, GBM also employs a non-adversarial, positive and constructive approach. GBM has so far successfully organized various activities including 'From Discord to Harmony' carnival, public talks, inter-cultural performances and exhibitions and panel discussions involving various NGOs in Malaysia (Syed Ibrahim, 2013). Despite criticism from various quarters, Zaid Kamaruddin (Personal Communication, 26 December 2012) emphasizes that GBM will move on, as a lot more needs to be done to achieve its goals, and IKRAM is positioning itself to be part of this great plan.

As part of its civil society concerns, IKRAM also does not neglect the legal issues related to society. In delivering its societal commitment, 'IKRAMLegal' was established by IKRAM lawyers to provide legal advice and advocacy for human rights activism and family crisis; offer career guidance and training for legal

students and young lawyers; and serve its members and public regarding legal matters according to Wan Anuar Wan Ibrahim, the Deputy Chairperson of IKRAMLegal (Personal Communication, 3 December 2012). In March 2012, IKRAM, through JIM agreed to assist Shari'ah Judiciary Department Malaysia (JKSM) by employing IKRAM volunteer lawyers in the enforcement of *Shari'ah* courts' decrees such as maintenance (*nafkah*) (JKSM, 2012). IKRAM lawyers also offer legal advice to some political detainees due to their participation in political rallies and demonstrations to advocate their legal rights. Likewise, IKRAMLegal also established Muslim Youth Legal Interest Group to train legal students and young lawyers on litigation skills, legal research and share trainers' experiences in the legal world.

Apart from all those mentioned activities of IKRAM that reflect IKRAM's fitting in the framework of NGO, IKRAM also recognizes the position of religious scholars (Ulama) as part of the civil society. According to Alias Othman, IKRAM Advisory Council Member (Majlis Timbangtara IKRAM) (Personal Communication, 25 December 2012), the religious scholars, or ulama in IKRAM acted as both reference in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), rulings (*fatwa*) and advice (*nasihat*) to the Muslim community, as well as the *murabbi* (guidance) for IKRAM members in their *tarbiyyah* system and process. In the same way, *Ulama'* also plays important roles in *irsyad mujtama'* (guiding the society) and articulate religious solutions pertaining to community issues through their opinions in media, public talks and engagement with all levels of society (Mohd Parid, 2010: 32). According to Zulfakar Ramli (Personal Communication, 30 June 2013) an exco-member of IKRAM who is in charge of its *Ulama* secretariat, clarifies that Islamic scholars strategically position themselves in advisory boards of IKRAM institutions as well as in public and private Islamic establishments such as Islamic banks, charitable organizations, co-operative society and other interest groups.

#### IKRAM and Women Empowerment

As maintained by Harlina Halizah, (Personal Communication, 30 June 2013), IKRAM recognizes the status of women as the backbone of the society and believes that women are important agents of change. Thus, IKRAM trusts that women need to be empowered to effectively contribute and lead the society. Officially launched on 3 October 2010, *Wanita IKRAM* plays its crucial role in spreading *da'wah* and defending the rights of women in Islam. *Wanita IKRAM* engages with all strata of the society through public talks, forums, smart partnerships, direct engagements and assistance, and all means possible. 'Women and Shari'ah' is a public talk series to create awareness and understanding of issues affecting women. In its resolution, *Wanita IKRAM* stated that:

"...as women they have specific roles in all mechanisms which impact legal, policy-

making, decision-making and roles of women with regard to self and family, under the banner of Shari'ah" (Badiah Baharin, 2012).

Harlina Halizah (Personal Communication, 30 June 2013) also explains that 'IKRAM Women and Family Support Center' (PAKSI) was established to assist women, single mothers and teenage girls in need of help in health, legal and women related issues. PAKSI has a hotline manned by volunteers to assist women in need of support and advice. The volunteers comprise of lecturers, lawyers, psychologists, medical doctors and experts in the fields of women and family affairs. PAKSI also conducts regular visits to prisons to motivate and educate female prisoners on Islam and good moral values. Children are not left out, as they are the assets in the organization. IKRAM also conducts the 'Reproduksi TOTs', which is a training the trainers program to teach the right approach to introduce sexual education to the young minds (IKRAM, 2012).

Under the IKRAM women activities, IKRAM has its Social Development Bureau to promote holistic and balanced social development based on Islamic principles. Headed by Harlina Halizah Siraj, this bureau works towards the enhancement of the family institution, to create Shari'ah-compliant families in order to achieve social order (Harlina Siraj, Personal Communication, 30 June 2013). IKRAM also organizes various programs towards this end (IKRAM, 2012). Correspondingly, IKRAM established its *Baitul Muslim*, a match-making institution for members is an internal mechanism, which promotes marriage among members was a continuity of the efforts done by JIM earlier (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 6).

Another landmark for IKRAM women's wing is the *Raudhatus Sakinah*, a half way house for 'problematic female teenagers' is a landmark project in IKRAM's social development agenda. These girls are given life skill training, motivation, guidance, and confidence to face life and be part of the society again. IKRAM believes that these groups need support from the society and IKRAM offers these through its women and families support group centre called *Pusat Sokongan Wanita dan Keluarga Islah* (PAKSI). Through PAKSI, IKRAM engaged in smart partnership with various government agencies such as the Shari'ah Judiciary Department Malaysia (JKSM) to help solve family issues. One major issue is the settlement of maintenance (*nafkah*) decree issued by Shari'ah courts (JKSM, 2012). Equally, the popular *Aku Bijak Jauhi Zina* (ABJZ) forum, is another trademark program of *Raudhatus Sakinah*, which aims to educate the society especially the young generation on the dangers of illicit sexual acts. ABJZ emphasizes having a mission in life as ordained by Islam. It shows the impacts of *zina* to individuals and society, and guides to healthy living. Living the Islamic way of life is the only solution (Raudhatus Sakinah Pusat, 2009).

#### IKRAM and Economic issues

IKRAM does not only aim to be economically

independent, it also seeks to formulate Islamic economic solutions and initiate economic reform through education; awareness campaigns and provide alternative solutions through the media and public forums (Nazari Ismail, 2010: 23). As points out by Wan Fauziah (2012, online comm., 23 December 2012), IKRAM believes that education is part of the economic solution. School and university syllabuses include economic and financial subjects. Many IKRAM members who are teachers and lecturers of economy and finance in schools and local universities play their respective roles in propagating Islamic finance, particularly on banking and usury. Economic experts from IKRAM are invited to talk on radio and television and share their views on Islamic economy and ways to stimulate the economy (Nazari Ismail, 2012).

With the same spirit, MUBIN, Muslim Business Network, an economic based NGO under IKRAM was established in 2010, with the aim of empowering Muslim businessmen and developing business networks locally and internationally. MUBIN promotes Islamic ethics in business, grooms young entrepreneurs and encourages businessmen to invest for *da'wah* projects and welfare organizations (MUBIN, 2012).

In its effort to be an economically independent organization and for IKRAM to expand its economic activities, a co-operative, *Koperasi Islah Malaysia Berhad* (KIMB) formed in 1994 (KIMB, 2011) under JIM was transferred to IKRAM. KIMB encourages members to save and invest, to work together towards an economically sustainable *Muslim Ummah* (KIMB, 2012).

### IKRAM and Politics

In its early years, JIM as the predecessor of IKRAM remained apolitical and maintained its *da'wah* and *tarbiyah* image in achieving its mission and vision. JIM's contribution to the nation building was mainly through its relentless efforts in education and promoting virtues among the people (Saari Sungip, 1997). The Reformasi (reformation) wave in 1998, however, changed the scenario; JIM saw the need to engage actively in politics (Hassan, 2002: 104; Kaneko, 2002:196). The *Reformasi* phenomenon led to a strategic paradigm shift by JIM as a movement (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 5). The organization metamorphosed from a non-partisan organization dealing mostly with evangelical style activities to a pro-active civil society that was involved directly with politics (Kaneko, 2002: 196; A. Fauzi, 2008: 219- 20). This turning point led its members to be more inclusive by actively participating in politics, thus positioning itself on the map of the Malaysian political scene (Saari Sungip, 1998). JIM capitalized on the democratic structure and space to pursue its '*islah*' agenda, in the prescriptive and preventive ways, along with its agenda for nation building (Saari Sungip, 1998). Upon such discourse, JIM turned to a wider engagement with other parties with the same aspiration from the non-Islamists and non-Muslim organizations (Saari Sungip, 1999).

As an NGO concerned with humanitarian issues, JIM

members participated in the 'Abolish ISA movement' (GMI) and this was a policy continued by IKRAM. The movement's landmark achievements were when the government announced the abolishment of the notorious Internal Security Act (ISA) (The Star, 2011) and when a group of detainees won court cases against the detention without trial (The Malaysian Insider, 2012). In its participation in the general election, IKRAM outlines a generic guideline on its involvement in politics and the criteria of candidates that IKRAM members may elect as their representatives. IKRAM's president, Ahmad Farid, in its speech on IKRAM's standpoint in political participation implies that: "We participate in national politics with the purpose of enhancing political literacy among the Muslim *Ummah* and the society. In supporting just and clean politics, we will help with the political agenda to reform the state leaderships, putting the best leaders to lead the country with full authority" (IKRAM, 2012).

### IKRAM and Global Advocacy

As an NGO, IKRAM is also involved actively in international issues. Wan Subki (Personal Communication, 20 June 2013), the vice president of IKRAM who is in charge of its international communications and activities suggests that IKRAM feels the urgency to be pro-actively engaging with affairs and issues concerning Muslim *ummah* due to the conviction that the *Muslim ummah* as metaphor by Prophet Muhammad is but one body, in which, if any part of the body is hurt, the whole body should feel the pain. Initial efforts with regard to sending reliefs to Muslims cause have been initiated since 1999 through JIM international (Maszlee Malik, 2012: 13). This was followed by the setting up of a new NGO for the Palestinian causes under IKRAM called 'Aqsa Syarif', was registered in 2010. It focuses on educating the masses of the *ummah's* responsibility to liberate Palestine from the occupation; sending continuous humanitarian and financial aid to the Palestinians and networking with similar organizations struggle (Aqsa Syarif, 2012)<sup>1</sup>.

Besides humanitarian aid, Aqsa Syarif has embarked on activities such as awareness talks in schools, mosques, government agencies, offices and public places; engagements with mainstream media; training the volunteers through Training of Palestinian Speakers (TOPS) program. Aqsa Syarif also involved in organizing or be a part of hi-impact programs such as Malaysian Global March to Jerusalem (MyGMJ) held in Malaysia; and sending representatives to join the 10,000 or more activists supporting the Global March to Jerusalem rally held in Jordan (Utusan, 2012). In tandem,

<sup>1</sup> In 2012 alone, more than USD\$3 million dollars had been channeled to Palestine through Aqsa Syarif (Hafidzi, 2012: 35). Aqsa Syarif had not only provided relief aid to the people of Gaza, but also taken part in the development activities in Gaza by providing monetary funding more than USD\$3 million in 2012, within two years of its establishment. Aqsa Syarif was established with the sole purpose of extending humanitarian aids and helping with the development activities of the Gaza population (Berita Harian, 2012).

IKRAM through its research center, Palestine Center of Excellence spread the message to the public through their statements, publications, memorandum, Friday sermons and researches (PACE, 2010). Aqsa Syarif is an active member of Al-Quds International Institution, an international NGO for Al-Quds heritage and cultural mission (IKRAM, 11 July 2012). Following the 'Pillar of Cloud' attacks on Gaza, Aqsa Syarif had sent humanitarian relief missions to Gaza besides the immediate assistance rendered through Aqsa Syarif office in Gaza itself. Aqsa Syarif capitalizes on the involvement of Malaysian celebrities in these missions to garner greater support of the Malaysians (Mohd Shah, 2012).

Besides Palestine, IKRAM is also concerned about the sufferings of the ummah in other parts of the world. In 2011, *Salam Iraq* was established as an NGO focusing on and highlighting the plight and sufferings of the people of the State of Iraq, to the Malaysian public and to the international community (Salam Iraq, 2011). To address the Syrian crisis, IKRAM in collaboration with more than 30 other NGOs form a national NGO coalition, *Gabungan Selamatkan Syria* (Save Syria Coalition) (Gabungan Selamatkan Syria, 2012). IKRAM members were sent on humanitarian missions to Syria, disbursing donations in cash and kinds, and gathering facts of the injustice in Syria. This helps with the donation drives and other fundraising projects for the Syrian cause (Al-Hijrah, 2012).

As for the South East Asian *Muslim ummahs'* plights, IKRAM has continuously sent aids to the poor and needy in the region through its 'Nusantara Islah Center of Excellence' (NICE) and '*Qurban Kasih Ummah*' project. Relief aids include in forms of educational courses for Cambodian teachers (1995); *Iftar* sponsorship, *sadaqah* and *Qurban* in Mindanao, Aceh, Maluku, Southern Thai, Cambodia, Ambon, Sulawesi, Meulaboh, Kalimantan and Vietnam since 1996; humanitarian missions to Ambon and Maluku (2000); humanitarian mission to Mindanao (2001); humanitarian mission to Aceh post-Tsunami (2006); educational sponsorships for orphans from Aceh and Vietnam (Ibrahim, 2009); humanitarian mission for flood relief in Thai 2011 (Kamaluddin, 2011) and humanitarian mission to Rohingya, Burma (2012). In October 2012, IKRAM became a committee member of the South-East Asia Humanitarian Committee (SEAHUM) to spearhead efforts and humanitarian works particularly for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis (IKRAM, 12 September 2012).

## Conclusion

According to the latest fad in the modern democratic world, NGO has been defined as a sphere of voluntary associations that serves as social spaces in which the members of the association reinforce their social webs and articulate their (moral) relationships (Lehning, 1998). As the foregoing discussion suggests, NGOs as

the main actor of civil society in the comprehensive framework of development and reform is becoming phenomenal not only locally, but also at the international level. Critical aspects of development encompassing the relief aid, economy, social and politics have been increasingly undertaken by various NGOs. Much attention has been given to strategize and implement development and reform agendas using strategic position of NGOs within the public sphere.

Within such notion and framework, NGOs are viewed as a potential factor to enhance the process of democracy by various methods; as pressure groups, they can play their role as policy analysis and advocacy; as watchdog groups, they can assume a large role in monitoring state performance and the action and behavior of public officials; as social change agents, they can exert a significant force and influence in molding the society by building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices; and as political agents they can bring changes to the political atmosphere through the mobilization of particular constituencies, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized sections of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs; and as third sector industries they can participate in stimulating development efforts by improving the well-being of community members (Gaush-Pasha, 2005).

From the study, it is understood that the changes in the society require strategic engagements, human capital strengths and spiritual motivation in the sense that it empowers the NGO as agent of change. This new paradigm of how religion and development could work together in theory and practice paves an alternative path towards the reform agenda. Religion can also contribute to the development agenda as part of the new global *fad du jour* through faith-based organizations as could be seen from the involvement of Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia (IKRAM) in Malaysia. As a case study of the Malaysian Islamic movement and NGO, IKRAM is taking its momentum and position in the reform process in Malaysia. Much has been written akin to this paper in examining their roles within the Islamic comprehensive framework as well as modern development agenda.

IKRAM, as critically studied in this paper, has been a key agent of change in the society through their contributions. IKRAM, given the general principles from the Qur'an and the prophet's traditions of spreading goodness, forbidding evils and upholding good moral values, is dynamically playing its roles towards development efforts. Similarly, the processes of *islah* (reform) and *taghyir* (change) which are based on the principles of Islamic faith of promoting justice, freedom and good governance as its highest purpose of *Shari'ah* (*maqasid Shari'ah*) in societal and state-level reformation have been the main motivations for its struggles. Consequently, IKRAM is seen as playing a significant role in the holistic reform agenda in Malaysia. Besides striving to attain Islamic ideals, which the

members must adhere to, and which the organization *raison d'être*, the means to achieve these goals contribute implicitly and explicitly towards the crystallization of the development agenda.

The study also discovered IKRAM's comprehensive roles in the Malaysian society as well as dynamic participations in politics and ummatic affairs around the globe through many of its activities. Critical aspects of development in Malaysia from a holistic perspective encompassing the relief aid, economy, social and politics have been increasingly undertaken by IKRAM through its various agencies. The reform and development agenda undertaken by IKRAM are beyond its local territory and comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of life, from the public services to education, healthcare, *tarbiyah*, welfare, social reform, moral reform, economy, politics, intellectual, scientific and jihad. These reform agenda have triggered changes not only in Malaysia, but also in some other parts of the Muslim world such as Palestine, Indonesia, Southern Philippine, Sri Lanka,

Cambodia and other countries through their relief work initiatives.

The study also acknowledged the genuine Islamic ideology; non-violence approach and disseminating message of truth in influencing the process of reform are better than the extremism and violence modus operandi. The study agreed that the full participation of Islamic NGOs such as IKRAM in development and reform agenda encompassing involvements in political, social, education and economic life enables the members, or those within its circle of influence to be active actors in ensuring the well-being of the citizens. This process, in a way, proves that faith in the age of globalization and modernism, within the sphere of civil society, could still continue to be relevant, having its significant roles and contributions.

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