



## **IKMAS Seminar Series No.3/2016**

# **Islam, Sanctuary and the Forgotten People? The Role of Religion in Providing Sanctuary in Malaysia**

### **Speaker:**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Malaysia has a mixed track record in providing Muslims with refuge, yet it increasingly lays claims to being an Islamic country. The refugee convention and its protocol, meanwhile, have been under intense scrutiny and their ideals are increasingly ignored or circumvented by some of their signatories. This seminar will explore alternatives to signing up to the convention in providing protection spaces for refugees outside of the convention. Using Malaysia as a case study the paper argues that the Islamic concept of sanctuary has historical application and potential to allow for the temporary and long term integration of vulnerable populations in the region. This also comes with numerous caveats and problems of its own, but considering the large refugee case load in the Muslim world it offers one alternative based on practice in one OIC country. Ethnographic vignettes from fieldwork with urban refugees in the Klang valley demonstrates the limitations of such an approach as well as the possibilities it affords. This paper argues that refugee policy in the region needs to move beyond the conventional durable solutions based on a rights framework that is increasingly meaningless.

## **BIODATA**

Gerhard is an anthropologist at the University of Queensland. Currently he is researching urban refugees in Malaysia. His first book entitled *Modern Muslim Identities: Negotiating Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia* is published by NIAS Press. He is co-editor of a volume on human security and Australian foreign policy as well as one on *Urban refugees: Challenges in Protection, Services and Policy*. He is also course director for World101x: Anthropology of current world issues, UQs fifth edX massive open online course.