

Phnom Penh's Fethullah Gülen School as an Alternative to Prevalent Forms of Education for Cambodia's Muslim Minority

by Philipp Bruckmayr

Following the end of Khmer Rouge rule (1975–79), the Cham Muslim minority of Cambodia began to rebuild community structures and religious infrastructure. It was only after 1993 that they became recipients of international Islamic aid, mostly for the establishment of mosques, schools and orphanages. Now Cambodia boasts several Muslim schools, financed and/or run by Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti NGOs as well as by private enterprise from the Gulf region, most of which rely on a purely religious curriculum. However, Cambodian Muslim leaders are urging attendance of public Khmer schools and seeking to establish alternatives in the form of Islamic secondary schools with a mixed curriculum, modelled after similar schools in Malaysia. The generally harmonious relations between Chams and Khmers have been affected by the importation of new interpretations of Islam through international Islamic welfare organisations, and the long arm of international terrorism.

The only Cambodian non-religious and non-discriminatory educational facility operated from a Muslim country is Phnom Penh's Zaman International School. It was founded in 1997 and is associated with the Fethullah Gülen movement. Classes are taught in both Khmer and English. Its kindergarten, primary and high schools are attended by Khmers, resident foreigners and a few Chams. For them, apart from the high standard provided by the school, its explicit agenda of instruction on an inter-racial and inter-religious basis, coupled with its prestige as an institution operated from Muslim lands, serves to make the school a valuable alternative to both secular private schools and Islamic schools.

This paper raises and discusses the interesting question of the applicability of Gülen's thought on education and inter-faith relations to the periphery of Southeast Asian Islam.

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Panel:
The Gülen Movement in
the Muslim World I

Venue:
B202,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS

26.10.07 Panels	Parallel Session 1	Parallel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00		
15:10-17:00		Presentation 10

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