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## Inside this Issue

Improving women condition in Indonesia	p.1
What they say about PKS	p.2
Editorial	p.3
On her own words: Interview with Ms. Ledia Hanifa	p.3
PKS Orientation Training Program	p.4
Next events	p.4

**The Center for Information and Services for the Prosperous Justice Party**

[www.pk-sejahtera.us](http://www.pk-sejahtera.us)

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# VOICE OF JUSTICE

## Improving women condition in Indonesia

Among the favorite topics of the media to show unpleasant images of Islam is its treatment on Muslim women. They are portrayed as uneducated, submissive and dependent to their husbands, and not as happy as their sisters in western countries, including America. Their “plight” is further intensified by the lack of awareness of the average Americans about Muslim women and Islam.

Ms. Seltzer, mid 40, a US Citizen who lives in Boston for 5 years may represent this phenomenon. “Before I met Muslim women, I thought Islam was very restrictive to women, treated women and man unequally, extreme people”, she said honestly. She admitted to have negative thoughts about Islam though she quickly added that it was because she had never had a chance to socialize with Muslim before. Asked particularly on Muslim women, she uttered, “I thought that Muslim women were not happy, they did not have a lot of freedom and choices that they could make, and they didn’t have career.” She concluded that because they did not get good education.

### Three Major Problems

The issue on Muslim women is becoming more interesting when it is observed from the point of view of Muslim women themselves. Ms. Ledia Hanifa, a woman activist who is currently chaired the Department of

Women Affairs at The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), has her own analysis. While admitting the bias that sometimes clouds the western media reports, she said that the condition of Muslim women in developing countries might also contribute to such bad images of Muslim women (other interesting points of her interview can be found in page 3). Far from being apologetic, she pointed out three major problems that cluttered Muslim women, especially in developing countries. Those are education, poverty, and morality.

Ms. Hanifa shares Ms. Seltzer’s view that the main problem is lack of education. However, she broadens the concept of women education to include not only formal education but also religious, civic, and family education. These will help women to have a full life. Unfortunately, the problem of education is intertwined with another problem that is poverty. Together, they create an infamous vicious circle. Poverty also prevents people to take a long term view on solving problem and forces them to take a shortcut. She took examples about two women in Indonesia who sold their children, one of them was because she could not pay the hospital cost and the other did not have enough money to raise her children.

These two problems lead to another problem: morality. In a sad tone, she expressed her concern on the danger of moral decadence faced by women in front of an unbearable hardship in their life. Especially for those who have

*Continue to Page 2*

*Continued from Page 1*

lower income. As they are busy providing food for their family, morality becomes less important to them.

The current condition of women in Indonesia is still gloomy. She cited some grim statistics. In West Java, only two hours driving from Jakarta - the Indonesian capital, the maternal mortality rate is 307 per 100,000 live births. In fact, Indonesia still holds the highest mortality rate among South East Asian countries with number 420 (UNESCO, 2005). On education, the average length of women in school is only 6.8 years, compared to men 7.8 years. The percentage of Indonesian women who are illiterate is 12.4% which is doubled than that of men 5.6%.

### **Two ways for improvements**

As women activist, Ms. Ledia proposes two ways in which women can play their roles: public policy and community development. On public policy, women activists should act as pressure groups for government to continuously improve women's condition and keep women issue on its agenda. For those who are currently holding executive and legislative positions, they should exert their influences to promote rules and regulations in favor for women.

While appreciating several important steps taken by President Yudhoyono on women's issues, Ms. Ledia criticized that his administration was more focused on the gender-related issues such as raising quota for women in the parliament than addressing the real women's problems such as education, health care especially reproduction health, quality food for mother and children, and necessary skills to raise their quality of life.

Elaborated the problem further, she admitted public policy was only part of equation. The government and

parliament can issue hundreds of rules and regulations in favor of women, but they may not be effective unless the Indonesian women themselves can utilize those rules for their interests. The problem is that many of them just do not aware of their rights. That is why the community development plays a major role. There should be a group of people who educate women in society and raise their awareness.

### **PKS takes initiatives**

As a party dedicated for the development of Indonesia, Ms. Ledia said, PKS has taken some initiatives to improve women's condition in Indonesia. However, she realized that such big problems could not be managed even by government, let alone by PKS itself. Thus, she and her team in the Department of Women Affairs have collaborated with other elements in society to works together. For instance, PKS joined forces with some NGOs to give training for women activist across Indonesia.

In February 2008, her department launched a program called "1000 National Jewels", which aims to form friendship and cooperation with a thousand most prominent women figures in Indonesia. Just recently, she met with Ms. Nia Dinata, a leading movie director, and supported her efforts to keep showing women issues in her movies.

On public policy, PKS supports the article 65 of the general election law (Law No.12 enacted in 2003) that

stipulates 30% quota for women candidates for the parliament. However, Ms. Ledia views such quota as a means rather than an end. The goal should always be the advancement of women. "It does not mean anything to have many women as Member of Parliament (MP) if they don't aware on women issues?" she argued. Thus, PKS continues to prepare its women members to be qualified and eligible as MP.

On community development, PKS has established more than a thousand of small community centers called "The PKS Center for Women" across Indonesia. The goal is to educate women in their region to be a smart and pious mother. The centers provide trainings and activities addressed specifically for women. The trainings vary from essential ones, to develop their awareness on religious and socio-political issues, to practical ones, to improve their skills on household as well as education. For example, there is training on how to build up a family library. In some places, the center even provides health care services. To run these community programs, PKS forms partnerships with many local governments to provide counseling to women. The programs also attract a lot of local public figures to join and contribute. This fact shows that many people are actually keen to do something for their communities, but they do not know where and how to help. And PKS center for women hopefully can fill this void.

### ***What they say about PKS***

**"At one level, PKS is a good example of an organization that promotes women participation in Indonesian politics. Women play an active role in PKS activities and statistics showed that majority of PKS members are women. Women are allowed to hold leadership positions in the party, except as party president (Burhanudin 2004: 127, 129) and a small number of women have held executive positions on the party (Yayasan API 1999: 265-266)".** – Trotter, Lydia. 2006. *Islam, Women and Indonesian Politics: The PKS challenge to substantive theories of democracy.*

# Editorial

When discussing the condition of muslimahs (muslimah literally means muslim woman) in developing countries, we should clearly differentiate between the teachings of Islam and the practices among its adherents. Islam treats muslimahs in a very distinctive way in the whole history of human being. When women were considered merely as ornament of men, Islam alleviated their status. Islam considers men and women as a partner in fulfilling their obligation as the servants of ALLAH. In real world, unfortunately, this is not the case. Muslims often do not reflect, in some cases even contradict, their belief. The most cited examples that become *causé celebré* for media are the muslimahs driving bans in Saudi and young girl circumcisions in some African countries. No wonder a great scholar of Islam, the late Muhammad Abduh, once said “Islam has been covered by Muslims”.

However, it should not by any means prevent us to admit that there are real problems regarding women’ condition. Three of them are education, poverty, and morality. As Muslims, we should work as hard and smart as we can to improve their condition for they are actually our beloved sisters and mothers.

In this respect, we support all PKS initiatives and efforts, particularly through its Department of Women Affairs, to improve women condition in Indonesia. We suggest them to speak louder about their plans and achievements. Thus, the world will hear their voice: “We, muslimahs, will never give up but fight for our causes”

# On Her Own Words

## Interact, don’t recluse

Ms. Ledia Hanifa talks about women role in Islam, stereotype on muslim women, and what can we do. Here’s the excerpts.



Ms. Ledia Hanifa (Photo: private)

### In your view, what critical role women can play in Islam?

As muslims, our main principle is the Holy Qur’an chapter At-Taubah verse 71 which says: “The believers, men and women, are protecting friends one another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong.” The key word here is partnership, that is men and women should work together and help each other to improve their life, starting with themselves, then their family, society, nation, and so on.

### Including works together with so-called feminist?

Of course. Everyone who has concerns on women, we discuss with them to find our common cause. We realize that the problem should be managed together.

We establish cooperation with foreign NGOs from America and Europe to help us upgrading our knowledge and skills.

### What’s your opinion on stereotyping of muslim women in western?

It’s a matter of perception. We can alleviate it with interaction with them.

**VOICE OF JUSTICE** is published by The Center for Information and Services for the Prosperous Justice Party (better known for its Indonesian acronym: PIP PKS) in North America. The PIP PKS is a non-profit organization founded and managed by PKS supporters in USA and Canada. Its mission is to give accurate and updated news and information about PKS and provided services to all PKS supporters and sympathizers in North America. The PIP PKS, however, is not a party branch of PKS in USA and/or Canada.

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Don’t recluse yourself. Show them that we are good and smart people. Most of them are educated and open-minded persons who tolerate differences. They also respect our values as we do. If we close our door, how can they know who we really are?

### What’s your advices for us as muslim women in US?

As I said, start to socialize with them, with your friends, colleagues, and neighborhood. Remember, it’s also our duty as Muslim to show the true face of Islam by being a good role model. Keep upgrading your knowledge and improving yourself. Never stop learning. You can learn from anything and anyone you are interacting with. This experiential learning will complete your theoretical knowledge. Be open mind to any input and critics from others. By doing these, you can play your role to improve our image as muslim women.

## PIPPKS News

# PKS Orientation Training Program

PKS Orientation Training Program for Midwest region was held in Savoy, Illinois on March 8<sup>th</sup>. There were 20 participants from Ohio, Missouri and surrounding cities of Urbana and Champaign. The program was opened by the host Mr. Aria Novianto.

Mr. Barokah Widodo came all the way from Washington, DC to be the program

The second session was devoted on the problems faced by people and the nation of Indonesia. PKS offers practical and true implementations of Islam as solutions.

Mr. Widodo concluded his presentation by introducing PKS more closely. Participants listened attentively to history of PKS. They asked a lot of questions on what PKS has done and what its plan for the future of Indonesia.

The program was followed by dinner. Participants were presented with certificates. Alhamdulillah it was a successful day.



Some TOP's Participants and Observers in Savoy, IL (Photo: DPD PIPPKS Midwest)

speaker. He opened his presentation by asking the audience to revisit what Islam means and what being a Muslim entails to. Comprehensiveness of Islam means one has to be a Muslim in every aspects of his life. Because of the social nature of human being, it's also necessary to have muslim family and muslim community. Here is where PKS hopes to play its role. Rule of law conducive to practicing Islam is not easily enforceable without government authority.



## Next Events

**Saturday, April 5 - 30, 2008**

### *Writing Contest*

**Detail:** <http://www.pk-sejahtera.us/>

Contact: Ms. Wiwied Irfianti at 925-957-6406 or 415-430-5146. Email: [wiwied.irfianti@gmail.com](mailto:wiwied.irfianti@gmail.com)

**Monday, April 7, 2008. 9 pm EST**

### *Radio Internet Operator Training*

Conference call: 1-218-486-7200

Access code: 617670

Contact: Ms. Wiwied Irfianti at 925-957-6406 or 415-430-5146. Email: [wiwied.irfianti@gmail.com](mailto:wiwied.irfianti@gmail.com)

**Sunday, April 13, 2008. 1 pm EST**

### *Silaturahmi in Atlanta*

199 Lexington PI Atlanta, GA 30350

Contact: Mr. Agustian Ismail at 404-402-8547. Email: [ismailm2@yahoo.com](mailto:ismailm2@yahoo.com)

**Saturday, April 19, 2008. 1 pm EST**

### *Seminar: Managing Energy for Better Prosperity*

**University of Toledo**

VIP Room, Scott Park Campus,

2225 Nebraska Ave, Toledo, OH

Contact: Dr. Muhammad Budiman at 314-662-3695. Email: [ayahania2000@yahoo.com](mailto:ayahania2000@yahoo.com)

**Saturday, April 26, 2008**

### *Orientation Training Program*

**Massachusetts Institute of**

**Technology (MIT), Boston**

Contact: Mr. Djunaedi at 508-393-3863. Email: [djunaedi@gmail.com](mailto:djunaedi@gmail.com)

**Sunday, April 27, 2008**

### *Get Connected II: Ms. Nursanita Nasution, Indonesia House Representative Member (DPR RI)*

Conference call: 1-712-580-1100

Access code: 7475787 (PIPKSUS)

Contact: Ms. Nur Yohana at 703 774 3174 or 202 360 0399. Email: [nur.yohana@gmail.com](mailto:nur.yohana@gmail.com)