

## Religion and Constitutional Practices in Asia



*Participants of the Conference on 'Religion and Constitution Practices in Asia'.*

*Front Row (left to right): Dr Farzana Haniffa (University of Colombo), Ms Ayesha Wijayalath (NUS), Dr Melissa Crouch (University of New South Wales), Dr Dian Shah (NUS), Professor Radhika Coomaraswamy (ICES), Dr Eugénie Mérieau (University of Goettingen)*  
*Second Row (left to right): Professor Shauna Van Praagh (McGill University), Dr Shamshad Pasarlay (Herat University), Dr Alfitri (State Institute of Islamic Studies Samarinda, Indonesia), Associate Professor Arif Jamal (NUS), Dr Nyi Nyi Kyaw (NUS), Associate Professor Benjamin Schonthal (University of Otago), Dr Mario Gomez (ICES), Mrs Gisela Elsner (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung), Ms Pham Thi Thanh Huyen (NUS)*  
*Back Row (left to right): Mr Gehan Gunatilleke (University of Oxford), Assistant Professor Rehan Abeyratne (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Dr Matthew Nelson (SOAS, University of London), Mr Raphael Pangalangan (University of Philippines), Mr Shamsul Falaah (University of Auckland), and Associate Professor Ameya Balsekar (Lawrence University)*

The ways in which religion interacts with and influences law and policy-making have become a topic of growing significance. They raise questions, among others, about managing legal and religious pluralism; on how religion is utilized as a tool for social and political mobilization; and on how different countries approach state-citizen relations in matters involving religion. This project, 'Religion and Constitutional Practices in Asia', brings together a group of seasoned and emerging scholars from a variety of jurisdictions to examine how religion informs constitutional practice and development in twelve Asian countries, each with different constitutional arrangements on religion.

A conference – jointly organized by the Centre for Asian Legal Studies (CALs) and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Sri Lanka, with support from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Ford Foundation, and USAID – was held on 9 & 10 November 2017 at ICES in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The conference attracted at least forty local and international participants, in addition to twenty presenters and discussants. Some of the topics discussed include: the relationship between religious and secular authorities in a state; the operation of religious personal laws; and the importance of social and political contexts in assessing the impact of constitutional recognition (and non-recognition) of religion.

A special roundtable discussion featuring Professor Andrew Harding (Professor of Law, NUS Faculty of Law), Professor Radhika Coomaraswamy (Emeritus Fellow at ICES and Member of the Constitutional Council of Sri Lanka), and Dr Asanga Welikala (Director of the Edinburgh Centre for Constitutional Law) was held on the last day of the conference, followed by a book launch of two recently-published monographs by Associate Professor Benjamin Schonthal (University of Otago) and Dr Dian A. H. Shah (NUS) investigating the relationship between religion, constitutional law, and politics in Sri Lanka and in Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, respectively.



*Dr Dian Shah, workshop convenor and Principal Investigator from NUS (left) and Dr Mario Gomez, Executive Director of ICES (right) giving the Opening Remarks.*



*Participants and observers at the conference.*



*Participants and observers at the conference.*



*Associate Professor Arif Jamal (NUS) as a discussant at the panel session on 'Islam and the Constitution'.*



*(Left) Dr Eugénie Mérieau (University of Goettingen) sharing her research on 'Religion and Constitutional Practices in Thailand' at the panel session on 'Buddhism and the Constitution' chaired by Professor Kalinga Tudor Silva (ICES/University of Peradeniya).*



*Professor Andrew Harding (NUS) delivering his analysis during the Special Roundtable Discussion panel, alongside Professor Radhika Coomaraswamy (ICES) and Dr Asanga Welikala (University of Edinburgh).*



*Dr Dian Shah (NUS) presenting a copy of her newly published book on 'Constitutions, Religion and Politics in Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka' to Dr Mario Gomez, Director of ICES at the soft launch of her book at the conference.*