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## Remembering IIUM's 2nd Rector, AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman

By [Dr Md. Mahmudul Hasan](#) - August 26, 2021 @ 2:31pm



We received the news of the death of AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, 2nd Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), with sadness and a deep sense of loss.

He breathed his last at Riyadh's Dallah Hospital on August 18, 2021, and was buried in a cemetery near al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah on August 20.

Born in the holy city in 1936, AbuSulayman studied in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United States. He was involved in establishing a number of outstanding organisations, such as, the Muslim Students' Association of the United States and Canada (MSA), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY). In my opinion, his more important contributions are his written works that demonstrate a superior intellectual ability, originality and profundity of ideas.

I became familiar with AbuSulayman's writings during my undergraduate years in Dhaka under the tutelage of Shah Abdul Hannan (1939-2021). I borrowed from him AbuSulayman's *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (1987). Shah Abdul Hannan made me familiar with many scholars like AbuSulayman and set the tone for my intellectual pursuit and development. Later he introduced me to AbuSulayman's other books, especially *Crisis in the Muslim Mind* (1991).

My first impression about AbuSulayman was that he was an original scholar, thinker and intellectual trailblazer in multiple academic disciplines. That impression has remained firmly in my mind all these years only to be reinforced as my familiarity with his works grew.

AbuSulayman was at the helm of IIUM from 1988 to 1998 during which the university saw its most spectacular expansion – both physically and in educational quality. He left Malaysia in 1998. However, his overarching influence, lasting legacy and intellectual imprint on the academic life and activities of IIUM are still palpable.

Especially through formulating its academic programmes, some of which is described in his essay "The Islamization and Revitalization of Theory and Practice in Higher Education: The International Islamic University Malaysia as a Model," he made an indelible impression on the university and on tens of thousands of its students. What is more, the architectural and functional design of IIUM's main (Gombak) campus is a testament to his artistic ingenuity.

Although AbuSulayman was not at IIUM when I joined the university as an academic in 2010, my affiliation with it generated in me a renewed interest in his personality and scholarship. I began to see his works in a more nuanced way and in a more serious vein. When teaching the Islamization (Integration) of Knowledge to postgraduate students, I studied the value and significance of his ideas and found his insights into the subject indispensable.

Especially, his "Islamization of Knowledge: A New Approach Toward Reform of Contemporary Knowledge" (1982) and his and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi's long co-authored essay "Islamization of Knowledge: Problems, Principles and Prospective" (1982) – both included in *Islam: Source and Purpose of Knowledge* (1988) – were essential texts. I often encourage my students to read his *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform* (2011) as well.

AbuSulayman is also an important author for the course on Islamic Literature that I teach to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Almost every semester, some of my students select him and his works, including *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity* (2003), as topics for their research projects. Thus, my academic involvement with AbuSulayman's thoughts and ideas has grown over the years.

Meeting the scholar whose writings I have held in such high regard was a dream come true for me. It happened in June 2015 when he came to visit IIUM with his family members, including his daughter Muna AbuSulayman. Both he and the university community were in a jubilant mood.

I remember the joy and exhilaration on the brightened face of IIUM's 3rd Rector Mohd. Kamal Hassan who was over the moon seeing his long-time colleague on campus. The university's top management and the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences organised a series of discussion programmes and exchange of views sessions with him. I had the privilege to attend most of them.

On June 15, 2015 afternoon, I attended a special session at IIUM's Senate Hall where AbuSulayman was the main guest. He was in front of me and my eyes remained fixed on him. At one point, I saw his head lowered and his eyes closed; he fainted, fell from the chair and remained unconscious for a short while. Anxious and gripped by panic, all in the hall frantically rushed to lift him from the floor. The IIUM Health and Wellness Centre was called, and within minutes one of its medical practitioners, Dr Ahmad Zuhdi Suradin, arrived. Soon AbuSulayman regained consciousness and we all breathed a deep sigh of relief.

After preliminary medical attention, he was taken to Ampang Puteri Specialist Hospital. Worried that none of his family members were present at Senate Hall when this incident happened, I sent a message to Muna AbuSulayman, saying: "In case you have not been informed yet, your respected father fell sick during the programme in Senate Hall and is now being treated at Ampang Puteri hospital." She replied that she was already with him at the hospital.

That sudden illness was perhaps a result of exhaustion caused by the transnational travel and the busy schedule he had. However, it was also obvious that his health was failing. Nonetheless, his mental vigour and interest in educational issues remained unimpaired. He came over from Saudi Arabia to Malaysia again in December 2015 on academic engagement at IIUM.

He conducted some intensive sessions to train a group of academics, including myself, who were writing textbooks in their respective disciplines. My work that contains his Foreword was later published under the title of Islamic Perspectives on Twentieth-Century English Literature (2017).

AbuSulayman wished to visit IIUM again in 2016, which, unfortunately, was postponed due to his medical condition. His visit was rescheduled and he was supposed to be at IIUM in 2017, which also never panned out because of his poor health. By that time, we all conceded that we might not see him at IIUM campus again.

AbuSulayman's commitment to IIUM, in terms of both blood and treasure, was phenomenal. I often hear senior colleagues mention his devotion, hard work and monetary contributions that he made to the university.

As Mohd. Kamal Hassan metaphorically stated, IIUM was AbuSulayman's "youngest and most beloved child." In some way, IIUM has been studded with his munificence which he poured out especially upon its needy students. Even after he left the university, his soul was attached to it.

We at IIUM are bound by a profound debt of gratitude to AbuSulayman for his sincerity, selflessness and intellectual legacy. We pray that God accepts his good deeds and grants him paradise, and that the university continues to thrive and stay on the track that its early leaders like AbuSulayman defined and constructed.

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