



## The Asia Foundation

☪ Celebrating Fifty Years ☪

### RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AN OBSERVATION PROGRAM FOR AMERICAN EMERGING LEADERS Study Tour #2: April 21-May 7, 2006

**Background:** The Asia Foundation, with the support of the U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Freeman Foundation, is arranging an *Observation Study Tour on Religion and Society in Southeast Asia* for a group of eight American emerging leaders. This Spring, 2006 program is part of a series of exchanges for selected Southeast Asians and Americans to examine the role of religion in society through visits to the others' regions. Program activities in the various locations will focus on the role of religious institutions and civil society groups in promoting respect, pluralism, inter-faith cooperation, and democratic values in ethnically and racially diverse societies. They will also provide opportunities to consider the challenges faced by their American and Southeast Asian counterparts in their work at the intersections of religion, society and public policy.

**Program Focus:** In visits to the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore, American participants will examine the role of religion in three Southeast Asian nations and how religious organizations provide a wide range of important services for citizens in the societies where they work. In each nation, participants will receive an overview of the historical underpinnings on the role of religion in Southeast Asian social and political life and learn about how religious organizations help to strengthen civil society in the region. In the Philippines, a largely Catholic country with significant Muslim populations in certain regions, the group will meet with religious leaders, scholars, and NGO leaders to discuss the role of religious organizations in providing social services and education, fostering citizen engagement and community involvement, and contributing to addressing communal conflict. In Malaysia, Islam predominates among the majority ethnic Malays while other religious traditions flourish among the ethnic Chinese and Indian segments of the population. Here too, participants will meet leaders in government and non-government institutions who work to promote religious tolerance, human rights, civic education, inter-faith dialogue, and gender equality. The participants will also make a brief stop in Singapore to meet with counterparts who work in this small, but ethnically and religiously diverse nation. In addition, the Fellows will be briefed on a broader set of political and economic issues at the regional level.

In addition to the various meetings with religious and civic leaders, there will be opportunities for the young American professionals to deepen the experience through community access activities and visiting important historical and religious sites. The group's itinerary will conclude at The Asia Foundation home office in San Francisco, where they will participate in a joint workshop with a counterpart group of Southeast Asian emerging leaders at the close of their U.S. observation study tour on Religion and Society in the U.S.

**Program Dates:**

*Friday, April 21:* Recommended departure date from U.S. to Manila, arriving Saturday, April 22

*Sunday, April 23-Wednesday, May 3:* Program in the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore

*Thursday, May 4:* Depart Singapore for San Francisco

*Friday, May 5:* Joint Workshop in San Francisco

*Sunday, May 7:* Recommended departure date from San Francisco to home. (Participants who opt to depart SF on Saturday will miss a light Saturday program).

**Participants:** The Asia Foundation is identifying American emerging leaders, up to 40 years of age, religious and lay, from a variety of professional backgrounds and regions of the U.S., whose work is at the intersection of religion and society or religion and public policy. Prior Asia experience is not required for participation. *All costs for participation in this program are covered by the project.*

**About The Asia Foundation:** The Asia Foundation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, and open Asia-Pacific region. The Foundation supports programs in Asia that help improve governance and law, economic reform and development, women's empowerment, and international relations. Drawing on 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research. With a network of 17 offices throughout Asia, an office in Washington, D.C., and its headquarters in San Francisco, the Foundation addresses these issues on both a country and regional level. For more information about the Foundation, visit [www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org).

These exchanges draw on nearly two decades of Asia Foundation programming in support of civil society development and democratic change in the region in which moderate religious leaders and organizations of various faiths have played prominent roles. The pioneering "Islam and Civil Society" in Indonesia and programs in inter-faith cooperation in the Philippines and the Moluccas are a few examples. They also reflect the Foundation's multi-year effort, in large part with support from the Freeman Foundation, to enable an emerging generation of leaders in Southeast Asia and the U.S. to engage with one another as well as with policymakers, professional counterparts, and Americans or Southeast Asians in various walks of life, on a wide variety of public policy issues.

**For additional information, please contact the following:**

Mr. Gerald Martin, Assistant Director, Asian American Exchange

The Asia Foundation, San Francisco, CA

E-mail: [jmartin@asiafound.org](mailto:jmartin@asiafound.org)

Tel: (415) 743-3304