

Spotlight on SCI History: SCI in Malaysia

A few weeks before the International Committee Meeting in Malaysia starts, it may be interesting to have some background information about the roots of SCI presence in South East Asia. The first contacts of SCI in this region date back to 1958 and had been made with a Young Buddhist Association in Thailand. In 1963, **Asian Secretary Devinder Chopra** travelled from India to Malaysia to explore possibilities for work in social welfare institutions in the then young country, and for international exchange of volunteers. In the same year, the ICM decided that a sub-office of the Asian Secretariat - then based in Delhi - should be established in Malaysia - long before an actual SCI local branch has been founded. From 1965, the new Asian Secretary **Hirosatu Sato** had been based in the Kuala Lumpur area. Attempts to register officially failed, however, so in 1968 the Asian sub-office and later on the Asian Secretariat moved to Singapore, with the Sri Lankan **Navam Appadurai** as Secretary. But the attempt to register our international peace organisation in the Republic of Singapore failed as well - the main reason being SCI's opposition to compulsory military service! At the end of 1972 Navam left to Sri Lanka, putting an end of seven years of constant SCI office presence in South East Asia.

Inspired by an international workcamp organised by the Asian Secretariat staff in the "School for The Mentally Retarded" in Penang in 1970, the local SCI Group (in Malay: "Pertubohan Perkhidmatan Awam Antarabangsa Pulau Pinang") was founded. This shows that the presence of the Asian Secretariat in the region, even though it was not sustainable, had been crucial for the beginning of an independent SCI structure in Malaysia. Already in the mid-Seventies **Stephen Nah**, then based in Penang, appears for the first time in the records, as "Honorary Secretary" of the

Group. The volunteers mainly worked with handicapped people - which still is one of the strong points in SCI Malaysia's practical work - and from 1989 have been organising the yearly "Penang Peace Run", nowadays a well-established event enjoying support from local government and many businesses. In the mid-1980 the SCI group in Kuala Lumpur has been officially registered. Still today, the two groups function quite independently from each other, making SCI Malaysia more a confederation of local groups than a national branch.

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Sources: SCIIA 32701.1-4, 41501.1-2, 41502.1