

STORY OF IMUN COLOURING THE SYSTEM: BRINGING A FEMINIST HEART TO HUMANITARIAN AID

The story of Khotimun Sutanti, affectionately known as Imun, reflects the strength of a woman's inner conviction and her determination to challenge the rigid divides between social sectors. For Imun, leadership is not about authority from above, but about a personal commitment to stand and move together with her community. Her path is shaped by a distinctive drive that connects the immediacy of humanitarian response with the enduring fight for feminist legal reform.

By weaving these two spheres together, she has created a space where the legal protection of women becomes an integral part of emergency action. This blend of experience and perspective enables her to navigate complex contexts with clarity, ensuring that gender justice is not treated as an afterthought, but upheld as a core principle in every crisis.

” THIS IS A CHOICE OF LIFE... WE DON'T CHOOSE TO WORK IN A CORPORATE OFFICE OR AS A CIVIL SERVANT, NOT THAT THOSE ARE BAD, BUT THIS IS THE PATH I CHOSE.

”



IMUN'S STORY

Roots in Resilience: From Survival to First Response

Imun's journey began with a quiet yet powerful defiance of the status quo. Her dedication to humanitarian work is deeply rooted in her lived experience as a survivor of the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, where she witnessed firsthand how disasters unravel the fragile safety nets of the most vulnerable. In the midst of chaotic and poorly coordinated relief efforts, she saw how women's specific needs were often sidelined.

Guided by a firm belief that women must be the architects of their own protection, she stepped forward as an informal volunteer among the ruins of Klaten and Prambanan area. That early commitment became the cornerstone of her life's work: advancing the recognition of women not merely as victims of crisis, but as leading first responders within their own communities.

”

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS ARE OFTEN NOT CONSIDERED PART OF HUMANITARIAN WORK BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT SEEN AS 'HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS,' WHEREAS THEY ARE ACTUALLY FIRST RESPONDERS WHO HAVE THE EXPERTISE IN WOMEN'S AND VULNERABLE GROUPS' ISSUES.

”



The Evolution of a Feminist Advocate

After her experience as a volunteer, Imun's growing interest in gender justice and legal advocacy led her to join Aisyyah's legal aid association in Solo. There, she began working closely with survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and facilitating empowerment programs for women affected by domestic violence. Although she was deeply engaged in this work, she initially found herself grappling with abstract notions of equality during her time in feminist school, at one point even questioning whether true gender equality was attainable. It was a mentor's encouragement to ground her understanding in women's lived experiences that shifted her perspective.

This reflective journey strengthened her convictions and eventually brought her to the Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC), where she focused on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). In 2011, she formally joined LBH APIK Indonesia as a program staff member, drawn by its strong credibility and its distinct role as a feminist legal aid institution.



Symbolism in Action: The Spirit of LBH APIK

LBH APIK (Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan) became the space where Imun could unite her legal expertise with her activist spirit. For her, the organization is not merely an institution, but a living symbol of resistance, embodied in its purple logo, a color long associated with the womb and the global women's movement.

The logo portrays a woman with five flowing strands of hair, symbolizing five forms of gender injustice, including subordination and marginalization. She faces left, signaling an ongoing stance of resistance against systemic inequality. In her hand, she holds scales as a representation of the pursuit of justice, while a half-heart silhouette underscores the courage and moral conviction needed to stand alongside survivors and defend their rights.

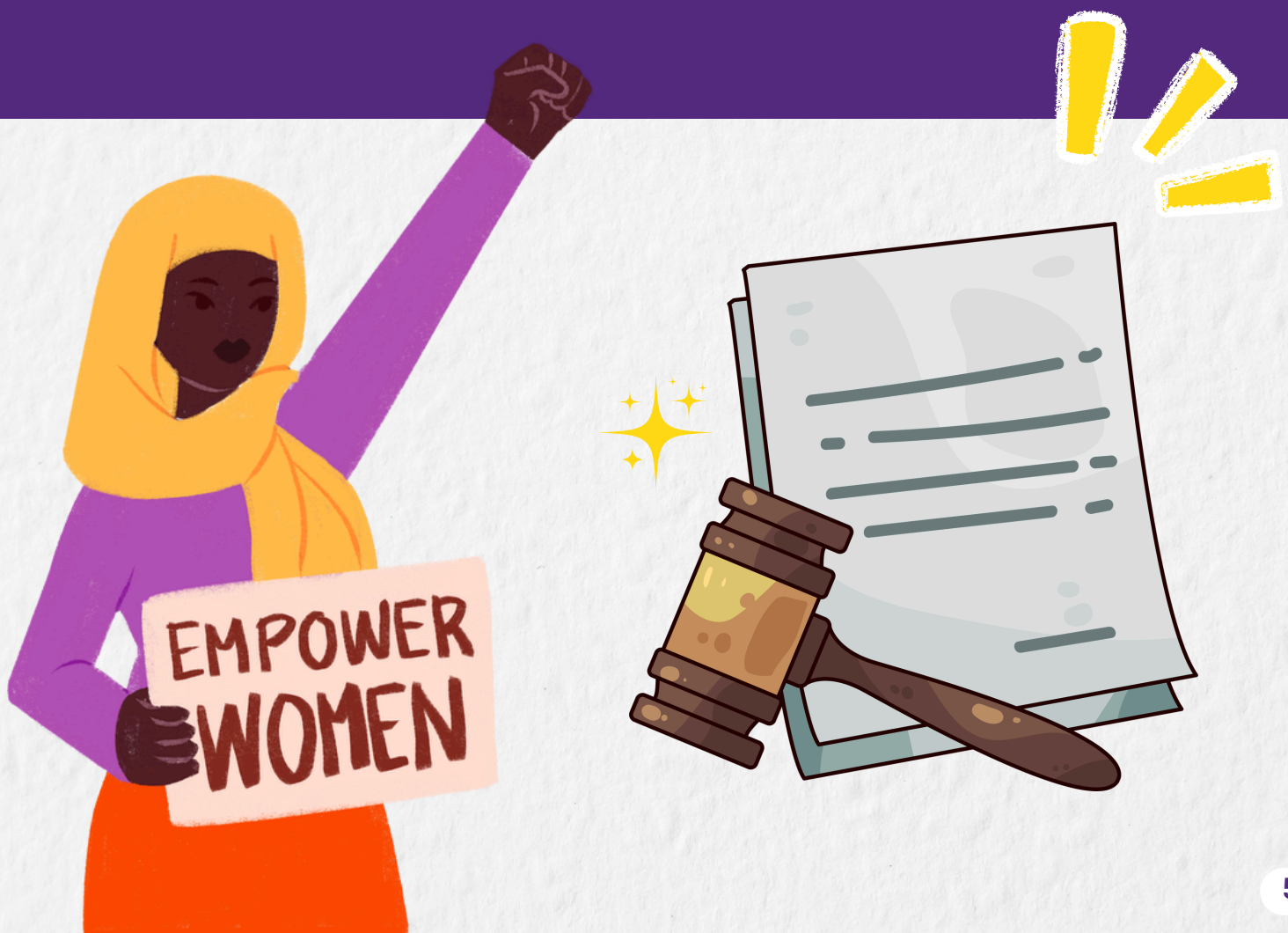
The silhouette of the half-heart in our logo represents courage, a woman who experiences injustice but fights back with bravery and conscience.



Advancing Women's Leadership in Humanitarian Action

As her role expanded, Imun became more active in pushing for change within the humanitarian system through the Women's Local humanitarian Leadership (WLHL) initiative. This work brings together her experience in legal advocacy and emergency response. Through WLHL, she challenges the barriers that often keep women from leading in crisis settings. She continues to push for women-led organizations to be recognized not just as supporting actors, but as key decision-makers in humanitarian response.

She understands that bringing feminist values into humanitarian spaces is not always easy. It requires patience, negotiation, and the ability to adapt without losing core principles. Through WLHL, Imun works to embed gender justice into the system itself, so that women's leadership becomes normal practice, not something seen as exceptional.





Women should never say that they cannot. I also want to see you at this table.

From a Single Volunteer to a Global Legacy

Today, as Director of Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia, Imun has grown from a fiercely confrontational activist into an adaptive and nurturing leader who intentionally cultivates “safe spaces” for others to thrive. She emphasizes the importance of giving women the room to “hatch” from their shells, building the skills, resources, and confidence needed to confront systemic barriers in their own time and on their own terms.

Her legacy rests on a simple yet powerful conviction: a woman’s rightful place is at the table, whether in disaster response settings, boardrooms, or courtrooms. To the next generation, her message remains clear and unwavering: women already possess the strength to safeguard their communities, and no one should ever deny them the opportunity to lead.

Closing Thoughts

Imun's journey shows that leadership often grows out of personal experience. Starting as a volunteer during the 2006 earthquake and later becoming the Director of LBH APIK, she has worked steadily to build systems that make sure marginalized voices are heard and protected. Her story reflects a practical and grounded form of feminist leadership, one that adapts to challenges, stays close to the community, and remains firmly committed to justice.



About SHIFT Asia

SHIFT Asia (Supporting Humanitarian Initiatives for Transformation in Asia) is an initiative that advances women's local humanitarian leadership and drives gender-transformative change across Asia, working specifically in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines.