

## MEDIA STATEMENT

30 September 2010

### KEY CHANGES TO ADVANCE HAJ REGISTRATION SYSTEM (AHRs) AND HAJ RULES 2010

Since last haj (2009), the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) has reviewed and amended its Advance Haj Registration System (AHRs) to give priority to first timers to perform their pilgrimage - that is to pilgrims (*jemaah*) who would be performing their pilgrimage for the first time, as opposed to repeaters who had already performed their haj previously. This amendment was effective since 18 July 2009. This was a necessary move as the number of additional haj places available was not enough to enable all those who wish to perform haj in that particular year to do so. As the Haj Authority in Singapore, the amendment represented our efforts to continue to be responsive to the need and well-being of the pilgrims and more importantly to ensure that those wishing to perform haj for the first time get to fulfil the fifth pillar of Islam – to perform haj once in their lifetime.

2. Making all the arrangements for the pilgrims departure for last year was also a challenge due to the uncertainties in the additional places available for our pilgrims, confirmation of flights, rescheduling of departure flights and even confirmation of accommodation at the Holy Lands. For the affected pilgrims themselves, this has resulted in deep anxiety over whether they could perform the haj.

3. In light of the above challenge, the tripartite Haj Review Committee comprising the representatives from Muis, the Pilgrimage Committee and AMTAS (Association of Muslim Travel Agents of Singapore) has reconvened and recommended further changes to be made to the Haj Package Tender System and the Advance Haj Registration System (AHRs).

4. The recommended changes or improvements to the Haj Package Tender System and the AHRs have been accepted by Muis. They also necessitate rules to be provided under the Administration of Muslim Law (Haj) (Amendment) Rules 2010 for Muis to be conferred with the necessary powers to better regulate haj and ensuring a **more resilient and responsive** haj management and administration system.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO AHRs INCORPORATED INTO HAJ RULES

5. Muis may remove applicants from the AHRs if they **do not respond** within a stipulated period of time to our offer for them to perform the pilgrimage in a specified haj season (known as the approved haj year).

6. If they respond but **reject** the offer to perform their haj in the approved haj year, they would be given only **one (1)** opportunity to defer their pilgrimage to the year of their choice. If they continue to reject the offer, they may be removed from the AHRs.

7. In all the above cases, the applicants would be refunded the haj administration fee that they had earlier paid, less **\$50** as administration fee. However, Muis may, where it considers appropriate in certain cases, refund the whole of the administration fee.

## **OTHER CHANGES INCORPORATED INTO ADMINISTRATION OF MUSLIM LAW (HAJ) (AMENDMENT) RULES 2010**

8. The minimum age for a citizen or permanent resident of Singapore to apply and register for the haj is revised from 15 to **18 years old** (in line with the minimum age imposed by the Saudi Haj authorities).

9. A person, who is a citizen or permanent resident of Singapore and **below 18 years of age** may apply to Muis to register to perform the haj if **the application is made together with one of his parents or legal guardians to perform the haj at the same time**. This is in line with the requirements of the Saudi Haj authorities.

10. Muis may, at any time, withdraw an approval granted to a haj travel agent (General Sales Agent or GSA) if the **GSA fails to secure the required minimum number of pilgrims** within a stipulated time.

## **EFFECTIVE DATE**

11. The changes to the Advance Haj Registration System and the Administration of Muslim Law (Haj) (Amendment) Rules 2010 will be implemented with effect from **Friday, 8 October 2010**.

## **OTHER CHANGES TO HAJ PACKAGE TENDER SYSTEM**

12. The changes recommended by the Haj Review Committee relating to the Haj Package Tender System have already been implemented in July 2010. These changes include :

i) Muis is given the right to **order the GSAs with less than 20 pilgrims** to make arrangements for their pilgrims to travel **with other GSAs with minimum number of 20 pilgrims**. However, the GSAs need to seek the consent of the pilgrims regarding the new arrangements and travel packages.

ii) The GSAs are required to **offer full refund** of any monies paid by the pilgrims who do not wish to take up the offer to travel with other packages **less \$200** to the GSA (being the GSA's administrative cost).

## **MAJLIS UGAMA ISLAM SINGAPURA**