



اتحاد شركات السياحة للمسلمين في سنغافورة

PERSATUAN AGENSI PELANCONGAN ISLAM SINGAPURA  
ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM TRAVEL AGENTS (SINGAPORE)

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### Media Statement Haj 2011 / 1432H

The fate of a substantial number of Singapore pilgrims without haj visas is a deeply disappointing turn of event for the community, notably for these pilgrims who had planned to perform the haj this year and the General Sales Agents (GSA) who are involved in planning and managing their pilgrimage.

2. Indeed, affected pilgrims would be greatly dismayed as they would have made appropriate preparations such as attending the haj preparatory classes, applying for leave from work and having paid for the haj package of choice.

3. GSAs have also made numerous logistical and operational preparations such as planning for the various haj programmes, booking of accommodations and flights and other matters that would help ensure a smooth haj for the pilgrims.

4. Notwithstanding the disappointment of us all, we recognise that even the best of man's plans are subject to the Will of Allah (s.w.t.) and that everything in life has been pre-determined by Him.

#### **Background**

5. Singapore's approved haj places for 2011 is 2,180. As there were many more pilgrims who wish to perform the haj this year, Amtas (the Association of Muslim Travel Agents Singapore) had approached H.E. Dr Jamil Mahmoud Merdad, Ambassador of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, to seek his assistance to facilitate the issuance of additional haj visas for these appeal cases.

6. Out of goodwill and compassion and a sincere desire to render his assistance, H. E. Dr Jamil Merdad had kindly agreed to issue additional haj visas to meet the aspirations and needs of these pilgrims. Amtas, thereafter, collated the data of these pilgrims and submitted their details to H.E. Dr Jamil Merdad. Muis expressed

no objection for as long as the additional applicants register with Muis and have secured flights as well as accommodation in the Holy Land through the GSAs.

7. Dr Jamil Merdad had also given his assurance to Amtas that the additional haj visas would be issued to facilitate the pilgrims' departure.

8. Thereafter, appropriate preparations were made to submit passports and relevant documents to facilitate all haj visa applications.

9. Unfortunately, additional haj visas cannot be processed and generated once the approved haj places of 2,180 were reached. Prompt actions were undertaken - H.E. Dr Jamil Merdad had contacted his counterparts and several agencies in Saudi Arabia to help resolve the problem. Muis and Amtas met with Dr Jamil Merdad to discuss ways to manage this problem. H.E. Dr Jamil Merdad has expressed his deep disappointment that many pilgrims are affected and that he had acted only out of compassion and goodwill to help more Singapore pilgrims perform the haj to fulfill their religious obligation.

10. Amtas and its members will face up and overcome this challenge with resolve, integrity and commitment, consistent with our role as managing the spiritual journey of the *dhuyuf ar Rahman* - the guests of Allah.

11. Our concerns are primarily focused on:

- i. The intent of the affected pilgrims to perform the haj
- ii. The status of the monies paid by these pilgrims to their respective GSAs

**The intent of the affected pilgrims to perform the haj**

12. Amtas has explored all possible channels to assist with the issuance of haj visas to enable all pilgrims and GSA officials to depart for the haj this year. Amtas has also requested the assistance of Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs, to seek the assistance of his Saudi counterpart.

13. As all the attempts to secure the additional visas were unsuccessful, Amtas has requested that Muis accord the affected pilgrims priority for places in the next haj season, subject to the number of approved places allocated to Singapore next year.

14. We pray and hope that Allah (s.w.t.) would bestow them with perseverance, good health and the ability to perform the haj next year or in the immediate future.

#### **Status of monies paid by the affected pilgrims to GSAs**

15. GSAs have made the necessary and required preparations many months ago. Accommodation contracts for lodgings in the holy land have been made and agreed upon with the suppliers there. All GSAs have issued the flight tickets of pilgrims and have signed contractual agreements to charter haj flights. Full payment for pilgrims' accommodation in Arafah and Mina has also been made.

16. All reservations and required payment to suppliers were based on the approved haj places of 2,180 and the additional haj visas. However, GSAs are bound by contractual agreements, along with strict payment terms and schedules. As such, GSAs would shoulder considerable losses while any possible refund would require some time to materialize.

17. Amtas sincerely hopes that affected pilgrims would empathise with GSAs' predicament and be forthcoming with their consideration when dealing with the GSAs in resolving this matter. A number of GSAs have a substantial number of pilgrims without haj visas.

#### **Refund of Payment**

18. Although the terms and conditions of the Haj Pilgrim Package allow for a full refund (less the \$200 administrative fees) in case of non-issuance of visa, the refund from GSAs' suppliers may take time to be processed and returned. Refunds due to pilgrims can only be made available after the haj season.

19. Amtas seeks the kind consideration and goodwill of affected pilgrims to give GSAs leeway until the scheduled time as the refund from suppliers, if any, are out of the hands of GSAs. Amtas and its members recommend that affected pilgrims deliberate and thereby exercise one of two options proposed:

- i. Seek refunds of payment made (less administrative fees)
- ii. Safe-keep monies with GSAs for the next haj season

### Seek refunds of payment made

20. Unsuccessful pilgrims may request for refunds from their respective GSAs. However, as the refund from GSAs' suppliers may take time to be processed and returned, refunds due to pilgrims can only be made available between 31 December 2011 and 29 February 2012. If pilgrims require partial or full refund prior to this period, pilgrims would be advised to discuss alternative arrangements with their GSAs. Certainly GSAs will bear losses, but out of compassion and goodwill, GSAs *may* waive the token sum of \$200 administrative fees, if this is within their means.

21. A *Banker's Guarantee* (BG) to ensure integrity and accountability of monies paid by affected pilgrims to GSAs would be furnished by the respective GSA to Muis for regulatory purview.

### Safe-keep monies with GSAs

22. Unsuccessful pilgrims, without coercion and out of their own freewill, may exercise the option of allowing GSAs to safe-keep the monies already paid, to be carried forward for payment due for their intended pilgrimage next year (2012/1433H). A letter of consent that would reflect this mutual agreement would be undertaken by both parties - pilgrim and GSA.

23. Similarly, a BG to ensure integrity and accountability of monies paid by affected pilgrims to GSAs would be furnished by the respective GSA to Muis for regulatory purview.

24. May Allah (s.w.t.) gives us His Blessings and guide us in our efforts and may we overcome the challenge of this crisis in the spirit of goodwill and piety.