



MEDIA STATEMENT

27 October 2011

UPDATE ON HAJ 2011 – NO GOODWILL VISAS APPROVED BEYOND OFFICIAL NUMBER

2180 Singaporean Muslims will be performing haj this year. This is based on the official quota of 680 plus an additional 1500 places granted based on the request made by the Minister in charge of Muslim Affairs in April.

2 Goodwill visas beyond the 2180 approved visas requested by Association of Muslim Travel Agents of Singapore (Amtas) and supported by the Saudi Ambassador have not been approved by the Saudi Authorities.

3 Officially the priority will be given to the 680 (Cat A) and 1500 (Cat B) who are registered with Muis before the Embassy would consider the appeal cases and issue goodwill visas. Last year some 400 goodwill visas were issued by the Saudi Ambassador.

4 This year, there were 652 appeal cases (Cat C&D) over and above the 2180. **316** visas have already been issued by the Embassy to the appeal cases (Cat C&D) before Cat A and B applications were fully processed. On 12 October, Muis was informed by the Saudi Embassy that no visas beyond the 2180 can be issued to Singapore pilgrims. As such, the same number of applicants in Cat A and B (1 Cat A & 315 Cat B) will not be able to perform their hajj this year.

Safeguarding the interests of affected applicants

5 Muis has spared no effort in trying to assist the applicants who were not issued visas especially the 316 applicants who had priority over Cat C & D.

6 Beyond Muis, the Minister in charge of Muslim Affairs has made an appeal to the Saudi Authorities on behalf of these applicants. Unfortunately, the appeal has not been successful.

7 Moving forward, our priority is to safeguard the interests of affected applicants. The affected applicants may choose to seek full refund of the monies paid or to allow the GSA's to keep the monies should they choose to perform haj next year. However, we will require the GSA's' commitment to be backed by a Banker's Guarantee, taken out in favour of Muis, in the amount collected from the pilgrims. This is to protect the interest of the pilgrims concerned.

8 Nevertheless, we seek the kind understanding of affected applicants to appreciate the difficult decision that has been made by Amtas, despite its members running the risk of shouldering losses due to the unfortunate circumstances.

9 Affected applicants are requested to approach their respective GSAs as soon as possible to register their decisions, whether to secure refunds or allow their GSAs to retain the money using the consent form available from the GSAs for the performance of haj next year.

10 Muis would give those 316 affected applicants first priority to perform haj next year. We pray that the affected applicants be given the patience and perseverance to overcome this difficult situation and be blessed with the opportunity to perform haj next year.

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