

**SPEECH BY HJ MOHD ALAMI MUSA  
PRESIDENT MUIS  
AT THE MOSQUE COUNCIL MEETING  
SAT, 16 APR 2011  
AT MASJID SULTAN**

The next Mosque Convention will take place at the end of this year. It will be driven by mosque leaders and facilitated by Muis.

2 In planning for Mosque Convention 2011, I like to suggest that we "Think Back, Think Ahead, and Think Across". There is therefore a lot of "thinking" for us to do.

"Think Back"

3 We need to do an introspection. How have mosques evolved as an institution since the very early days of Singapore? More specifically, how have our mosques progressed over the last 5 years, since Mosque Convention 2005.

*Evolution of mosques as an Institution*

4 There are no historical records of the existence of mosques in Singapore prior to the arrival of the British. But I believe that there were already mosques when Malay/Muslims established settlements on this island.

5 We have records of mosques that were built after the British came. The first mosque then was Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka. The mosque was built as a wakaf, bequeathed by a philanthropic and God fearing man, Syed Abdullah bin Omar Aljunied. It was meant to primarily serve the Muslims residing in the vicinity, many of whom were settlers originating from Malacca. Hence, the name Omar Kampong Melaka was aptly chosen. The characteristic square minaret and the grandeur white building, with a colonial look, are distinct features of this mosque, which can also be found in some mosques in Malacca today.

6 Thereafter, more mosques sprung in Singapore. These include the grand, Sultan Mosque, which is another wakaf mosque to serve the community of Arab, North Indian, South Indian, Bugis, Javanese and Malay Muslims who resided in its vicinity. The early Indian Muslim settlers also built mosques through the contributions of charitable members of the community. Interestingly all the six “Indian Muslim” mosques were found in the city area. This was where we find many Indian Muslims residing and engaging in commercial activities when they came to Singapore. There are many mosques today that are Aw-qaf. Nevertheless, the wakifs are not only men. We have pious ladies who bequeathed their wealth to build mosques like the Hajjah Fatimah, Hajjah Rahimahbi and Khadijah Mosques. There are also mosques built as contributions from the Malay Regiment and the British Army. These include the Masjid Tentera Di Raja, Masjid Hang Jebat and Masjid Al-Firdaus. Finally, all the other remaining mosques in Singapore were found in kampongs where

many Muslims lived. They were built through the spirit of gotong-royong of the villagers.

7 Mosques in those early days functioned as places of worship and centres where the community conducted religious events. They were built with little or no facilities and could accommodate just a few hundred worshippers. When Singapore attained independence, the government undertook an intensive urbanization programme. Many of the old kampongs were affected by redevelopment. They were cleared to give way to new public housing and industrial estates. This was a historical turning point. The old mosques had to be phased out together with the kampongs. New generation, multi-purpose and bigger mosques were built in their place. The Mosque Building Fund (MBF), a brain-child of former Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, provided an efficient mechanism to raise funds from the community. Twenty-three MBF mosques have been built so far under the MBF program. Together with the other older mosques which remain up to today, the total capacity of all mosques in Singapore is much higher than what all mosques could provide before we started to phase out the kampong mosques.

8 Mosques in modern day Singapore have taken new forms and new roles. They are designed to better reflect and blend into the changing landscape of the country. As urban mosques, they have been re-modelled to cater to the changing socio-religious needs of the community. Mosque is no longer merely serving as a place of worship for the Muslim public. They now frequent mosques to learn

more and deeper about the religion, participate in its various family as well as youth development projects and mosque serve as a focal point for wider engagement within the community as well as with the larger society. Mosques today have become an integral part of the lives of the community. They guide Muslims to live as good Muslims as well as good members of the society.

9 Mosque leaders realized the need to better organize mosques to become the centre of Islamic life. They therefore started to organize 5-yearly meetings to chart the direction of mosques in Singapore. The first of this 5-yearly meeting took place in 1995. In that 1995 Mosque Seminar, mosque leaders discussed the role of mosques to meet the higher expectations of the community in modern Singapore. It was agreed at the 1995 Seminar that mosques in Singapore are an institution that performs a wide range of functions. Five years on, in 2000, mosque leaders met again to find ways to improve the administration and management of mosques. Mosque Seminar 2000 looked at strengthening governance, systems and processes used in mosques. From the theme of “Doing things right” (in 2000), mosque leaders focused their attention on “Doing the right things” when they met again in 2005. Mosque Convention 2005, aimed at re-modelling mosques. The re-modelling of mosques is being achieved through re-shaping content, re-structuring leadership and re-organising systems. Re-modelled mosques endeavour to be community -, family -, and youth friendly.

### *Progress Over Last Five Years*

10 Efforts to strengthen our mosques as centres of worship, Islamic learning and social development have continued over the last 5 years since the last Mosque Convention in 2005. Let us take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the strategies and recommendations made at the last Mosque Convention 2005.

(a) Re-shaping Content (Islamic Learning)

We have reviewed the curriculum and methodology for Islamic Learning in our mosques. A new aLIVE (Living Islamic Values Everyday) curriculum had been introduced in all mosque madrasah that teach “traditional Islam” in interactive ways that make our young love Islam as their way of life. Similarly, a revised Adult Islamic Education curriculum is now “pilot-tested” in several mosques to make the Islamic content more connected to the practical needs of the religious life of our jemaah. The use of this new curriculum will be eventually expanded to all mosques once the pilot implementation has been evaluated and the necessary improvements made. Our mosques have also gone “beyond the minaret” in providing Islamic education at home for those who need home-based Islamic learning.

Mosques have not only imparted knowledge about Islam to develop a faithful, practising and knowledgeable community of believers. They have also imparted social ethos that are necessary to make Muslims live as good members of a multi-

religious society and good citizens of a secular state. Over the last five years, mosques have been active in dakwah (preachings) to further strengthen the religious resilience of Muslims to confront life's challenges. For example, mosques preached resilience amongst its congregants when Singapore faced severe economic recession in 2009. Furthermore, the Islamic content delivered through khutbah (Friday sermons) and kuliah (religious lectures) emphasized a lot on inclusivity, contributiveness, adaptiveness and progressiveness that we want our community to embrace as good Singaporeans in their social as well as religious life.

(b) Re-shaping Content (Social Development)

Alhamdulillah, our mosques have over the last 5 years become more youth, family and community-friendly. Mosque leaders have responded very positively to our calls for them to have mindset change and embrace our youth. Mosques today have created more "space" for youth. Youths have greater say in how the mosques are being run as more of them sit on the management boards. Furthermore, mosques have developed good youth wings that are facilitated by an increasing number of full-time youth development officers.

Mosques today are also more inviting to families. They have even catered for family prayer space in the main prayer hall. Programs meant for the whole family are now more popular. Family-based events like marriage solemnization

ceremonies can now be held in the mosques. Executive imams also conduct family counseling on a need basis.

More importantly, mosque leaders at Mosque Convention 2005 agreed to make mosques important nodes that actively engage other nodes within the national grid. Alhamdulillah, it is now a part of the mosques' "DNA", to be connected to community, grassroots and national organizations. Such connections have resulted in collaborative projects and ensuring that poor and needy families assisted by the mosques are referred for schemes and resources available at the national level. The image of mosques and Muslims as active contributors to the well-being of others is further reinforced through the ethos of radiating "Blessings to All". Rahmatan Lil Alamin ("Blessings to All") efforts embarked by mosques are meant to translate the above ethos to deeds.

(c) Re-structure Leadership

Mosques today are led by competent leaders and able staff members. There is now structured training to envision and upskill mosque leaders. Mosques are also employing professionals for their day to day running, under the oversight of the management boards.

Mosque leaders are entrusted with heavy responsibilities. Amongst these responsibilities, is the need for them to own and deal with "local" issues and challenges. It is quite common now

to see mosque leaders reaching out to the community within the vicinity of the mosques to help alleviate some of the challenges that residents face, with the support of grassroots agencies.

The cultivation of a strong civic spirit in mosques is given a boost when mosques are drawn into the enhanced mosque cluster system. The efficacy of this cluster system is apparent. Mosque leaders felt energized with the synergy that resulted through clustering. More help could be dispensed to needy families; the implementation of effective programs could be accelerated and productivity of mosques was enhanced. The Enhanced Mosque Cluster System is potentially the “big wave” that could produce sweeping changes.

(d) Re-organise Systems

Mosques today are well managed by mosque leaders and staff. There are outcome indicators which mosques measure to ensure that they are financially sustainable, well governed and well maintained. I am happy to report that all mosques maintain up to date financial accounts, and audited annually on a timely basis. This is attributable to all mosques participating in the Shared Financial Services. The Shared Services Centre for mosques had been set up. Besides providing shared financial services, the Centre is also starting to provide shared human resource services.

The quality of mosque management is recognized through the Mosque Awards Scheme. This Scheme incentivizes mosques to do very well in their management. It has also provided mosques with benchmarks against which they can measure themselves.

*The Gaps – Actions Not Accomplished Yet*

11 In spite of the good progress made, it is acknowledged that there are areas that our mosques can do better.

12 The Specialised Islamic Learning Centres is one area that needs more attention. There is substantive work that needs to be done to develop their content. Specialists in the various areas of Islamic Learning need to be developed to provide leadership of the Centres.

13 Mosques should also do more to envision the community with the idea of the Singaporean Muslim Identity (SMI) through their various platforms. Mosques can do more to popularise the thoughts behind SMI which are values that guide the community to thrive as faithful Muslims within modern Singapore.

14 There is also a realization that full-time staff in mosques can be better trained. At present, most of them learn on the job. More can be done to better equip our fulltime staff in the mosques before they undertake their responsibilities in the mosques. We can look at

model elsewhere on how our mosque staff are trained. When I was in Turkey, I was made to understand that mosque fulltime staff need to undergo a full-time training of 30 months before he can be an Imam in a mosque or 18 months before he can be a mosque officer.

15 Even volunteers can be better managed. There is a need to enhance the current volunteer management system to better take care of mosque activists and befrienders.

16 In short, we can take satisfaction that our mosques had done exceptionally well in the last 5 years – implementing most of the MC 05 Blueprint of action. The unfinished work that I mentioned will have to be completed as we look into the future and chart the direction of mosques in Singapore for the next 5 years.

### Thinking Ahead

17 The upcoming Mosque Convention 2011 (MC11) is an opportunity for the mosque fraternity to look into the future. To do this, we need to identify critical areas for us to focus our thinking.

18 I am certain that each mosque leader will have suggestions on what these critical areas are. We like to listen to your suggestions.

19 Allow me to broadly suggest a few areas for your consideration. First, I like to suggest that we look into further increasing the religious

outreach of mosques. How can we our mosques attract more worshippers, participants and congregants.

20 Second, is how, after increasing their outreach, can mosques create deeper impact on the socio-religious life of the community. Putting this is another way, how can our mosques be the transformational touch-points of the community.

21 How do we achieve this transformation? The third area that I like to suggest we look at is the need to develop a “core group” within mosques to create this transformational effect.

22 Last but not the least important is the perennial need to always ensure that the religious knowledge that mosques impart to the community is profound and impactful. It is this profound content that will enable the core group to transform lives.

23 I am certain that you have many other ideas. Let us bring forth these ideas so that they could be discussed.

### Thinking Across

24 In charting the direction for mosques in the next 5 years through the coming MC11, let us remind ourselves that mosques do not exist in isolation. Mosques in Singapore are an institution that exist as part and parcel of a larger “eco-system”. We need to fully appreciate this point so that mosques can extract the maximum

benefits through symbiotic relationships with their “environment”. Mosques need to synergise themselves with the rest.

25 Their immediate environment consists of all other mosques in Singapore. Mosques must see how they can operate as a “whole of Mosque” sector – working together to enjoy the benefits of sharing resources and economies of scale. Closely linked to mosques are Muis and all its stakeholders – madrasah, asatizah, religious leaders. How can mosques take advantage by adopting a “Whole of Muis-Family” approach.

26 Finally, how can our mosques synergise with all institutions beyond the Muis family and the mosque sector. Singapore is fortunate to have a vibrant social and civic sectors. Mosques must not lose the excellent opportunities to have a “Whole of Society” approach so that they can benefit from what others can offer and are doing. In the same breadth, mosques should offer to the external partners what they are good at and the resources that they can share.

27 “Thinking Across” is therefore a way to make our mosques dynamic and contributive “nodes” within the larger grid comprising of the Muis family, the community, society and the state.

## Conclusion

28 There is much work that is waiting for us. Minister Dr Yaacob has announced that the Mosque Convention 2011 is a very important event for the Mosque sector this year. I am pleased to say that our mosque leaders have always risen to the occasion and have always delivered their best. This had been proven many times in the past.

29 Alhamdulillah, by and large, mosque leaders have made the last Mosque Convention a success because they diligently followed through to implement the strategies and recommendations, even though as explained earlier there are still gaps that we need to work on.

30 The most important factor that has contributed to our success is the strong sense of unity amongst mosque leaders and between mosque leaders and Muis. Our Mufti has always said that with the spirit of unity, no challenge is insurmountable. Let us put our hearts together and engage our minds to produce the best ever 5-Year Plan for our mosques. Let us work hard to make Mosque Convention 2011 a huge success.

Thank You.