

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT OF MUIS
HJ MOHD ALAMI MUSA
AT THE POST-GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP (PGS)
AWARDS & FINANCIAL GRANT CEREMONY
ON MON, 12 SEPT 11
AT ROYAL PLAZA ON SCOTTS

Today we celebrate yet another milestone in our efforts to strengthen and enhance the socio-religious life of our community. In a short while, Honourable Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim will present this year's Post-Graduate Scholarship (PGS) awards and financial grant to four deserving individuals. They will pursue higher learning in Islamic thought, Gender, Intra-faith and Quranic Studies for their Masters and PhD. These fields of study are critical as it will affect the lives of our community in this increasing complex world.

The PGS scheme was launched 6 years ago. The scheme was conceived to develop a pool of specialists in fields of knowledge that are important to the development of socio-religious life of Singaporean Muslims. The PGS scheme is one part of the long-term process to ensure that our community will eventually have the necessary domain specialists and experts to address emerging and frontier issues.

This goal was clearly defined in Muis' first 3-year plan and it built upon earlier efforts to encourage our young to pursue postgraduate studies. A further impetus to develop these domain specialists came about

when Muis was consulted as the Islamic authority in Singapore to give its views on the ethical perspectives of bio-medical research and developments. R&D work in bio-medical sciences is an emerging area of growth for Singapore. Unfortunately, there was then no local Muslim with the required specialisation to provide learned opinions when we were consulted on the new developments in bio-medical sciences.

There was also a need to have specialists to guide us on the application of Islamic laws particularly Islamic Family Laws, within the context of a modern Singaporean society which is governed by civil laws. Issues like organ transplantation and the intricacies of the unique structures of home ownership require specialist knowledge on the “interfacing between syariah and civil laws”.

Progressively, there are also more issues that are being dealt with by the Fatwa Committee in Muis that need specialists with a good knowledge of “muamalat” laws (i.e. faraid, hibah, inheritance) and the modern financial systems. The need arose when the community needed guidance from the religious perspective when financial schemes (like the CPF scheme) undergo changes or when the insurance industry introduces changes that affected them.

Another example of the need to build a pool of specialist is in the area of inter-faith. While the Muslim community is actively building inter-faith relations and goodwill, we do not have amongst us, individuals who are specialists in inter-faith studies. These specialist are necessary as we need to have qualified people who are able to adequately represent the community in interfaith engagements at higher levels.

To address this need, Muis took the decision to start “investing” in bright Muslims and sponsor them to pursue post-graduate studies in renowned universities in Europe, America, Australia and Asia in the areas that we lack specialists. Many of them have also achieved their basic degrees from various fields of Islamic Studies from traditional middle eastern universities.

We are now seeing some fruits of our “investments”. I am unable to mention the names of all our returned PGS award winners who are here with us today. But allow me to name a few. Top of the list is our very own Mufti, Dr Mohamed Fatris Bakaram who studied on how Islamic jurisprudence should be applied to Muslims who live as a minority community within a secular context. This training is definitely relevant for Muslims in Singapore and it has also facilitated his role as Chairman of the Fatwa Committee. Ustaz Irwan Hadi Md Shuhaimy, the current Head of the Office of Mufti also deserves a mention, for achieving a Distinction for the Master of Law (LLM) course at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) for his study on relations between Islamic Law and Society.

Two other outstanding examples are Dr Rufaihah Abdul Jalil and Siti Rahmah Mirza Abdul Karim who specialise in the area of stem cell research, collaborative reproduction and bio-medical ethics. They are already assisting Muis in the consultation process managed nationally by the Bio-ethics Advisory Committee (BAC).

Another two ladies who had done very well are Dr Shamsiah Abdul Karima and Nurhidayati Yahya who completed their post-graduate studies in Islamic Banking and Finance from Durham University in UK. They have

assisted the Fatwa Committee in its deliberations on new financial schemes as well as financial instruments and how the community can be guided from the Islamic perspective.

We can also be happy that we are now building capacity on the inter-faith front. Three asatizah are pursuing their PhD programs that are related to inter-faith. Ust Nazirudin Nasir, who recently completed his (pre-PhD) Masters course in Oxford University and has been awarded a scholarship for doctoral research by the University for his excellent performance will write a thesis on “The Concept of Abrahamic Religions in Contemporary History”, Ust Mohd Hannan Hassan is now completing his PhD with a thesis on “Non-Muslims under Islamic Legal Thought and Practices of Aceh” and Ust Leyaket Ali is progressing well in his PhD program in Inter-Faith Studies which is a collaboration between the University of Gajah Mada, Duta Wacana (Catholic) University and Universiti Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga.

I am happy to say that our PGS award winners who have completed their studies are contributing to the community, either through Muis or other institutions.

Nevertheless, I like to reiterate our PGS scheme is only the beginning. Those who have completed their post-graduate studies have to proceed on their own to gain more exposure and to go much deeper into their areas of specialization. We like to eventually see a number of experts emerge from this initial group of PGS alumni. We have asked Muis Academy to look into ways to create opportunities for our PGS alumni and

others who have made it on their own, to academically enrich themselves both nationally and internationally.

In conclusion, I like to congratulate the recipients of this year's PGS awards. I like to also congratulate 12 of our asatizah who have recently succeeded in completing their Masters program in "Inter-Disciplinary Islamic Studies" conducted by the Universitas Islam Negeri Sharif Hidayatullah and facilitated by the Muis Academy. We are proud that our asatizah are continually seeking deeper knowledge. This is a testimony of them wanting to be better equipped in imparting knowledge to meet the religious needs of the community. They too add to the pool of potential specialists for Muis and the Muslim community. We hope some of them will go on to pursue niche specialization in Islamic sciences and other areas of knowledge. They will receive our letters of commendation from Minister Yaacob a little later.

Muis is committed to build capacity for the Muslim community and will encourage many more to become specialists in key areas of knowledge necessary for the development of our religious life. Through this long-term and sustained effort, we can look forward to a more confident and contributive Muslim community in the years ahead.

Thank you.