

SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR TAN HUNG SENG AT GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR SINGAPOREAN STUDENTS, 11 OCTOBER 2010

Your Eminence Sheikh Dr Ahmed Al-Tayyeb
Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Al-Shariff

Your Excellency Dr Abdullah Hosseiny
President of Al-Azhar University

Distinguished guests,
Graduands of the Class of 2010,
Members of the Singapore student body,
Ladies and gentlemen

I am honoured to address you this afternoon on this joyous occasion. For the Class of 2010, today's ceremony is a milestone. It marks the conclusion of an extremely significant phase of your life. For the past four years, you have studied hard to obtain a degree at Al-Azhar University. More importantly, you have acquired valuable knowledge, forged deep friendships and picked up numerous life-skills that will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life. The journey to reach this destination may not have always been smooth. I am sure that there were times when you felt a little home-sick and missed your family and friends in Singapore, not to mention the food! But you have persevered, pressed on and finished the race. Very soon, you will be returning to Singapore where you will be received by your proud families and embark on a new chapter of life. I am very pleased that some parents are here today to celebrate this special occasion with their children. All of you can take pride in your achievements. I am especially happy to report that some of you have even emerged among the top foreign students of your sub-faculties! This is a wonderful result which I hope will inspire the rest of the Singapore student body to work hard and aspire to excel in their studies.

Many of you will go on to assume leadership positions in the Muslim community in Singapore. Perhaps, we might even have a future Mufti of Singapore in our midst here today! Regardless of your future vocation, I am confident that your education at one of the world's most esteemed Islamic universities will prepare you well for the future. Al-Azhar University has, since its establishment in the 10th century, produced countless prominent Islamic scholars, teachers and thinkers. One of Al-Azhar University's strength has been its emphasis on imparting the values of moderation and respect for the diversity that can be found in Islam and the world. The atmosphere of openness, respect for diversity and tolerance has encouraged its students to view Islam as a religion that is compatible with science and modernity; and is open to dialogue and interaction with other faiths. The fact is that Egypt, which enjoys a rich and diverse heritage, has also been a nation where people of different faiths have lived and worked alongside each other for centuries. I hope that these experiences will be useful when you go back home. As Singaporeans, we have enjoyed racial and religious harmony for the past 45 years since independence. But we cannot take this for granted. As future leaders of the Muslim community, you have an important part to play to build up a community of excellence that also strives to improve the common well-being of all Singaporeans. This is what makes Singapore special and unique. While we accept and celebrate our diversity, we must never allow our differences to define ourselves.

To our special guests from Al-Azhar, let me say that we are greatly honoured by your presence today. On behalf of the Singaporean students, I want to thank you for taking time to share in this special occasion with us. I am certain that your presence means a lot to them. Singapore appreciates and values its close and long-standing relationship with Al-Azhar. Many of our key Muslim leaders are graduates of Al-Azhar and they have served Singapore with distinction. We were privileged and honoured to welcome the late Sheikh Tantawi to Singapore in 2006. The warm reception the late Sheikh Tantawi received everywhere he went in Singapore was a reflection of the respect and high regard that many Singaporeans have for Al-Azhar. We certainly look forward to the opportunity to welcome Your Eminence Sheikh Al-Tayyeb to Singapore in the future.

Let me close by extending my warmest congratulations and *alf mabrouk* to the graduating class of 2010 and to wish them all the best in their future endeavours.