

**SPEECH BY HJ MOHD ALAMI MUSA
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AT MASJID AL-AMIN**

The functions of our mosques have evolved over the years. Our mosques in the early years were mainly places of worship and venues for religious celebrations. It was then adequate for them to be fully managed by volunteers in the spirit of gotong-royong. Full-time salaried mosque staff was non-existent.

2 Times have changed. So have the functions of our mosques as new ones were built in public housing estates when Singapore rapidly urbanized itself. Our volunteers found that they needed to be supported by full-time salaried staff to manage the bigger mosques, their finances and administration. The community's expectations had also significantly risen. They expected mosques to serve them in many ways – through the provision of part-time madrasah education, pre-schools, religious classes and a wide range of social services. Not only that our volunteers realized that our mosques needed more full-time staff, they also needed managerial level staff to co-ordinate and manage the heavier work load as well as greater responsibilities.

3 Our mosques did not remain static but continued to grow further. Expectations continued to rise as mosques need to reach out to more young people and to the larger Singaporean society. Mosques in our public housing estates today perform multi-functional socio-religious roles catering to much larger populations. Our mosques are valuable multi-million dollar assets of the community and the annual budgets to

run all the services are quite substantial. It was in the late nineties that volunteers of bigger mosques provided feedback that they not only needed good staff and managers but it was also necessary to have mosque chairmen who were able to give full-time attention in leading the mosques.

4 Hence, with the support of our mosque management boards and mosque volunteers we introduced and implemented the Mosque Executive Chairman (MEC) Scheme. It did not take long for our volunteers to conclude that the MEC Scheme was effective because the “MEC mosques” enjoyed many benefits from having full-time Chairmen. Adopting a cautious approach, the number of MECs was gradually increased. From only two MECs in 1999, the number of MECs today stands at 11 – which is roughly an increase of 1 MEC each year.

5 Ten years have passed and we felt that it is timely to review the MEC Scheme. In the review, we evaluated the achievements of MEC mosques, consulted volunteers of MEC mosques on the effectiveness of the MECs and studied the public feedback that was published in the media on the MEC Scheme. We did all these, to ascertain whether the MEC Scheme is still relevant and needed today; whether it has been effective and if the scheme can be further improved.

6 I went on a series of visits to MEC mosques over a 3-month period, accompanied by Muis’ Secretary and other senior officers. We engaged the volunteers and discussed the MEC Scheme. They gave us frank and valuable feedback. From the series of dialogue sessions, I like to report that our volunteers in MEC mosques are satisfied with the MEC Scheme as it has benefitted them. They felt that the Scheme is

still needed today. At the same time, these mosque volunteers presented good ideas to further improve the MEC Scheme. We like to thank all our mosque volunteers and members of public who had given their views on the MEC Scheme.

7 Besides mosque visits to meet volunteers, we also set up a Committee to evaluate the performance of MEC mosques. The Committee found that MEC mosques have performed relatively better. Comparatively, their governance has been better. MEC mosques, for example, had no financial non-compliances and submitted audited accounts on time. This is an important requirement under AMLA as mosques receive funds from the public. MEC mosques too have proven to be model mosques. We have so far two “aLIVE” centres of excellence (ACE) and both of them are found in MEC mosques. These two MEC mosques have achieved high standards in delivering Islamic education for the young. And nearly all “Distinction” winners for the “Family-Friendly”, Youth-Friendly” and “Community-Friendly” Mosque Awards are MEC mosques. In short, MECs have given much value to our mosques. They have made a difference and this is acknowledged by volunteers in MEC mosques.

8 From our consultations with mosque volunteers, performance evaluation of MEC mosques and assessment of need, as mentioned earlier, Muis concludes that the MEC Scheme is beneficial, should be retained and gradually expanded for mosques that serve sizeable Muslim populations, eg the MBF mosques. Nevertheless, we agree that there is room for the MEC Scheme to be further improved.

9 An improvement that we are making is that mosques will be more involved now in the implementation of the MEC Scheme. For example, the Mosque Management Board (MMB) must first agree that their mosque needs and wants to employ an executive chairman. They will then seek Muis's support and assistance. Furthermore, MMBs will also now be involved in the selection of the MEC; and in defining their performance indicators as well as appraising their performance.

10 This means that the MECs will be subject to greater scrutiny and they will have to match up to the high expectations. On the issue of accountability, we want to make it clear that the MEC is accountable to the mosque management boards for the day to day running of the mosque. Nevertheless, as Muis is the appointing authority for all mosque chairmen and MMBs, it follows that both the MEC and MMB members are eventually accountable to Muis. This is the practice now for all our mosque chairmen and MMBs, especially for accountability on policy and statutory matters.

11 As explained earlier, we have more stringent and higher performance expectations on MECs. Their performance indicators cover areas like the effectiveness of the programs conducted in the mosques; governance standards; financial strength of the mosque; extent of their community outreach and their ability to help empower the needy (ie zakat recipient) families in the neighbourhood. In a short while, we will share with you some of these KPIs for MEC.

12 With such a heavy responsibility, MECs' focus of work will be at the mosque. This is the present arrangement and we will ensure this. Notwithstanding this arrangement, Muis has decided to co-share part of

the MEC's salary. Our aim is to lend some support to the mosques and to reduce their financial commitment. Muis will co-share 20% of the remuneration of the MEC while mosques will bear the remaining 80%. We feel that these co-sharing figures are reasonable.

13 In conclusion, let me say that the improvements that we are making to the MEC Scheme reinforce our long-standing and consistent position that volunteers in our mosques, including the MEC mosques, are the backbone of our mosques. Notwithstanding the presence of MECs, it is undoubted that the active involvement and valuable contributions of volunteers, facilitated by the MECs are key to the success factor for our mosques. Muis value the strong support of all our mosque volunteers. We are looking into ways to better manage our mosque volunteers and will also do more to acknowledge their contributions.

14 The MEC Scheme is dynamic. We will continue to monitor its effectiveness. Be rest assured that Muis is prepared to tackle any ineffectiveness, whenever it appears. We are committed to make continuous improvements in the management of our mosques, including the implementation of schemes like the MEC Scheme. With such improvements, we can further strengthen our mosque management and administration. Mosques in Singapore have been frequently visited by study delegations from overseas to learn from our good management and administration. Let us work together to maintain these high standards.

15 Thank You.