

**SPEECH BY DR YAACOB IBRAHIM, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT  
AND WATER RESOURCES AND  
MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF MUSLIM AFFAIRS  
AT THE MUIS WORK PLAN SEMINAR ON SATURDAY,  
2 APRIL 2011 AT 10.15 AM**

President and Members of MUIS Council

Mufti of Singapore Dr Fatris Bakaram

Religious and Mosque leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Wr Wb and a very good morning

I am pleased to join you at the MUIS Work Plan Seminar 2011. Before I continue, it would be appropriate to pause and reflect how blessed we are to live in peaceful surroundings, considering the natural disaster that has hit Japan and the unrest in several Middle East countries.

2 Our prayers go out to the people of Japan, to the many who lost loved ones. The Muslim community in Singapore did our part for Japan when the Rahmatan lil Alamin Foundation carried out a donation drive at all mosques. What must be uppermost in our minds however are the exemplary resilience and fortitude, and many acts of courage and cooperation shown by the Japanese in order to get life to normal even as they come to terms with their loss.

3 We also recognize the developments in the Middle East with some concern. We facilitated the return of our students from Egypt. Through the cooperation of various parties including the Singapore Mission in Cairo, Singapore Airlines, families and MUIS, our students were safely brought back home. To date, two batches of students are back in Egypt to continue their studies. And by the end of April, all 190 students would have returned. Let us pray for their safety and well-being and for peace to return to the Middle East and the rest of the world.

#### **First Year of 3<sup>rd</sup> MUIS Three Year Plan (2010 – 2012)**

4 MUIS launched its third 3-year plan last year. In this 3-year plan, MUIS is focusing on three areas - developing religious content and thinking; developing dynamic leaders; and strengthening platforms that reach out to the community.

5 I am pleased to hear that MUIS Third 3-Year Plan is progressing well. MUIS will share with you the progress in greater detail during the course of this seminar. I am also happy that MUIS continues to review its programmes regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to the evolving and changing needs of our community.

## **Progressive Religious Thinking and Programmes**

6 MUIS has the role of providing religious thought leadership for the community. And I am happy that the updated fatwa on CPF nomination which allows for our fellow Muslims to make CPF nominations in favour of their dependants, which is akin to a *hibah* or a gift under the Islamic Law, is seen as progressive and responsive to the current needs of our community.

7 Religious education is also a vital part of MUIS' work. Our religious content and curriculum need to be in-step with emerging issues so that our community is confident in negotiating the modern world. I'm pleased that MUIS had taken the initiative to validate the aL.I.V.E. programme last year to ensure that its contents and pedagogy are able to meet our needs. Scholars from several renowned institutions, both local and overseas, endorsed the contents of the aL.I.V.E. programmes as being rooted in Islam and the approach of active and participatory learning as suitable and engaging.

8 I am also happy that Muis has developed an adult religious education programme that is being piloted at 17 mosques. This programme was developed with the help of our senior asatizah. It will be reviewed and refined before deciding on expanding the rollout to other mosques.

## **Developing our Religious Leaders**

9 Our asatizah play a significant role in shaping our religious lives and need to acquire the skills and knowledge to face the many emerging modern and contemporary issues. Programmes such as the **Asatizah Executive Development Programme (AEDP)** are designed to develop the capabilities of our religious leaders. 95 asatizah attended this training last year. This training will be offered to at least 100 more this year. To better prepare our asatizah to respond to more complex and contemporary issues, MUIS also trained 25 asatizah under its inaugural Advanced AEDP last year. 25 more will be trained this year. In addition, to provide them with a wider perspective of managing socio-religious life of the Muslim community in a modern society, selected asatizah will be attached at MUIS this year under the MUIS Asatizah Attachment Programme (MAAP).

10 Our young asatizah today play an important role in shaping the religious discourse. One example is 29-year old **Ustazah Norul Haslinda Hashim**, a graduate from Al-Azhar University and now serving at Masjid Al-Istighfar. Ustazah Norul Haslinda's involvement in the aL.I.V.E. programme did not stop at just delivering the lessons, she was also instrumental in developing the Teens aL.I.V.E. programme. Ustazah Norul Haslinda also upgraded herself by taking part in professional training courses provided by MUIS, and was able to help train some of the newer aL.I.V.E. teachers. Young asatizah such as Ustazah Norul Haslinda have the potential to become leaders of our community with the right training, programmes and guidance. For these reasons the aL.I.V.E. programme will be further enhanced by introducing an

aL.I.V.E. 2.0 starting with Teens aL.I.V.E. and Youth aL.I.V.E. Plus for post secondary youths who want deeper content in Islam.

11 At the same time, we must always be grateful for contributions and wisdom of senior asatizah like **Ustaz Ibrahim Kassim**. We easily lose count of the number of roles he has played in our community over many years or the number of languages he speaks – everyone fluently I am told and always in a gentle manner that touches the heart of the congregation. So while our asatizah attend courses and upgrading programmes, we should not lose out on the opportunity to interact and learn from our more experienced and learned asatizah, like our Shaikh Syed Isa Semait.

## **Mosques**

12 Our mosques are places of worship. They are also important centres for community engagement. So young mosque leaders must also learn from the likes of **Habib Hassan** in how he engages people of many faiths at the Baalwie Mosque and elsewhere. His are priceless humane skills that should be treasured and sustained.

13 I am happy that our mosques are well-integrated into our national fabric. The North East and South East **Enhanced Mosque Clusters** (EMCs) are examples of how mosques work in tandem with CDCs, social agencies, and Malay/Muslim Organisations to reach out on the services available to the community. I am pleased to say that under the leadership of our mosque leaders and the

efforts and dedication displayed by our volunteers and befrienders, more families are benefitting from the assistance provided by the EMCs.

14        59-year old **Mdm Ah'esah**, a part-time seamstress, is a good example of an active and committed volunteer at the Darul Ghufuran Mosque. Mdm Ah'esah regularly visits the elderly, delivers groceries to them and even takes them for their medical appointments. She also volunteers in Ramadan projects like Porridge & Iftar on Wheels. We must recognize our mosque volunteers like Mdm Ah'esah for their selfless contributions. The outreach by our volunteers will remain very important as MUIS expands its empowerment programme for the 4<sup>th</sup> batch of our poor and needy. This time a new financial coaching element will also be injected into the empowerment programme.

15        I am also pleased to note that Muis plans to hold a Mosque Convention towards the latter part of this year. This Convention had been held once in 5 years since 1995. I welcome this Convention. It would be useful for us to assess the progress of our work since the last time we met. The Convention should also chart the direction for our mosques for the next five years to ensure that they continue to meet challenges and at the same time positioning our mosques strongly to better serve the socio-religious needs of our community.

## **Conclusion**

16        In conclusion, I commend the council and staff of MUIS, with the

cooperation of all in our religious sector for the commendable efforts in the last year. To continue working towards better progress for our community, MUIS must review and refine its programmes regularly, taking into account the areas of improvements proposed by our stakeholders. With close cooperation and consistent effort, my colleagues and I are confident that we are on track towards our vision of a Community of Excellence.

17 Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Wr. Wb.