

**SPEECH BY USTAZ MOHD ALI ATAN
HEAD, HARMONY CENTRE
RE-OPENING OF HARMONY CENTRE & INTERFAITH IFTAR
23rd August 2011**

Our Guest of Honour

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim

Minister for Information, Communication & the Arts and Minister in
charge of Muslim Affairs

Respected Religious Leaders

President of Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis)

Hj Mohd Alami Musa

Mufti of Singapore

Dr Mohamed Fatris Bakaram

Muis Council Members

Distinguished Guests and Friends of Harmony Centre

Assalamualaikum and peace be upon all my brothers and sisters in
humanity

Once again, on behalf of Muis and the Harmony Centre, please
accept my warmest greetings to everyone here who have so kindly
made the time to be present in this simple re-opening ceremony of
the Harmony Centre and of course, our annual Interfaith Iftar.

2 Our special thanks to our Guest of Honour, Minister Dr Yaacob
Ibrahim, for gracing the occasion this evening.

3 This Interfaith Iftar held annually during the blessed month of Ramadan is an excellent opportunity for friends of all faiths and beliefs to meet and rekindle old ties, build new friendships and share best wishes of blessings and peace and of course , tuck into some food together.

4 Today marks another milestone in the interfaith journey of Harmony Centre with the Re-Opening of the newly Refurbished Harmony Centre . As you know, the Harmony Centre @ An-Nahdhah was opened by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on the 7th October 2006 which was also held in the month of Ramadan. That means we are in our 5th year of existence. It is for this reason that we have decided to organise the re-opening of the Harmony Centre at the same time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5 The Harmony Centre symbolises one of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore's (MUIS) efforts to engender a greater understanding of Islam and Muslims amongst the multi-racial population of Singapore, and to provide a convenient hub for people of all faiths to meet and interact with the sole purpose of understanding each other better and working towards strengthening inter-religious harmony.

6. In addition to the physical exhibits, the Harmony Centre's heart and soul lies in the programmes that we organize to promote greater

interfaith understanding and engagement. These programmes, which are open to participants from all faith communities, focus on three main thrusts of Training, Learning and Engagement..

7. **The focus on training** is to build greater capacity and pool of resources in interfaith work. We recognise that in order for interfaith efforts to flourish at all levels, there has to be a pool of people within each faith community who are passionate and trained in the art of enhancing interfaith dialogue and engagement.

8. **The Learning thrust** is aimed at encouraging deeper understanding of the essence and practices of all religions. This is primarily done through learning journeys, faith talks, sharing session and workshops with scholars and practitioners from Singapore and the world over.

9. Beyond all the learning and talking, we believe that actual **engagements** are crucial in building and cementing the bonds of relationship between peoples of different faiths. This is the third thrust of the Centre. This is done through goodwill meetings, joint community and humanitarian projects, conversational circles, community engagement games and iftar get together like today.

Ladies and Gentlemen

10 After our fifth year of existence, we felt the need to review what we have been doing, to better understand what we have achieved

and to chart the path we should take going forward to achieve the aim of the Centre. This review was done by consulting our visitors, partners, friends of Harmony Centre, docents and volunteers in addition to conducting surveys on the communities' understanding of the importance of interfaith engagement.

11. Among the findings of the review, we found that, while the Centre and its programmes have been well received, there is a need to build awareness and rally greater participation of Muslims in interfaith work. This is necessary to expand the pool of resource persons and facilitators to help permeate the message of the importance of interfaith engagements even further.

12. Yet another finding of the review is the need to have exhibits and programmes that offer information that go beyond basic information on the religion and offer deeper insights into the faiths.

13. Based on these findings, Harmony Centre undertook the refurbishment work by introducing a new section and as well as new formats to the existing Centre, while maintaining the overall essence of the content of the Centre. The new section labelled "Islam and Interfaith Relations" is a new addition which was deemed necessary to respond to the review findings.

14. The section seeks to establish the rootedness of principles of harmonious interfaith engagement within Islamic sacred text and tradition. It identifies the many verses within the Holy Qur'an on the

principle of peaceful and respectful relations with people of all faiths and that there is no compulsion in religion. The section also dwells on how Prophet Muhammad showed the way in the conduct of harmonious relations with people of all faiths. In his tradition it is also recorded that he will hold to account, in the day of judgement, Muslims who had acted unjustly toward people of other faiths. His legacy is further propagated by many scholars, traders and renowned Muslim personalities through their writings, travels and their trade. And this spirit of promoting harmonious living and engagement in a plural society continues to be championed by many Muslim groups and personalities right up to the present day. And all these are featured in this new “Islam and Interfaith Relations” section.

15. Another new feature of the refurbished Centre is the “expanded and more open” concept of the Multi-Religious Singapore section. In the original Centre, brief information of all the 10 recognised religions in Singapore is kept in drawers and can only be viewed if the visitor pulls open the drawer. In this refurbished setting, a more detailed information on each of the faith is on display. In addition, other information such as the concept of divinity, holy books and icons of each religion are also provided in an interactive fashion at the section.

16. Another new feature is in the “Islam and Civilisation” section where a segment on key historical milestones in Islamic civilization has been added to demonstrate Muslims rich and colourful interactions with peoples of many lands and civilizations. Through this

segment, we hope the community and visitors alike will take many lessons from history to build our own unique brand of religious harmony for Singapore.

17. While the content may stay the same for the other sections, the layout has been transformed to allow for a more comfortable and easy traverse of the Centre, to enhance the overall visitors' experience.

18. I feel another important point to make is that the content and research that has gone into this refurbished Centre will be used in our Islamic education programmes for the young, adult Islamic education at the mosques and disseminated through many other platforms, both conventional ones as well as online, in due time. This is to ensure that the community take lessons from these information and will live the values there in their daily lives.

At this point I would like to announce that the Harmony Centre is back in operation with a new vigour.

Ladies and Gentlemen

19. In my short stint here, indeed I must say I am very touched to be able to work with all faith leaders and communities and see how committed they are in promoting religious harmony in Singapore. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the faith leaders for their commitment and support toward the programmes and initiatives

of the Centre since its opening. Our thanks also go to MCYS, MOE, our partners in IRO and Onepeople.sg, schools, youth groups, Friends of Harmony Centre, and also our docents and activists for keeping the spirit of building a cohesive society always alive.

20. In conclusion, my team and I humbly seek everyone's continued blessings and support especially from our religious leaders to join Harmony Centre in our journey together to strengthen the Bonds of Humanity.

May peace and blessings be upon us all.

Thank you.