

**SPEECH BY HJ MOHD ALAMI MUSA  
PRESIDENT MUIS  
FOR 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY DINNER  
OF HARMONY CENTRE  
22 NOV 2011**

His Excellency  
Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam  
President of the Republic of Singapore

Honourable Minister  
Dr Yaacob Ibrahim  
Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts &  
Minister in-charge of Muslim Affairs

Sohibus Samaha Mufti

Religious & Community Leaders

Ladies & Gentlemen

On behalf of Muis, I like to welcome all of you and express our deepest gratitude to HE President Tan for his gracious presence.

2 This Dinner is held to commemorate the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Harmony Centre.

3 The Harmony Centre is deeply committed in advancing harmony amongst the various faith communities in Singapore.

4 Inter-faith work and goodwill building are not new to the Singapore Muslim community. In fact, the involvement of the

Singapore Muslim community in inter-faith engagement dated far back into pre-independence Singapore.

5 Historical records show that Jamiyah, which is the oldest Muslim organisation today, had been active in building goodwill amongst the various faith communities as far back as in the 1930s. They did so with the support of the British administration, through its Commissioner General for South-East Asia.

6 This continued in the 1940s. We are indeed proud that one of the pioneers of the Singapore Muslim community, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique founded the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) in 1949. As you are aware, the IRO is today an iconic organization that provides the harmonious platform to demonstrate bonds of togetherness amongst various religious communities.

7 The commitment of Singaporean Muslims in contributing towards inter-faith harmony continued in post-independence Singapore.

8 When Muis was formed in 1968, it was very conscious that as the authority in managing religious life and administering Islamic laws through (AMLA), the cornerstone of Singapore's well-being through harmonious inter-religious living must be protected.

9 This commitment was shown when our Mufti then, Shaikh Syed Isa Semait, became personally involved in the IRO as early as in

1975 . He was its Chairman in 1993. As the longest serving member of IRO and still active in IRO today, our former Mufti represented the Muslims firm commitment in preserving inter-religious harmony. This was also seen through the many articulations made by Muis, in the 1980s, to enhance social and religious harmony.

10 The 1990s saw our mosques becoming more active in the larger society, forging bonds with religious organizations, other places of worship and social organizations. They also started to organize “Open Houses” and invited Singaporeans to visit mosques to better understand Islam and Muslims.

11 Mr President, Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, all these have enhanced efforts to build inter-faith goodwill building.

12 Our efforts became more organized in the last ten years, after we entered the new millennium (21<sup>st</sup> century). Muis and mosques saw the need to institutionalise these inter-faith efforts within our agenda. In other words, building inter-faith relations and engaging other faith communities are built into Muis’ and the mosques’ plans of action.

13 This institutionalization came about with the setting up of the Harmony Centre. We conceptualized the Harmony Centre in 2004 when we were designing the An-Nahdhah Mosque in Bishan. There was a dire need then for the Muslim community to have a dedicated Centre that is able to present the true teachings of Islam, to promote

inter-faith dialogue as well as engagement and strengthen the social bonding amongst the different faith communities. Hence, the Harmony Centre was “born”.

14 Harmony Centre was officially opened by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in October 2006. We have just passed the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the existence of the Centre.

15 We are very pleased to report that the Harmony Centre is achieving the objectives of its formation and had done well over the last five years.

16 With the belief that a better understanding of Islam amongst non-Muslims can create better inter-faith relations, Harmony Centre became an important destination for Learning Journeys to build bridges of understanding. Some 25, 000 visitors of whom (92% are non-Muslims) visited the Harmony Centre since its opening. But Harmony Centre is not only about Islam and its approach is not Muslim-centric. It became a meeting point where people of different faiths and persuasions gathered to share, discuss and have dialogue on issues of common interest from their respective religious perspectives.

17 Ladies and gentlemen, another significant contribution of Harmony Centre is in capacity building of inter-faith activists. Among others, the Harmony Centre had collaborated with Hartford Seminary from the United States and the Centre for Study of Society and

Secularism, Mumbai, India to conduct Inter-Faith Training and Conversation Circles for religious, community and youth leaders.

18 We are pleased that the Harmony Centre received very positive feedback from visitors. Overseas visitors have suggested that the Harmony Centre be replicated in other countries. Muslim leaders from Muslim majority countries who visited the Harmony Centre commended it for projecting a comprehensive view of Islam as a civilisational religion that exudes a lot of moderation, progressiveness and inclusiveness.

19 As a unique effort at fostering inter-faith understanding, Harmony Centre has created international interest. It was invited to showcase its work in countries like Australia, Belgium, Germany, Japan and Spain.

20 Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, five years on, Harmony Centre is ready to move on to the next stage of its development. It wants to deepen inter-faith engagement and dialogue beyond the level of goodwill building. The emphasis will be on building appreciation and understanding of each others' faith, beyond mere tolerance. To achieve this, Harmony Centre will work with all faith communities on content-based programs. For a start, we will be launching a discursive program later this evening – The Aleem Siddique Memorial Lecture Series. This Lecture will be a platform for the sharing of each religion's perspective or worldview on global issues affecting humanity. The aim is to share the commonalities or

the intrinsic universal values of each religion as we discuss these issues. Sohibus Samah Mufti Dr Fatris Bakaram will be its inaugural speaker. More content-based inter-faith programs will be rolled out in the coming years.

21 In addition, we will, in the next few years, use the additional resources that we have incorporated in the New Harmony Centre to further endear the Muslim community to inter-faith engagements. Asatizah, senior madrasah students, youth leaders, mosque and Muslim community leaders can take part in Learning Journeys and workshops on “Islam and Inter-Faith”. This is an attempt to enlarge the community’s pool of inter-faith activists and participants. We need a critical mass of inter-faith activists from the Singapore Muslim community with the capacity for deeper inter-faith engagements to spearhead our effort in strengthening inter-religious understanding based on knowledge.

22 In summary, besides its emphasis on strengthening social bonds amongst religious communities, the Harmony Centre in the coming years will organize content-based programs and continue to build capacity in inter-faith engagements. With these new additional efforts, the Harmony Centre hopes to contribute towards more substantive inter-faith engagements and understanding to enhance the multi-religious fabric of Singapore. May we be guided in realizing these noble intentions.

With that, thank you very much.