

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MUFTI OF SINGAPORE  
Ustaz Dr Mohamed Fatris Bakaram**

**2019 Hari Raya Gathering with Asatizah  
Tuesday, 2 July 2019 | Temasek Club**

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The Honourable Chairman of the Asatizah Recognition Board, Ustaz Ali Bin Hj Mohamed,

The Honourable Deputy Mufti of Singapore, Ustaz Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir,

Members of the Asatizah Recognition Board (ARB),

Respected Asatizah,

Ladies and gentlemen,

*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.*

**Introduction**

Alhamdulillah (*all praises to Allah*), for His infinite grace and blessing of kinship (*ukhuwwah*) that have bonded us together, and for which we have been given the opportunity to gather, meet and unite in this Hari Raya event at the end of Syawal 1440 Hijriyah.

2. This gathering is very significant as it symbolises the unity and solidarity of the Asatizah – especially in present day’s ever-challenging context. Our unity and solidarity, as witnessed here is invaluable. Moreover, Singapore needs it more than ever, to ensure the integrity of its multi-racial, -cultural, -lingual and -religious society.

3. Two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to participate in the International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) that was held in Singapore on 19 – 21 June

2019. I was pleased to see many Asatizah participating in the conference and I hoped they have benefited immensely from the constructive discussions throughout the conference.

4. The conference was attended by religious and community figures from around the world. Among the most important messages from the conference that I could share with you today are:

- a) A plural society is like a colourful piece of silk-woven cloth. It is pleasing to the eye, and yet it could be torn off if it is improperly worn. Accordingly, this silk-woven cloth needs to be cared for and preserved so that it will not get easily torn, which could undermine the stability of a plural society, especially like Singapore.
- b) Singapore is a small country; besides gaining valuable experience from other countries, Singapore also contributes significantly to other countries by sharing its experiences in building a resilient society.
- c) The need for cooperation or partnership between community leaders and religious leaders in establishing the resilience of a society with diverse faiths, views, culture and languages.

5. At the opening ceremony of the conference, a commitment to safeguard religious harmony was launched. Contents of that commitment are not new to Asatizah. Ever since in school, we have been exposed to the idea that despite the diversity in beliefs and religions within an Islamic civilization, it has not hampered the efforts to build and safeguard the integrity of a community, which had in turn contributed to the development of a great Islamic civilization of the time. Today, we follow the same discussion through the consensus of scholars (*ulama*) and

community leaders who have produced The Amman Message (2004) and the Marrakesh Declaration (2016), as well as the Asatizah Code of Ethics in Singapore.

6. The commitment to safeguard religious harmony underscores seven key points:

- a) Upholding freedom of religion
- b) Building stronger bonds
- c) Fostering a culture of consideration and mutual understanding
- d) Sharing and propagating beliefs respectfully and sensitively
- e) Maintain solidarity in crisis
- f) Supporting institutional efforts, and
- g) Safeguarding religious harmony for a better Singapore for all.

7. What impressed me during the launch of the commitment was the strategic role played by Singapore's religious figures including the Asatizah to foster religious harmony in Singapore has set a positive example for the world. I would like to congratulate Asatizah leadership for their efforts in setting the main agenda of religion is not only recognised locally but even internationally as well.

8. The contribution of Asatizah is also acknowledged by Mr Masagoes Zulkifli, Minister of Environment and Water Resources, who is also the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs in his keynote address at the Hari Raya Event on 21 June 2019. He recognised Asatizah's contribution together with the Office of Mufti in developing religious thought and practice that are relevant with local contexts, while at the same time being confident in contributing to the benefit of the larger Singapore society. On

that basis, religious leaders need to continue to develop a community of success that the Minister has emphasised and which consists of three main principles – Character, Competence and Citizenry.

### **Empowering the Institution of Asatizah Through the Path of Moderation (*Manhaj Wasatiyyah*)**

Blessed Asatizah,

9. Based on what I have mentioned just now, we must collectively think of steps to continue to strengthen the Institution of Asatizah, in which our contribution can be expanded and developed in preparation to face greater and more complex challenges.

10. In my opinion, this can be accomplished by making the path of moderation (*manhaj al-wasatiyyah*) a rule in carrying out a strategic role in embracing religious life in Singapore.

11. This rule has important features that I would like to highlight below:

- a) Enhance the strength and solidarity of the institution of Asatizah;
- b) Lead towards being just and fair in interacting with one another;
- c) Consistency in adhering to universal principles and values, and;
- d) Spread the concept of *khairiyyah* (righteousness) and peace as well as the safeguarding of the religion, society and country.

12. To elaborate this path of moderation (*manhaj wasatiyyah*), I have outlined three main points below:

- a) The path of moderation (*manhaj wasatiyyah*) which is the foundation of the Asatizah Code of Ethics cannot be fully appreciated or perceived if it is not supported and applied in everyday life. This process encompasses the value of togetherness, diversity, contextualisation and credibility that should be part of an Asatizah's personality. Asatizah are role models who are highly respected in the community. If we, the Asatizah do not show full support to the Code of Ethics that have been set by our own Asatizah, then best believe that our society will not be able to move forward in their religious practices.
- b) The path of moderation emphasizes on the participation of religious leaders in complex issues of the day that occur within a globalised society; be it issues at the local or international level such as global poverty, social equality, global warming and radical ideology.
- c) This institution of Asatizah is ours. Every development and progress was achieved by our local Asatizah. The latest achievement is the launch of the ARS Mandatory system which has placed the Asatizah institution on an equal standing with other professions that contribute to nation-building. The Asatizah institution is not merely an institution that should be the pride of the local Muslim community; in fact, it is a very valuable asset that must be preserved, cultivated, and defended by each and every Ustaz or Ustazah in Singapore. Institutions established by the Masyayikh (senior scholars) at the Singapore Religious Teachers Association (Pergas) which was then developed with the cooperation of the Asatizah Recognition Board (ARB), Pergas and Muis must be safeguarded and not left in peril for the benefit of the Asatizah institution itself.

### **The Prophetic Will**

Respected Asatizah,

13. As I conclude my speech, I would like to call upon all Asatizah to observe and reflect upon the prophetic will from the Prophet (may peace be upon him) as recorded by Imam al-Bukhari so that we may all instil it in our evaluation and appreciation for the contributions of others.

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ- أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ- قَالَ: "إِنَّ مَثَلِي وَمَثَلَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ مِنْ قَبْلِي كَمَثَلِ رَجُلٍ بَنَى بَيْتًا فَأَحْسَنَهُ وَأَجْمَلَهُ، إِلَّا مَوْضِعَ لَبِنَةٍ مِنْ زَاوِيَةٍ، فَجَعَلَ النَّاسُ يَطُوفُونَ بِهِ، وَيَعْجَبُونَ لَهُ، وَيَقُولُونَ: هَلَّا وُضِعَتْ هَذِهِ اللَّبِنَةُ؟ قَالَ: فَأَنَا اللَّبِنَةُ. وَأَنَا خَاتِمُ النَّبِيِّينَ"

“My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: 'Would that this brick be put in its place!' So I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets.”

**Dear Asatizah,**

14. How beautiful is the analogy illustrated by the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) in the hadith that I have just read briefly. Our Prophet never saw himself as the only noble person in contrast to the previous prophets. He describes himself as the last brick in a beautifully built home. This analogy – indirectly – recognizes the great contribution that were done by the prophets before him.

15. Hence, it has never occurred in the mind of the Prophet (may peace be upon him) – being the seal of all prophets – to demolish an existing building and erect a new home based on his own creation and design! He, as mentioned in another hadith, was sent to “*perfect the noble virtues*”.

16. That is what we have to do as Asatizah. As we observe the contributions that were sown by our predecessors with a spirit of appreciation, we should aspire to continue their legacy by preserving the bonds between each other, so as to embark on the future of religious leadership together.

17. I am certain that it will create a profound impact on Singapore's well-being in the future. The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) has instructed us believers to assist one another in the empowerment of every aspect of human life. He mentioned:

عن أبي موسى - رضي الله عنه - قال: قال رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم -: "المؤمن للمؤمن كالبنيان يشد بعضه بعضاً"

Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said, "The relationship of the believer with another believer is like (the bricks of) a building, each strengthens the other."  
(Recorded by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

17. May Allah bestow His blessing upon our brief gathering today. And may this gathering will carry on with more academic sessions (*jalsah ilmiah*) that would enhance the intellectual and spiritual capacities among the Asatizah (may Allah accept). *Wassalam*.