

SPEECH BY DR YAACOB IBRAHIM, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION & MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF MUSLIM AFFAIRS AT THE MUIS WORK PLAN SEMINAR AT THE SINGAPORE ISLAMIC HUB ON SATURDAY, 18 APRIL 2015 AT 9.00 AM

Haji Mohd Alami Musa, President of MUIS

Haji Abdul Razak Hassan Maricar, Chief Executive of MUIS

Mufti of Singapore Dr Mohamed Fatris Bakaram

Members of the MUIS Council

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Wr. Wb. and a very good morning.

1. I am happy to be here at this year's MUIS Workplan Seminar. This year is a significant one. As a nation, we celebrate our golden jubilee. But at the same time, we commemorate the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, our first Prime Minister, who dedicated his life to build a harmonious and prosperous, multi-racial Singapore. He played a pivotal role in supporting the Muslim community during our early years as we built up our key institutions. We are grateful to Mr Lee for his vision and immense contribution in bringing the nation and community to where we are today.

OUR PIONEERS, OUR INSPIRATION

2. In January this year, we hosted Sheikh Dr Shawki Allam, the Grand Mufti of Egypt as part of MUIS' Distinguished Visitor Programme. During the MUIS Lecture, Sheikh Dr Shawki spoke about the need for every Muslim to strengthen trust and understanding with other communities.

3. Our pioneer leaders exemplified these core values. They recognised that preserving peace and harmony was necessary to help safeguard the religious identity of the community. They worked tirelessly, hand in hand with the Government to introduce the Administration of Muslim Law Act in 1966 that led to the formation of MUIS, Syariah Court and Registry of Muslim Marriages. Though these institutions were initially met with scepticism, our community leaders were undeterred and strove to build the community's trust in these institutions.

STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS & COMMUNITY

4. These institutions have served our community well over the last five decades. They have helped our community adjust to the rapid changes around them, supported the aspirations of Muslims in tandem with Singapore's economic transformation, and nurtured the Singapore Muslim identity. Today, these institutions play a key part in all Muslims' lives and we should celebrate their role in our community's progress.

5. Today, I would like to touch on four areas that are close to the hearts of all in the community, and which highlight how MUIS and the community have worked together to advance the community's religious life over the years.

SHAPING COMMUNITY'S RELIGIOUS THINKING

6. First, the development of progressive religious thought over 50 years of change. We attribute this largely to our pioneer religious scholars like Almarhum Ustaz Ahmad Sonhadji, Almarhum Maulana Babu Sahib, and Almarhum Kiayi Ahmad Zuhri Mutammim. They were deeply anchored in the Islamic tradition yet were open to respond to the changing social contexts.

7. The legacy of their religious ideas is evident in our community's contributions towards the well-being of the larger Singapore society. I am happy to note that later this year, the Office of the Mufti will be publishing a series on the collection of fatwas since the last 40 years. This is an important effort to document our local religious heritage and spur further reflection on how to advance our religious thinking.

8. We must continue the legacy of our religious scholars, and our madrasah institutions play a key role in nurturing good, future asatizah. The community clearly appreciates the continuing significance of madrasah education as shown by their generous contribution to MBMF, Dana Madrasah and Wakaf Ilmu. With such contributions, we have been able to support teachers' training and development, provide financial assistance to needy students and make improvements to learning facilities.

9. This is further complemented by other resources like Edusave, which our madrasahs tap on to provide more enrichment programmes for madrasah students. In March, I shared that Singaporean students in madrasahs need not pay national examination fees, similar to students from national schools. The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth will assist MUIS to fund the examination fees for secular subjects, whereas Dana Madrasah will be used to fund the examination fees for religious subjects.

10. With these developments, I am confident that the improving quality and standard of education in our madrasahs will put our madrasah students in good stead for the future.

MOSQUES AS CENTRES OF THE COMMUNITY'S SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

11. The second area that I would like to touch on is the role of our mosques.

12. The mosque is at the centre of our community's socio-religious life. In the early 1970s, when some mosques had to be displaced because of urban development, pioneer leaders like the second MUIS president, Hj Buang Siraj and former Mufti Shaikh Syed Isa Semait, understood the sentiments of those who were affected. And they worked hard to engage and assuage the concerns of those affected. At the same time, our pioneers endeavoured to raise funds through door-to-door collections to build new mosques.

13. Later, through many discussions, and with the support of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Mosque Building Fund (MBF) was set up in 1975. With the community's strong ownership and support, we have been able to build 23 new-generation mosques and upgrade 39 others. A total of 86,300 prayer spaces have been added since then, in beautiful mosques that offer a much more pleasant environment for us to come together for prayer. And MUIS will continue to build new mosques and redevelop older ones to meet the needs of our community.

14. The mosque institution is a testimony to the spirit of *gotong-royong* in the community. Mosque staff work hand in hand with volunteers to ensure the smooth running of the mosque. More women and our youth are now coming forward to serve in the Mosque Management Boards. Beyond being a centre of worship and religious learning, our mosques

are playing the role of building bonds and growing the spirit of volunteerism in our community.

SUPPORTING THE LESS PRIVILEGED

15. The third area I would like to highlight is our community's support for the less privileged. The steady growth of zakat is another reflection of how the community has shown strong collective ownership in building the community's assets with MUIS. The annual zakat collection has now surpassed the \$30 million mark. This is a tremendous increase from the modest amount of less than \$20,000 when we first started collecting zakat fitrah.

16. The growth in zakat funds has enabled the community, through MUIS, to provide timely assistance to needy families, as well as the development of Islamic education, madrasah education and asatizah training.

17. The Enhanced Mosque Clusters, or EMCs, initiated in 2008, is part of MUIS' efforts to empower our mosques to play a key role in alleviating the challenges faced by zakat recipients. Since then, the number of zakat recipients has increased by 85% to 5,432 in 2014. From this year onwards, MUIS will streamline service standards for zakat disbursement at the EMCs. Zakat recipients or potential recipients can be assured of a more consistent delivery of social assistance across the 29 mosques partnering Muis. Through the networks established with Social Service Offices and Family Service Centres within their constituencies, the EMCs are well-placed to refer Zakat recipients to national assistance schemes like ComCare as well.

18. I am also happy for the zakat recipient families that have achieved financial independence under the Empowerment Partnership Scheme. Introduced in 2004, the scheme has helped 506 zakat recipient families to become self-reliant. Of these, some have even stepped forward to give back, by contributing voluntarily as mentors and sharing their successful experience with current EPS families.

19. Recognising the important role of volunteers, MUIS introduced the Mosque Befrienders Scheme in 2008 as a way to harness the community's collective efforts to support the zakat recipients who are under long-term care. Today, close to 600 befrienders are working closely with the mosques to provide emotional support and companionship to the elderly, the physically disabled and those suffering from chronic illnesses. MUIS will be providing more support for this role through structured training and engagement sessions in 2015.

TRANSFORMING HALAL INTO A MARK OF TRUST

20. The fourth key area of interest to our community is Halal certification. In 2014, Warees Halal Limited, a not-for-profit public company limited by guarantee, was formed to support the MUIS Halal Certification Unit. With Warees Halal undertaking the more operational functions, MUIS is able to focus on enforcement and more strategic Halal-related functions. This includes developing industry-relevant standards, streamlining practices within the value chain, and strengthening trust in the MUIS Halal mark. I am confident that this working model involving MUIS and Warees Halal will strengthen

compliance and ensure continued public confidence in Singapore's Halal certification system.

CONCLUSION

21. We have many reasons to celebrate and be thankful for the great strides we have collectively made in our socio-religious life. We are on firm footing as we embark on the next lap of nation building, and we hope the younger generation will emulate the spirit of our pioneers and work together to co-create our future together in Singapore.

22. We will face many different challenges but our core values must remain. The sense of mission, resilience and determination must continue to live on as the mantle of community leadership is passed on to our young. The *rahmatan lil 'alamin* ethos embodied by our earlier generations must be continued to be imbibed and strengthened further so that we are a community that inspires and radiates blessings to all. Allow me now to conclude in Malay.

23. Kemajuan dalam kehidupan beragama kita telah memberi kesan positif bukan sahaja pada masyarakat kita, tetapi juga pada kesejahteraan negara secara keseluruhannya. Masyarakat kita telah mencapai kemajuan yang membanggakan dalam masa yang singkat. Ianya berkat usaha bersama institusi kita, visi pemimpin generasi perintis serta sokongan padu daripada masyarakat. Para pemimpin perintis kita telah meletakkan batu asas yang kukuh buat Singapura walaupun terpaksa menempuh banyak dugaan dan cabaran.

24. Marilah kita terus mengekalkan warisan mendiang Encik Lee Kuan Yew dan para pemimpin perintis yang lain dalam mewujudkan Singapura yang lebih baik pada masa hadapan. MUIS dan institusi-institusi keagamaan kita memerlukan sokongan padu daripada semua pihak dalam menghadapi cabaran-cabaran mendatang. Marilah kita terus membimbing anak-anak muda kita dan memanjatkan doa kepada Allah swt agar Dia memberkati dan memudahkan usaha-usaha kita.

Anak muda tunggak harapan
Kukuh beriman nasihat diakur
Pohon doa dalam kesyukuran
Negara aman rakyatnya makmur

25. Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Wr. Wb.