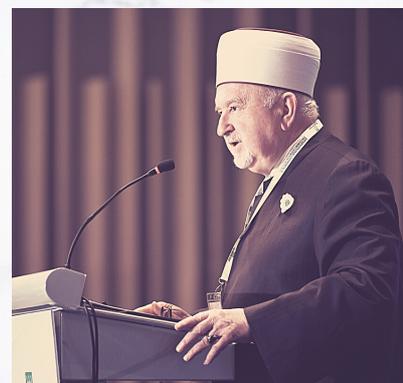# RPCS Quarterly

Developing New Horizons of Knowledge for Islam in the Contemporary World

Report on the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS)

Special Edition

Editorial

In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Dear readers and friends of Muis,

Our world today is characterised by disruptive change that poses great challenges but also immense opportunities for societies to thrive and flourish. The Covid-19 pandemic is a perfect example for us to revisit the ways in which we envision and plan for our societies to thrive. Our conversations around developing Muslim "Communities of Success" started well before the pandemic, but the public health crisis had offered us fresh perspectives on how we could bolster this discourse further.

It is with God's grace and blessings that we had been able to successfully organise the inaugural International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS) on 9th and 10th September 2022, at a time when borders re-opened and esteemed scholars and participants from many countries could join us. The ICCOS is part of the "Communities of Success" (COS) initiative by Muis. Our main aim is to provide a platform for Muslim minority communities from different parts of the world to engage on, and enrich positive narratives of successful Muslim communities, characterized by good character, competency, and citizenry (3Cs). Muis has also started a new research programme to support the COS initiative, called the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS). Through the RPCS, we hope to facilitate the development of a progressive religious leadership, and of new and contextualised bodies of knowledge, to guide Muslims in responding effectively to complex socio-religious issues and challenges.

With the theme "Contributing Citizens, Dynamic Institutions", the inaugural ICCOS focused on:
- How contextualised religious guidance and progressive religious leadership, supported by competent and efficient institutions, could empower Muslims to live as dignified and contributing citizens. Speakers discussed the concept of citizenry in contemporary contexts and the role Muslims play in plural and secular societies.
- The important roles various institutions such as, educational, religious, social, cultural, legal, and political institutions could play, to develop "Communities of Success". Discussions centred around how government agencies and Muslim communities could work together to build robust and resilient institutions that could thrive in a fast-transforming world.

We are pleased to present to you this conference report which documents the highlights from the presentations and discussions that took place in the conference, as well as a summary of the Executive Study Programme (ESP) which was conducted for the international participants. We hope you find the content of this report relevant to your efforts in contributing towards successful communities. We welcome any feedback you may have on the proceedings of the conference and the contents of this report.

With best wishes from the RPCS Editorial Team

Content

Keynote Address

by Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore

PM Lee expressed his gratitude to be part of the inaugural International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS), along with esteemed religious scholars, asatizah and community leaders from all over the world. ICCOS represents an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss how different communities can acquire success in diverse and contemporary societies.

PM Lee acknowledged the challenges in realising the vision of diverse yet cohesive societies which live harmoniously and successfully together. He notes that the matter is not straightforward for Muslim communities, particularly those living as minorities in secular and diverse societies. And while Muslim individuals play their part in being responsible and contributing citizens, countries with Muslim minorities must reciprocally be able to build the right institutions and foster the right attitudes and values in society. With no singular approach, much could be learnt from one another to achieve this goal.

In Singapore's context, both race and religion are important aspects of the community's identity. Muslims form 15% of the local population, of which ethnic Malays form the majority. While Singapore is fortunate that racial and religious relations today are generally harmonious and peaceful, it had not always been the case, especially half a century ago. Painful historical lessons serve as important reminders of the need to maintain peace and harmony and to avoid distrust and division. In the continuous and collective efforts to foster peaceful and harmonious relations, every segment of society must play their part.

The Singapore government seeks to uphold multi-racialism by bringing the different races and religions together and rejecting sectarian or majoritarian politics. This can be seen through the various policies and laws that have been designed to uphold this key principle, which includes safeguarding the rights of minority communities.

Such efforts and policies prevent minority groups from being marginalised, and ensure these groups have the space to pursue their cultural and religious practices.

The minority communities, including Muslims, also contribute and do their part to maintain racial and religious harmony, and social cohesion. They approach issues with a spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation. They understand that because of the multiracial context of Singapore, some things must be done differently from other places and contexts. PM Lee cited several examples of how the Singapore Muslim community have demonstrated their pragmatism and ability to contextualise practices in accordance with religious values, such as broadcasting the azan (call to prayer) over the radio and pointing the loudspeakers in mosques inwards. This allowed for mosques to be built within dense public housing estates and for such an arrangement to be accepted and welcomed by residents and neighbours of other faiths. In tackling delicate issues that arose from living in communities where different faiths and ethnic groups intermingled closely, Muslims in Singapore have also demonstrated the ability to engage amicably and constructively.

PM Lee also stressed on the importance of minority communities maintaining the trust and confidence of other groups in society. In Singapore, Muslim leaders work closely with government and community partners in guiding the community on proper interpretation of Islam and maintenance of mutual trust between Muslims and non-Muslims. He acknowledged that this requires strong and respected Islamic leadership to stay on top of its responsibilities. PM Lee urged Muis to continue to invest in Singapore's Islamic religious leadership. For example, programmes and scholarships which

> 66 In Singapore, Muslim leaders work closely with government and community partners in guiding the community on proper interpretation of Islam and maintenance of mutual trust between Muslims and non-Muslims. 99

aim to equip aspiring asatizah with the knowledge and skills to serve the community could be established and strengthened. The continuous expansion and building of new religious knowledge is also a critical exercise and PM Lee encouraged institutions and religious scholars to work with Muis through the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS), for the benefit of Muslim communities around the world.

Beyond being good Muslims, PM Lee also emphasised the importance of minority communities to fully participate in the economic and social life of their countries. Thanks to the various collective efforts from the state authorities and community leaders, the Muslim community has made considerable progress over the past decades.

Additionally, the majority groups must also do their part and make the necessary efforts to uphold peaceful relations. In a multi-racial society, the majority group must be ready go one step further by acknowledging and respecting the interests of minority groups. They must realise that in any society, it is harder to belong to a minority than a majority group, and the latter should therefore be especially mindful never to make the minority groups feel left out.

To conclude, PM Lee acknowledged that Singapore has come a long way in its journey but building a cohesive multi-racial and multi-religious society is always a work in progress. Times and circumstances change, new generations have different life experiences and expectations, and from time to time, society will need to address new and sensitive issues. In a multi-religious society, while the government takes a neutral and secular approach, it must also recognise and respect the different legitimate views and aspirations among Singaporeans, and balance them fairly to reach a political accommodation.

Moving ahead, with this 'give-and-take' approach, all groups can live and let live, and get along together. PM Lee strongly encouraged the continued promotion of mutual exchange of ideas and practices to develop Muslim communities of success, including on platforms such as ICCOS.

> " Singapore has come a long way in its journey, although building a cohesive multi-racial and multi-religious society will constantly be a work in progress. "

THE SINGAPORE MUSLIM COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE TOWARDS A COMMUNITY OF SUCCESS

by Ustaz Dr. Nazirudin Mohd Nasir,
Mufti of the Republic of Singapore

Mufti Dr Nazirudin outlined important lessons learnt from the pandemic. Amongst others, it created new and critical perspectives in developing resilience and the meaning of success. It taught us that life is not just about the self, but the community, not about getting what we want but attaining what we need. Mufti emphasised that religion is indeed an important source of resilience and social responsibility. The pandemic experience has given us a crash course on the most important ingredients of success in a fast-changing world: resilience guided by our principles and values, adaptability in navigating change, and solidarity with others guided by the values of charity, compassion, and hospitality.

In discussing the important role of faith communities in overcoming unprecedented challenges like the pandemic, the connection between the Shariah, society, and humanity is critical. While the Shariah helps respond to various questions depending on one's social context, it also provides important general principles and foundations. For example, it urges mankind to protect and enhance the welfare and well-being of all. Indeed, everything that the Shariah requires its followers to do are never outside the realm of human life and society, but within it and for its benefit.

The challenge of bridging the divide between the religious and secular is becoming even more acute today, as the gulf between religious norms and values and the liberal secular state appears to grow wider. If we make no attempts to bridge the divide, we will end up with communities withdrawing and not participating fully within the society. Succumbing to withdrawal means becoming only concerned with protecting our own faith and demanding that our religious rights must always be fulfilled as citizens. However, a thoughtful reading of our religious traditions and teachings would reveal that these aspects of modern life are not anathema to the Muslim faith.

The Singaporean Muslim Identity (SMI) reflects the belief that Singaporean Muslims can be good Muslims, good neighbours, and good Singaporeans at the same time. While our identities and allegiances to faith and nation means having to adjust and adapt in a diverse society, the expectation that there should be no need to adjust or compromise is both unreasonable and unrealistic. In fact, it is very clear from our Islamic history that rigidity and inflexibility were not traits of the Prophet's guidance to Muslims.

On the importance of working towards the common good, Muslims can learn from the prophetic examples that are consistent with the way the Quran describes the mutual and symbiotic relationship between community and state, and how success depends on the level of trust, confidence, and support between the two. When the state offers its citizens a safe space to live and practice their beliefs, citizens reciprocate with doing good and acting with fairness (*al-birr*) and justice (*al-qist*). This is the clearest indication of the Qur'an's instruction to work towards the common good, driven by values such as kindness and equity.

In finding solutions for increasingly complex contemporary and future challenges, religious education and guidance must be empowering for the Muslim community. Mufti stressed that it is the responsibility of religious leaders and scholars to convey the principles and values to the community to empower them in making their own decisions when faced with unique problems. In fact, this is how the Singapore fatwa institution works today, where it refrains from simply highlighting what is permissible or otherwise. Rather, the fatwa formulation processes elaborate the relevant principles for individuals to consider and apply to their own situations. While this approach is more challenging than giving direct answers, more circumstantial and complex issues in the present and the future mean that this is the better way forward.

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The long-held notion of a dichotomous but conflicting and sometimes acrimonious relationship between the religious and the secular, faith and science, or Islam and the secular state no longer reflect our social realities today. In the face of many more complex challenges, our efforts to forge success cannot wait much longer, and it is necessary for Muslims to muster the courage and honesty to speak about our strengths and weaknesses, gaps, and blind spots. Indeed, our generation must chart its own path towards success, empowered, and not incapacitated, by tradition. This endeavour requires confidence and courage to read our traditions afresh, think critically, and co-create solutions creatively with others.

PANEL 1: NURTURING CHARACTER FOR COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS

Overview

The first ICCOS panel presented on how Muslim communities could draw inspiration from Islamic traditions to forge a progressive and forward-looking vision of Islam in contemporary contexts as contributive citizens. Professor Muhammad Quraish Shihab discussed the process of ijtihad as a science and methodology of interpretation of religious scripture in offering new solutions to modern challenges and in advancing society. Sheikh Dr Mustafa Cerić's presentation explored a moral and ethical worldview shaped by Islam which could inspire a purposeful life with responsibility towards all of God's creations. Sheikh Dr Amr Mostafa Hassanein Elwrdany expanded on the concepts and principles of citizenry in Islam and highlighted the limitations of classical traditions which necessitate a rethink of religious traditions and a revisiting of current understandings of administration of the modern state.

Approaching Religious Traditions in Contemporary Contexts

By Professor Dr. Muhammad Quraish Shihab,
Expert on Quranic exegesis and former Minister of Religious Affairs in the Fourth Development Cabinet, Indonesia

Professor Quraish elaborated on the role of the *turath* (Islamic tradition) and ways to engage with it in our contemporary context. *Turath* refers to any knowledge that is connected to the Qur'anic texts, the Sunnah (prophetic traditions) and the *ijtihad*, and the process of interpreting classical religious literature.

According to Professor Quraish, there are two main types of *turath*. The first type relates to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the main sources of the Shariah. In contrast, the second type which relates to the *ijtihad* of the early generations of Muslims, which have been dealt with varying degrees of reception. Some consider past *ijtihad* as conclusive and definitive, whilst others reject it on the claim that Muslim communities have not been able to move forward because of it.

There is the middle ground which is a more balanced view that considers the ijtihad of previous scholars to be valid but conditional to their respective contexts. In other words, while an ijtihad may be applicable for a certain time and place, it may not necessarily be suitable in other settings. According to this moderate view, while the merit of past ijtihad in providing solutions for Muslims within their contexts is acknowledged, contemporary scholars are permitted exercise ijtihad anew based on their own interpretation of religious texts in the circumstances they live.

The speaker argues that a diversity of opinions is acceptable – and even inevitable – due to many reasons, such a scholar's comprehension and interpretation of scripture, the development of knowledge and sciences, and one's lived realities and environment.

Yet, the *turath* remains compatible with any time and place, and its study continues to be important and relevant as it serves as a reference for the purpose of presenting new solutions and facilitates betterment within societies, which is essentially the objective of the Shariah.

One of the biggest challenges in engaging with *turath* is how to deal with its more austere and/or extreme interpretations and applications today. In this regard, the presence of qualified scholars and jurists today is crucial as they possess the ability to derive sound religious interpretations and solutions, subjected to their mastery of its related sciences, and their comprehension of the demands or contexts in which they live. Undoubtedly, this is a momentous task which requires collective effort from all parties.

While scholars and jurists have made tremendous efforts in establishing the methodological foundations in interpreting religious scriptures, misinterpretations still occur for a multitude of reasons, such as a weak command of the Arabic language, when one is unable to distinguish between the different functions of prophetic instructions given under the different scenarios and the different roles of the Prophet-- as the mufti, judge or political leader. Indeed, the Prophet's judgment that is specifically meant for specific litigants differ greatly from the fatwas he issued to a wider and more general audience. Additionally, the Prophet at times committed actions that were specific to him and not meant for others (*khususiyyat*), like his marriage to more than four wives.

Similarly, misinterpretations can also happen because of one's inability to understand classical concepts in today's context, such as *Dar al-Islam* (abode of peace) and *Dar al-Harb* (abode of war), and *al-Walaa wa al-Baraa* (loyalty and disavowal). This includes the Qur'anic references to religious diversity and the restriction of social relationships between Muslims and others, such as in verse 51 of Al-Ma'idah.

> **"** One of the biggest challenges in engaging with turath is how to deal with its more austere and/or extreme interpretations and applications today. **"**

In some places, such misinterpretations have led to major disputes where some view forging political alliances with non-Muslims or electing non-Muslims to hold political office as prohibited in Islam. Yet, there are other verses in the Qur'an that call on Muslims to be righteous and just towards others. In fact, if Muslims were to carefully understand the Qur'anic verses in a holistic and comprehensive manner, one would see how these verses affirm that the only political alliance that is prohibited is that which involves those who are hostile and oppressive towards Muslims.

Similarly, when interpreting religious scriptures, it is equally important to be mindful of contextual differences. One of the notable attempts in applying Islam in context is the initiative by *Nahdhatul Ulama* in Indonesia known as "*Islam Nusantara*", meaning the Islam of the Indonesian archipelago. It calls for the adherence to religious principles by finding the right balance in preserving classical traditions and adopting a contextualised understanding of religious texts and sources. *Islam Nusantara* also acknowledges and accommodates local cultures so long as they do not contradict Islamic principles and values.

In conclusion, the speaker underlined the necessity to strike a delicate balance in practising one's religious beliefs and fulfilling one's commitment towards the secular state. The key element behind this model is *ijtihad*, which emphasises that renewal does not equate to total change. Instead, renewal requires preservation of what remains beneficial and applicable, while making the necessary adjustments by leaving out that which is no longer practical and feasible within our current context and lived realities. All these should be coupled with our constant appreciation of the vast contributions and works done by past generations and classical scholars.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS

Contributing Citizens, Dynamic Institutions

Ethico-Theological Foundations of a Muslim Community of Success

By Sheikh Dr. Mustafa Cerić,
The Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sheikh Mustafa elaborated on the relationship between theology and humankind's pursuit of good. In many faiths, notions about the universe's coming into existence (cosmogony) and the end of times (eschatology) shape ethical orientations and moral behaviours. Similarly, in all three Abrahamic religious traditions, these visions contribute to the most important concepts of normative relations between man, his Creator, as well as non-human creatures.

An acknowledgement and belief in God's creation of the universe is a starting point of a moral and ethical worldview. This is influenced by a sense of indebtedness to the Creator based on a voluntary submission, and not compulsion. However, man is not in charge of the laws of physics, and he is therefore not accountable for the functions or laws of nature. Instead, he is responsible for his moral conduct towards fellow human and non-human beings. In this regard, the emphasis and priority for mankind should be to harmonise his relationship with the Creator, his fellow brothers in humanity, and the natural world, in his current abode.

In this regard, mankind should think about the consequences of his moral and ethical behaviour and avoid being a cause of harm for himself and others.

Religion inspires mankind to live purposefully and to be of benefit to those around him. As people of faith, we believe that this world was not created in vain, but rather, for meaningful reasons and purposes. Most significantly, it is to present God's glory to His creatures, and this can be done by emulating and manifesting His love and mercy in our interactions with others. By this very purpose, God instructs humankind to thrive physically and improve spiritually to achieve immediate and eternal success.

The speaker concluded that humankind is God's debtor because He gave him life without asking for anything in return, except for being grateful and committed to doing good for the whole of mankind. This presents the core character and basis of man's designation as God's vicegerents as described in the Qur'an; that he continues to enjoin goodness to all and prevents evil in all its forms.

The Concept and Principles of Citizenry in Islam

By Sheikh Dr. 'Amr Mostafa Hassanein Elwrdany,
Secretary of Egypt's Fatwa Council (Dar al-Iftaa), Egypt

Sheikh 'Amr highlighted how coexistence is an intrinsic part of God's creation and design. In fact, God has made peaceful coexistence a religious obligation such that there must not be prejudice between Muslims and people of other faiths, as declared by the Prophet in his final sermon: "The believer is one who is trusted by others.". This means that Muslims are required to foster positive relationships with humankind regardless of their faith and belief.

The speaker noted three main factors which may impede the successful cultivation of coexistence and citizenry:

- Lack of emphasis and/or awareness on effective ways to promote and maintain successful coexistence.

- Prevalence of negative character and personality traits like *fardaniyyah* (individualism), *mizajiyyah* (neuroticism), and *tasyakkuk* (doubtfulness) among many others.

- Increase in hate speech and hateful rhetoric due to a variety of underlying factors and reasons.

It is important for Muslims to recognise that our classical traditions may not provide the detailed guidance in dealing with current realities. This is where insistence on implementing past systems of governance like the Caliphate system is counter intuitive due to the jarring differences between the past and the present in the needs and realities of communities and societies. Nurturing a community of success in today's context requires a rethink of our religious traditions and revisiting and expanding our understanding of state administration. This may constitute three main components, namely (1) citizenry; (2) administration of public and individual interests; and (3) sovereign law.

Within the Islamic traditions, the concept of citizenry can be traced back to the life of the Prophet, including but not limited to the Medinan Constitution. Although the Prophet did not set the boundaries of governance based on territorial borders per se, he provided the option for those who wish to enter in the constitution through a contractual agreement, which is a similar concept to citizenry.

In addition, there are five models of peaceful coexistence that existed throughout the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which relate to the concept of citizenry. In addition to the first four models (Meccan, Abyssinian and the two Medinan models) previously identified by Sheikh Dr. Ali Gomaa, the speaker proposes a fifth model, i.e., the Yemeni model. This was when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent the companion Muaz Ibn Jabal with two others to Yemen, which involved a minority Muslim group ruling over a non-Muslim majority population.

Muslims must hence recognise that these five models reflect the important role of citizenry, the same way the first generation of Muslims were active citizens of the respective societies they were born into or had lives in, whether under Muslim rule or otherwise. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) migrated, he turned towards the direction of Makkah and said, "Had I not been expelled from you, I would never have left." This suggests that had it not been for the Prophet being forced out of Makkah, he would have wanted to remain in the country of his birth, even if it meant becoming a citizen under non-Muslim rule.

> 66 Nurturing a community of success in today's context requires a rethink of our religious traditions and revisiting and expanding our understanding of state administration. 99

While the objective here is not to categorise or classify countries in accordance with the five models above, we can extract important lessons from these models of coexistence which could be effectively applied to our respective circumstances and situations. Muslims also require a renewed understanding of social contracts where citizenry can be defined as a status bounded by a legal social contract which aims to establish public safety and security, social justice, and community development. Hence citizenry can be viewed either as a status, or a contract between the individual and state per se, or as a virtue that brings about many positive outcomes.

Developing such a renewed understanding of citizenry in Islam requires Muslims to further examine its essential foundations, conditions, objectives, and characteristics:

- **Foundations**: There are distinct similarities between citizenship and business transactions in Islam. Like any contract of agreement, the state and society represent the different parties involved, and the rights of citizens as well as the law of the land are like the specific objects of the contract. In addition to these, the constitution serves as the contract of agreement, where the terms and conditions are clearly set out and recorded.

- **Conditions**: Through studying the constitution of Medina, there are eight conditions for citizenry: (a) mutual responsibility; (b) embracing diversity; (c) active participation; (d) justice and fairness; (e) acceptance and tolerance; (f) upholding sovereignty; (g) honesty and transparency; (h) progress and development.

- **Objectives**: While there may be various objects or subjects involved in the social contract of citizenry, these should essentially revolve around the *maqasid* (main objectives) of Shariah, which includes not just the preservation of life, values and identity, but also the development of education, culture, public safety and security, social justice and economic progress and development.

- **Characteristics**: Like any other social contract that requires mutual agreement by choice and without any form of compulsion, both the state and the citizens are required to actively participate and fully abide by the mutually derived constitution.

Finally, it is necessary to acquire and effectively channel the right resources to better improve the administration of state and public interests and develop public awareness on the importance of becoming competent and contributing citizens.

PANEL I DISCUSSION

The panel discussion underscored how **religious traditions can continue to be relevant in modern times.** Muslims should continue to preserve and protect the spirit of our religious tradition whilst being respectful of the rights of others. This should shape the character of Muslims living in the modern world.

Central to the character of a successful Muslim is **the concept of *'amr ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil)** which is argued to be the key to moral equilibrium in society. This requires the observation of good manners and decorum in all our interactions.

There is also a need to instil a proper and robust understanding amongst Muslims today regarding the **compatibility of the modern nation state with other systems of governance present within the religious tradition.** Additionally, it is essential to **look beyond classical interpretations of concepts such as *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* to encourage contribution within modern systems of governance.** With this refreshed approach, **diversity can be viewed as compatible with the Muslim faith**, and not something which must be opposed and removed. The panel concurred that **citizenry should be viewed as a right and responsibility upon all Muslims, and it constitutes extending goodness to the whole of mankind.**

PANEL II: DEVELOPING COMPETENT MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN DIVERSE & MODERN CONTEXTS

Overview

The second ICCOS panel discussed the concept of contributive citizenry, focussing on how it can strengthen social cohesion in diverse societies in which many Muslim communities live as a minority. Highlighting the increasingly complex modern challenges and the rising societal expectations on religious leadership, Professor Abdullah Saeed elaborated on the reforms needed for Islamic higher education, to prepare and train religious leadership who can guide the Muslim communities in navigating diverse and secular societies. Professor Mona Siddiqui spoke on the important role of religion, including Islam, in strengthening social cohesion. She emphasised the need to develop constructive religious language which acknowledges shared values and supports a vision of the preservation of human rights and a good and equitable society for all. Finally, Dr. Khalil Abdul Rashid discussed the importance of the leadership of Muslim institutions in advancing tolerance and social cohesion, by drawing on lessons learnt from the experience of chaplaincy in the US.

Religious Leadership and Training for a Successful Muslim Community: A Possible Way Forward

By Professor Abdullah Saeed,
Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and
Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia

In his presentation, Professor Saeed provided an analysis of the current expectations on religious teachers in Muslim-minority contexts, existing models of training and education, and shared his proposal to advance religious training and leadership for the future.

Based on his observations, there is an overwhelming expectation upon religious teachers and leaders to perform multiple roles in today's world. Other than carrying out basic religious functions, they are also expected to educate the society by giving talks and classes, contextualise Islam for the local population, engage and guide Muslim youths in dealing with contemporary challenges, in addition to managing Islamic institutions. On top of that, they are also required to participate in interfaith activities to foster social cohesion, interact with and advise the government on matters pertaining to the faith community, and participate in projects of national interest and security, amongst many others.

The critical question to pose is whether institutions of Islamic learning are adequately preparing religious graduates to deal with the various challenges and responsibilities outlined above.

The speaker argues that in many cases, the training offered does not encompass the expected roles. In other words, there is a pervasive mismatch between the training that our religious graduates attend and the roles that are expected of them.

> ❝ The critical question to pose is whether institutions of Islamic learning are adequately preparing religious graduates to deal with the various challenges and responsibilities outlined above. ❞

The speaker shared his observation of three existing models of Islamic training institutions:

- The Traditional Model
- The Integrated Model
- The Liberal/Western Model

Even as each model has limitations, there are positive aspects in each which could be identified and integrated to formulate a unique model of religious training for the future. From the Traditional model, we can retain the emphasis on language proficiency and an immersion in classical Islamic texts and traditions of various disciplines. From the Integrated model, we may adopt the integration of Islamic disciplines with other relevant fields such as sociology, anthropology, and history. From the Liberal/Western model, we can emulate its emphasis on academic skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, research, and academic writing. Additionally, it also studies the socio-historical development of Islamic disciplines, which may often not be emphasised as much in other models of Islamic education.

The speaker also presented a proposed model of religious training for the future which involves the key areas of knowledge, skills, and spirituality. This must be complemented by a number of other factors such as contextualisation, intellectual freedom, interreligious relations, historical understanding, meaningful learning, and spiritual development. These aspects, some of which continue to be underemphasised in each of the current models of Islamic education, will help to strengthen the training and outcomes of the education model that we wish to develop in order to nurture competent religious leaders for the future.

As part of our efforts in building practical knowledge on issues which Muslim minorities face, the speaker highlighted several areas that should be included such as Muslim interaction with secular law and modern systems of governance, limits of contextualisation for Islamic ethical and legal norms and rulings, emerging ethical issues in areas such as stem cell research and gene editing, the impact of technological developments on basic forms of worship, and developments on international human rights norms such as freedom of religion and equality.

The speaker also provided several suggestions for the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) initiative:

- Identify a range of urgent matters of interest to Muslim minorities and organise a series of focused symposia on each issue.

- Identify scholars with high interest in specific issues and develop a method in consultation such as basic principles of research and limits of contextualisation.

- Form a global alliance of scholars who can contribute to these types of research and endorse its results, which, in turn, could gain legitimacy and authority as collective positions.

In his conclusion, the speaker underscored the importance of investing resources in these areas and building on our experiences, in order to continue to develop leadership and be of service not only to the local Muslim population, but also around the world, especially those in Muslim-minority contexts.

Embracing Religious Diversity and Interfaith Cooperation

By Professor Mona Siddiqui, OBE,
Professor of Islamic and Interreligious Studies, University of Edinburgh, and the Jane and Aatos Erkko Professor at the Helsinki Collegium, Scotland

In her presentation, Professor Mona Siddiqui discussed the role of religion in strengthening social cohesion, which is key for faith communities to continue to flourish and succeed in a diverse environment. In general, the speaker shared several key aspects which must be emphasised to strengthen social cohesion.

Firstly, religious language must be constructive. It requires the preservation of human rights, whose language has come to the forefront in recent decades, thus creating new paradigms of justice. Where faith has traditionally place humankind largely in relation to, and within the perspective of,

the Divine, modernity emphasises humankind's relationship to each other, where the human person assumes the centre stage. Notions such as justice, equality, and recognition of differences are no longer predicated on a divine concept but on our desire for a good and equitable society for everyone. A recent survey found that young people are increasingly more likely to see interfaith work as a vehicle for social and political action, allowing them to focus on issues of social action and justice.

The issue of ethics and values must also be taken seriously, especially in many contemporary environments where there are lower levels of religiosity.

It demands of us to address how we remain steadfast to our faith and shape our attitudes towards others. Today, questions remain on whether Muslims hold intrinsically different values which may inevitably clash with the values of liberal democracies and civil societies. Therefore, it must be our priority to identify common values which could form the basis of the public and private spaces of civil society, where people of all backgrounds converge and coexist.

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In this regard, some aspects of pluralism must be taken into consideration as it encourages societies to acknowledge shared values to shape communal life. This is especially important in modern democracies which thrive on people of different backgrounds and beliefs living together and contributing to the common good. It entails that everyone is given a stake in moral life and the wellbeing of the country they mutually call home. This approach cultivates a better sense of citizenry, which instils a sense of belonging alongside others and more importantly, making others feel that they belong alongside us. In this context, citizenship cannot simply be a silent, passive, law-abiding presence. Rather, it must always remain visionary and proactive for the good of all society, and citizens should be motivated to get involved on behalf of other citizens to promote common interests.

Today, coexistence demands that we move beyond cultural and perceptual boundaries even if we may differ in some respects. After all, diversity is a reality, but inclusion is a conscious choice and a moral commitment. It requires not only courage and humility, but also solidarity and empathy with those around us. If we can work together because we feel that we have a stake in the moral good of our society, there would always be the motivation to flourish and help others to flourish. Therefore, we should strive to reframe the complex theories of diversity of faith and multiculturalism into simpler but deeper concepts of empathy and sociability, which can bind us to one another through ordinary and radical acts of kindness, thus helping us to arrive at a more hopeful future.

Ultimately, we need to live in a manner whereby values may still collide, but we are able to agree on the values that are worth holding on to, and this demands a set of ethics that takes pluralism of life and values seriously.

Leadership of Muslim Institutions in Minority Contexts – Reflections from America and its Muslim Chaplaincy Experience

By Dr. Khalil Abdul-Rashid,
Muslim Chaplain at Harvard University and Co-founder of the Islamic Seminary of America in Dallas, United States

Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid discussed the role of Muslim leadership and institutions in advancing tolerance and social cohesion, specifically in the American context where Muslims make up a very small minority. In spite of this, there are significant numbers of Islamic institutions in America - 3000 mosques and Islamic centres, and 240 Islamic schools. Most American Muslims continue to express patriotism to the nation although they have been confronted with a multitude of challenges, especially post-9/11.

The speaker spoke on Muslim chaplaincy in the US as an illustration of the role that Islamic religious leadership can play in contributing to the broader community. Despite being a recent conception, chaplaincy in the US is fast becoming a relevant and effective new paradigm of Muslim communal leadership.

In fact, chaplains are sometimes given more recognition than local Imams, therefore signifying the opportunity and responsibility to be of service not only to the faith groups, but also to surrounding communities.

The spirit of Muslim chaplaincy as observed in the American context today is derived from the Quranic account of Prophet Yusuf, who served and had been employed by the non-religious ruling institution of his time. Despite the difference in faith, it did not stop him from serving his people and protecting their interests in times of vulnerability. This participation and contribution to the larger society is an aspect which people of faith must strive to emulate in their contexts.

The three areas of Muslim chaplaincy, micro, mezzo, and macro level practices, all complement each other and are all uniquely a part of cultivating an atmosphere of diversity, inclusion and belonging for Muslims living as minorities. It is a role that is best accomplished by someone with a commitment to service, an appreciation for scholarship, and a love for the climate and culture of public service.

In America, Muslim chaplains quickly understood that in order to build strong Muslim communities, they must be prepared to protect faith communities in general. This includes building alliances with other institutions and forming coalitions which supported belonging and inclusion. Additionally, religion teaches us that the best of mankind is the most beneficial to mankind, regardless of their differences. Chaplaincy is therefore seen as an expression or a pursuit of the love of God through service and beneficence to others.

The new paradigm of religious leadership must understand that our pursuit for equality and justice is incomplete if it is pursued for only ourselves. Rather, it should be pursued with benevolence or ihsan for all. In the U.S.A., Muslim chaplaincy is rapidly emerging as a new form of Muslim minority community leadership and is situated at the intersection of communal leadership, Muslim scholar/teacher, institutional manager/administrator, and Muslim counsellor/spiritual guide. It is a new phenomenon in general for community leadership in the West with constituents who are not only Muslim but non-Muslims, thus potentially contributing significantly to the strengthening of social cohesion.

PANEL II DISCUSSION

The **importance of developing competent communication** was underlined as a critical step in **developing competent Muslim communities in diverse and modern contexts.** There is a need to emphasise our shared humanity and to avoid language which causes further division. Aligned to this, it is recommended for Islamic studies to also underscore the value of humanity and become part of the foundation in developing a good education. The notion of pluralism also needs to be consciously incorporated in order to reduce judgmentalism or a binary threat perception that has become quite common.

Another factor to consider in nurturing more open mindsets in diverse and plural environments is **the existence generational divides on worldviews, which needs to be addressed to break unhealthy cycles of interaction and stereotyping.** Constructive religious language and awareness of rights need to be part of the education of young people in order to get them engaged in religious learning and deepening their faith. Constructive religious language should include ihsan (kindness) in establishing components of justice, equality, and fairness to address the issue of emotional effectiveness. Similarly, constructive religious language can develop loyalty to faith that is not narrowly defined.

Finally, one of the panellists also touched on **developing healthy patriotism**, which includes standing up for justice and putting in efforts to improve the well-being of society at large, and inspiring others to do the same.

PANEL III: ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION & ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Overview

The third ICCOS panel looked at how religion, through various religious organisations and leadership, could enhance social cohesion and active citizenry at the institutional level by working together with institutions of similar interests, such as government and international bodies. Professor Dr Azza Karam shared on the role of religious organisations during humanitarian crises and the value of working together in a coordinated manner. From the experience of the Muslim minority community in South Africa, Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool discussed lessons of active citizenship, coexistence and nation building. Finally, Miss Yeoh Chee Yan shed light on the Singapore experience, notably the role of the secular state in facilitating social cohesion by working alongside religious groups of various faiths.

Building Resilient Communities ahead of Global Challenges

By Professor Dr. Azza Karam,
Secretary General of Religions for Peace International

Professor Azza Karam noted how religion performs various crucial roles in the areas of peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights, which are also pillars of the United Nations system. Numerous studies have shown religious organisations to be one of the earliest and currently most important social service providers throughout the globe, where they make up 70% of humanitarian responses, especially during times of crisis. Additionally, religious institutions offer their services in healthcare, infrastructure, employment, and education, amongst others, all of which coincides with the functions of the United Nations. All these statistics substantiate the importance for the UN to partner with religious institutions and organisations.

While many governments have previously viewed religions to be of significance only in the private space, there has been a notable shift in the last 20 years, where many have sought to partner with religious leaders and organisations which continue to be powerful and influential actors in many parts of the world. To further advance the cause of religions as a catalyst for good, many interfaith organisations such as the Religions for Peace (RFP) were formed, in which various religious groups are represented from the leadership to the grassroots level, forming a coalition dedicated to promoting peace within societies around the globe.

By combining the political, social, and economic capital of different religious groups, there would be better collaboration for these groups to serve the wider community together. When a collective service is formed, no single religious institution or ideology becomes dominant or more influential than others.

The recent Covid pandemic presented a global humanitarian challenge which took place against the backdrop of a climate crisis and monumental shifts in political power. It also coincided with the largest presence of refugees in many parts of the world, many of whom are Muslims. At the same time, access to medicines and vaccines are tightly controlled, resulting in greater vulnerability and suffering in many societies. For religious groups, this was a great opportunity to think, act, and serve differently by serving together, especially since the outbreak was not limited territorially and did not distinguish between people.

However, the speaker shared her observation that in many places, many religious groups continued to respond exclusively, with each directing their response to their own faith groups. Although the public is eventually served, service remained to be in silos when there was an opportunity could have been seized the to strengthen multi-religious collaboration.

'No one is safe until everybody is safe'. The survival of the minority depends on the others, and the thriving of the others depends on the minority. Our conversation must therefore not be limited to religious groups coming together, but rather, serving the society together and investing in one another.

Many Muslim organisations and institutions today are becoming more involved in, and contributing to, various humanitarian programmes. This reflects their readiness to build and strengthen social cohesion in times of great vulnerability. Religious communities and minority groups can be a trigger for a mindset change which would allow for creativity in the understanding and application of the Muslim faith. For Muslim minorities, a sense of responsibility can be better fostered in order to contribute to the wider society.

In conclusion, as we reflect on God's mercy upon mankind, we should ask – "Is God's mercy only meant for a particular group of believers, or it is meant to be universal?" If so, does it not mean that we have an obligation and a moral imperative to invest in one another and serve all of mankind?

> 66 As we reflect on God's mercy upon mankind, we should ask ourselves a question – "Is it only meant for a particular group of believers, or it is meant to be universal?" 99

Muslims and Nation-Building – Lessons of Active Citizenship and Coexistence

By Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool,
Former Premier of Western Cape and Founder of the World for All Foundation, South Africa

Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool highlighted how the South African Muslim minority have faced challenges over 350 years, including having suffered the banning of Islam as a religion, discrimination against Muslims under the apartheid because of race, religion and colour. However, it is in how the South African Muslim community responded to the conditions of oppression, as well as how they imagined themselves as a Muslim community co-existing with a huge oppressed black majority, where important lessons could be drawn to help Muslim minority communities across the world. The global Ummah could make a critical transition from victimhood to agency in pursuit of a shared humanity, and thus co-existence with others on the basis of inclusive citizenship and active nation-building with the aim of strengthening the common good for all.

The speaker used 3 metaphors to illustrate key characteristics that summarise the characteristics of the South African Muslim minority:

1. **The accordion:** An instrument which contracts with full confidence in its own internal identity, and expands by reaching out to others who are oppressed in a supportive embrace, in order to make the most beautiful harmonies;
2. **The forks in the road:** This highlights the importance of having wise and visionary leadership during moments of choice and decision, which often helps to dispel the fears and doubts of larger society;
3. **The double-edged sword:** An understanding that to every outward thrust is an inward implication, such that in seeking justice and equality for ourselves, we must ensure that it is made available for others as well.

The South African Muslim community has identified an effective formula for participation in common causes alongside fellow citizens. Firstly, recognition of the importance of building trust as the cornerstone of communal relations. Secondly, they declined to compete for primacy to push the religion-based cause, but rather, prioritised the society's common struggle against oppression. Lastly, this struggle required them to participate in the wider liberation and interfaith movements, despite their dissimilarities in faith from other citizens. The abovementioned presents a framework as a guide for other Muslim-minority communities around the world to actively contribute to social causes which affect the citizens in their lands. It is in this process of prioritising and advocating for the cause of others that Muslims will find ways to address their own conflicts and challenges.

From these experiences, there are five key elements of coexistence that could be identified within a shared society:

- Identifying modes of coexistence: From isolation, to assimilation, to integration.
- Living with multiple identities: Embracing national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identities in addition to a core Muslim identity.
- Defining secular from secularist: Understanding that the separation of religion from state does not constitute a relationship that is hostile, but rather, cooperative and facilitative.
- Understanding religious compliance and expression: A conviction to religion that is considerate of the surrounding context.
- Having consistency: Wanting for others what we want for ourselves, such as that of equality, freedom, human and civil rights.

Muslims in South Africa are guided by the Muslim sacred texts on the practice of tolerance and embracing diversity. An understanding of Islam which recommends relations of kindness and justice opens pathways towards an embrace of the other, founded on mutual peace and security, and based on shared values and cooperation for the common good. For Muslim-minority communities, an appreciation of the maqasid or the objectives and values of the Shariah provides room and direction for Muslims to integrate in a diverse society. This integration determines whether Muslims are regarded as a force for good or irrelevance in their respective communities.

Considering these unique circumstances, instead of the historical dependency on traditional Muslim heartlands as the source of knowledge and direction to the Muslim periphery, the periphery may now be more enabled to drive the regeneration of Muslim thought and practice throughout the world. This may only be possible if we view our being a minority as a blessing and not a curse, a joy and not a burden, as learnt in the South African experience.

We learn that moments of change offer an opportunity for the world to rethink what it means to be human. In this lies the opportunity for us to reimagine ourselves in relation to others, and to reinsert ourselves thoughtfully into our contexts. While this is sometimes achieved seamlessly, it usually requires hard work and shared struggle with the rest of society, so that the attainment of good and justice is a mutual one - for society, and for religious communities as an integrated and integral part of society.

Religious Communities and the Secular State – The Singapore Story

By Ms. Yeoh Chee Yan,
Chairman of National Heritage Board and Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Singapore

In her presentation, Ms Yeoh discussed the notion of a secular state in Singapore's context. Firstly, this entails that the country's laws are not based on any particular religion. Secondly, religion is kept out of electoral politics. Additionally, all 3 branches of the Government - the Legislature, the Executive and Judiciary - are neutral with regard to religion. This 'separation of church and state' allows for the Government to be a neutral arbiter should conflict arise between religious groups.

In describing Singapore's society, it may be slightly misleading to consider it as secular. It is perhaps better described as a multi-religious society, as 80% of the population still profess religious affiliation as reported in the latest Singapore Census (2020). Being the most diverse country in the world, it requires a pragmatic approach to ensure that such differences do not undermine national unity and social cohesion, which is fundamental to the nation's governance.

Religion is seen as a force for good as it provides moral guidance, meaning, and comfort to individuals within the community. More than a private good, it can also serve the common good, as seen by the long history of active citizenship by religious organisations in providing education, health, and social services to all in Singapore. This support and partnership between public and private sectors result in a relationship of trust between the government and religious communities.

Under the constitution, religious freedom is guaranteed but subject to the larger good. Religiously inspired violence or security threats are not tolerated, but neither are public expressions which insult or denigrate any religion or undermine inter-faith harmony. Legal levers such as the Internal Security Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act are enacted to manage this. However, where laws can help to protect social cohesion, it may not necessarily strengthen it.

In this regard, the secular state of Singapore facilitates social cohesion by promoting pro-social behaviours and safeguarding common spaces, such as residential estates, workplaces, public schools, and other spaces where religious activities and practices are negotiated so that peaceful co-existence and interaction can be achieved. For example, the promotion of the usage of designated bins for the burning of joss paper can be seen as a sense of restriction towards a religious practice. However, this accommodation by practicing religious groups makes the common space better for everyone.

> **"Religion is seen as a force for good as it provides moral guidance, meaning, and comfort to individuals within the community."**

Another key to cohesion in Singapore is inter-religious engagement. Political and apex religious leaders work together to strengthen social cohesion on the National Steering Committee for Racial and Religious Harmony. This Committee has met regularly for over 20 years just as Harmony Circles on the ground have convened local religious leaders in all 93 constituencies. These regular gatherings have built bonds of friendship, trust, and goodwill – something that no law can do – thus enabling them to resolve any inter-religious conflict and express solidarity with other faiths in testing times.

Recent surveys show that there is strong public consensus in support of racial and religious harmony in Singapore. Those who profess a religion are less ambivalent and distant towards those of other faiths compared to those who do not have a religious affiliation. This suggests that inter-faith engagement has borne fruit. Equally important are the efforts to build bridges between those with no religious affiliation and religious communities, particularly due to their potentially opposing views towards controversial issues.

Another crucial key to social cohesion is the civic capacity to discuss social differences, which remains a work in progress.As with any public discourse, the current debate over the repeal of Section 377A is a good test. The Government has been careful to consult religious and LGBTQ groups before the announcement, knowing that this can be a divisive issue, and it must continue to engage different groups to reach an accommodation without deepening social divisions.

Most religious groups have made public statements on the matter as it is their civic right and duty to guide their respective communities. Although some Singaporeans take the view that religious groups should not express public views on law and policy, the Government has clarified that religious groups, like other civic groups and citizens, are free to express their opinions as long as they do so responsibly.

These developments show that it is not merely the Government, the Courts or Parliament which will determine how things play out. Rather, it is a test of our civic culture and collective ability to discuss our differences without fracturing society and to assume shared responsibility for the common good. Our recent experience with Covid has shown that Singapore is a high trust, cohesive society. Likewise, regardless of our differences in beliefs, if we are willing engage respectfully and with consideration, and make accommodations for the common good, we can continue to be confident and hopeful to continue seeing diversity as the blessing it was created to be.

PANEL III DISCUSSION

To enhance social cohesion and encourage active citizenry, the panellists discussed various key factors that should be prioritised and addressed. First is the **importance of contextualising Islamic practice and provide the assurance for the protection and administration of religious affairs in a diverse society where Muslims form the minority.** For example, the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) in Singapore ensures the freedom to practice Islam in accordance with Islamic law in the areas of family law and inheritance while not encroaching into the legal system at the national level, such as criminal law, which is applicable to all. The AMLA allows for the establishment of key institutions in Muslim affairs, such as the Shariah Court, Registry for Muslim Marriages, and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS). This allows Muslims to live peacefully alongside other religious groups while practicing its faith as well as fully participating as citizens in a public common space and contributing to the common good. The AMLA is an example of how this space is carved out to allow for Islam to be practised and for the minority Muslims to thrive in a diverse society under a secular government.

The **importance of forming consensus amongst wise and decisive leadership** was also underlined. The leadership needs to guide the community to do what is right in a multireligious society by acting on maqasid of the Shariah. Taking guidance from the maqasid would allow the community to move, navigate and coexist confidently as part of a multicultural society under a secular government. Also, **a symbiotic relationship between the government and people within a healthy and interactive ecosystem is critical to effective governance**. The government cannot exist alone but requires good citizens who are active, participative, and contributive. The citizens' sentiments and ideas should be listened to, facilitated, and celebrated, so that they can be harnessed to transform the society.

Finally, to achieve active citizenry, people of faith and religious organisations **need to acknowledge the need to serve beyond religious affiliations and in service of the broader community.** There is the need to explore how our values and principles can shape a practice of religion which is congruent with the rest of humanity. For example, **the concept of 'adl or justice could serve as the foundation for religious thought in the modern context**. This approach based on common values and principles would enable religious groups to make the connection between local, regional, or global issues more easily. Essentially, a strong values-driven identity will help society to maintain racial and religious harmony in a very diverse society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

by Ustaz Dr. Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, Mufti of the Republic of Singapore

In his closing remarks, Mufti Dr Nazirudin expressed gratitude to all participants of the ICCOS for their presence, ideas and suggestions on the various themes of the conference. He highlighted the key points raised by participants throughout the conference, particularly on the need for contextualisation in the understanding and practice of Islam, and the importance of harmonious co-existence in the context of a socially and religiously-diverse society.

A community of success is underpinned by the three key values – character, competency, and citizenry. Central to this framework is an understanding of one's context, how it may differ from that of others, and how it may therefore require different solutions considering the varying circumstances that each encounter. However, a real challenge to this is how then do Muslims understand, interpret, and apply the religious traditions, considering that these traditions too have their own contexts and backgrounds, some of which may fundamentally differ from our own. There is therefore a certain level of expertise and sophistication required for scholars and religious leaders to be competent in dealing with a complex and diverse body of Muslim traditions. The conference has briefly identified examples, such as on citizenry and relations between Muslims and others.

Meanwhile, our ethical duties also demand of us to contribute to the common good whilst observing empathy and respect for others. In this regard, it is important for our community to appreciate the values of social cohesion and active citizenry, and to appreciate these as fundamental to our faith today, not apart from it or externally imposed on Muslim communities. These pillars, when enacted, provide a solid foundation upon which a community of success can be formed.

Central to this vision is a strong and capable religious leadership. As we navigate contemporary and future challenges, it is crucial for us to continue developing new competencies and skills along the way. This can be done by updating our curricula and methodologies, forming new bodies of knowledge, and expanding our network and alliances with scholars throughout the world. At the same time, there is an urgent need for a more robust, comprehensive, and fresh approach in the training and development of the next generation of religious leaders and scholars. This challenge is particularly acute in the area of grounding 'contextualisation' as a legitimate and authentic consideration in the formulation of religious thought and laws. This, when paired with a competent community and political leadership, will foster solidarity, proactiveness, and thriving shared spaces – all signs of a true community of success.

The conclusion of the conference only signals that the real work has just begun. It is therefore upon us to harmonise these ideas to produce positive outcomes in our respective communities. Ultimately, this is the goal of the RPCS, which seeks the collective will and wisdom from everyone who can relate to the challenge of forging successful communities. Mufti encouraged participants to stay in touch with the RPCS by participating in its future programmes as part of continuing thoughtful conversations around the subject of building "Communities of Success".

EXECUTIVE STUDY PROGRAMME

9 September 2022

Overview

The pre-conference Executive Study Programme (ESP), attended by 70 local and international participants, featured Singapore's experiences in developing institutions and strengthening community relations. In line with ICCOS' on "Contributing Citizens, Dynamic Institutions", ESP provided participants an opportunity to learn how Muslim community organisations in Singapore have partnered with the wider society in developing the 3Cs – Character, Competency and Citizenry.

The first itinerary featured The Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation (RLAF). Formed by Muis in 2005, it allowed the Singaporean Muslim Community to radiate compassion and kindness by offering help to those in need and providing aid to victims of natural disasters, thus projecting the "Blessings to All" spirit. Through this initiative, it facilitates the capacity building of community and youth leaders, promotes better understanding, and cultivates stronger bonds amongst people of various faiths. In this regard, it plays a key role in strengthening inter-faith understanding and race relations in Singapore through humanitarian & community development work.

EXECUTIVE STUDY PROGRAMME

This itinerary also featured the Bersamamu (With You) programme, organised by the Registry of Muslim Marriages (ROMM) under the M3 collaborative framework. A ground-up effort initiated by Muslim solemnisers, the programme was developed to inspire strong and stable marriages by offering support to couples before and throughout their first two years of marriage. As part of this initiative, The Temasek Foundation Achieving Resilient & Inspiring Families (TFProject ARIF) was developed in 2021 through a collaboration between Temasek Foundation, KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and Muis to provide improved support to couples in preparation for marriage and family life, optimise maternal wellness, and enhance child development.

In the second itinerary, participants learned about the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies (PCICS) offered by Muis. This programme aims to nurture a generation of confident, compassionate, and competent professional Asatizah (Muslim religious teachers) who posses the requisite knowledge and skills to provide relevant and contextualised religious guidance in a highly diverse, plural, and inter-connected world. PCICS is based on a holistic curriculum which emphasises both religious and the social sciences to develop a critical and creative thinking mindset whilst equipping our Asatizah with new competencies and relevant proficiencies.

Participants also visited the Harmony Centre, which serves as an integrated hub that promotes greater understanding and engagement of all faith communities. The Centre, which hosts various religious exhibits and artifacts, regularly organises interfaith programmes, supported by its three key thrusts: 1) Training – to build capacity in interfaith dialogue and engagement, 2) Learning – to deepen understanding of the different faiths, and 3) Engagements – to build bridges and relationships among the faith groups.

EXECUTIVE STUDY PROGRAMME

The third itinerary featured the Youth Mentoring Office (YMO), which was formed by MENDAKI (Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community) in 2019 to spearhead mentoring efforts within the Muslim community. It aims to build a strong mentoring ecosystem, where the youth are connected and actively contribute to the aspiration of a Community of Success. In this spirit of mentorship and guidance, the KelasMateMatika@CC (KMM@CC) programme was also initiated in 2018, empowering parents with Mediation Learning Experience (MLE) skills so that they become more confident in teaching basic numeracy concepts to their children.

Participants also learned about the M3 Engagement Coordination Office (ECO), a collaboration between Muis, MESRA (Malay Activity Executive Committees Council) and MENDAKI, which aims to build the capabilities of community volunteers. It offers a training framework for volunteers to acquire necessary skills and deepen their understanding of the relevant national policies and Government schemes to help vulnerable families. Through this effort, it coordinates and strengthens outreach efforts in partnership with other government agencies, Muslim organisations and other community groups, thus co-creating solutions, bridging gaps and meeting the needs of the community.

The Executive Study Programme (ESP) featured Singapore's experiences in nurturing "Contributing Citizens, dynamic Institutions" through:

1.Building stronger communities through RLAF and shaping resilient families through Bersamamu.

2. Developing competencies of religious leaders through PCICS and fostering social cohesion through the Harmony Centre.

3. Nurturing community leaders through the Youth Mentoring Office and collaborating with national agencies through the M3 Engagement Coordination Office.

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS)

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focus will be on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges.

The RPCS aims to bring together local scholars and senior practitioners to study current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. It serves as a platform to nurture the right intellectual environment to facilitate the growth and development of its own group of religious leaders, scholars and thinkers who are seen as authentic and credible to guide the local Muslim community.

The RPCS conducts research as part of developing new knowledge and publishes a series of online articles to present the evolving religious discourse and analysis of issues relevant to the theme of Muslim Communities of Success. Its research agenda encompasses three broad areas:

Governance (Islam, secularism and diversity)
Study and develop new understanding on the relationship between religion and secularism, identify models of successful citizenship and contribution, and formulate a robust and credible framework of successful living drawn from Islamic traditions, history and experiences.

Society (Family & Social Cohesion)
Identify ways of supporting and strengthening the family institution and review laws as society evolves so that they remain resilient amidst these challenges, and how religions can be an effective resource in enriching further the common space and common good in any pluralistic society.

Science and Technology (Biomedical ethics, new food technologies, digital technologies and ethics, crypto-currencies)
Develop Islamic thought and ethics to provide new guidance on issues such as new food technologies, digital and financial technologies, environmental challenges and others.

If you are interested in the topics and discussions covered in our RPCS Roundtable Discussions, do keep a look out on our website and related platforms for upcoming sessions. We look forward to providing a safe space for collaborative learning and the building of new bodies of knowledge on the range of topics covered.
Please visit www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/RPCS.