

# RPCS Quarterly

*Developing New Horizons of Knowledge for Islam in the Contemporary World*

## *In This Issue*

**Introduction to RPCS**

**Our Inaugural Research Fellows**

**Seminar on Muslim Communities of Success in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Upcoming Seminar**



## Launch of RPCS

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is part of Islamic Religious Council of Singapore's efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme aims to develop new horizons of knowledge that will lead to contemporary and effective guidance on socio-religious issues for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focuses on developing new insights, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges under three main research areas: 1) Governance 2) Social 3) Science and Technology.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/RPCS>



Contact us at [RPCS@Muis.gov.sg](mailto:RPCS@Muis.gov.sg)

# RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS



From right: Mr Esa Masood (Former CE of Muis), Ust Muhammad Saiful 'Adli, Mufti Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir



From right: Mr Esa Masood (Former CE of Muis), Ust Fathurrahman, Mufti Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir

## Fellowship Award

The RPCS aims to provide opportunities for local asatizah and religious leaders to conduct research on current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community as part of developing religious thought leadership.

The RPCS is pleased to welcome our inaugural research fellows who have been appointed by the RPCS Selection Committee.

The fellowship scheme commenced from September 2021. We wish our fellows all the best for this new journey. Stay tuned to get updates on their research project!

## Research Projects

### **Ustaz Muhammad Saiful 'Adli Bin Ayob**

**Research Topic:**  
Peaceful Coexistence from the Prophetic Guidance: Life Lessons from the Treaty of Hudaibiah.

**Project duration:** 6 Months.

### **Ustaz Fathurrahman Bin Hj M Dawoed**

**Research Topic:**  
Making Halal Food Choices: Social and Contemporary Religious Perspectives.

**Project duration:** 12 Months.

# RPCS Research Fellows



## Ustaz Muhammad Saiful 'Adli Bin Ayob

Ust Muhammad Saiful 'Adli obtained his bachelors degree from the Faculty of Education, Kuwait University, specialising in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies, and a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia. He is currently a Manager in the Office of the Mufti (ARS Office) and also serves as an Associate member of the Fatwa Committee.

Personal motivation/motto: *"The best among you is the most beneficial to the others"*

## Ustaz Fathurrahman Bin Hj M Dawoed

Ust Fathurrahman is currently Executive Director of Andalus Corporation Pte Ltd. He is a member of the Fatwa Committee, MUIS Council, and an Honorary Member for the Council of the Singapore Islamic Scholars & Religious Teachers Association (PERGAS). He obtained his bachelors degree in Islamic Law from the University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, and a Master of Science degree in Asian Studies from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in education at the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

Personal motivation/motto: *"Always learn, unlearn and relearn. What we know is little compared to what we don't know. Don't be afraid to listen, explore and consistently ask Allah SWT for Hidaayah"*



# Seminar Report

## PRE-ICCOS SEMINAR ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 15 JUNE 2021

### OVERVIEW

Muslim Communities of Success initiative is a positive and forward-looking articulation of a vision of Islam and Muslim communities that thrive in, and actively contribute to, contemporary societies. On 15 June 2021, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) organized the inaugural pre-ICCOS Seminar on Muslim Communities of Success in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The seminar is the first among many upcoming events and programmes leading up to the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS).

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the seminar was conducted virtually, attended by 245 participants including religious teachers and community leaders. The seminar featured two panel sessions followed by a lively Q&A segment at the end of each session.

The discussion revolved around the need to contextualise religious guidance and develop innovative approaches, tools and measures that would enable Muslim communities to adjust and adapt in navigating new and complex challenges such as the pandemic. For that to happen, it is important to harness religion as a positive resource in cultivating resilience and instilling a strong sense of responsibility to protect the well-being of society. Amongst the many key points was that religious leadership must produce relevant and timely guidance and directives that respond to the current needs of the community, with the aim of saving lives and preserving social cohesion in times of crisis. To do this, religious leaders need to consult and partner experts and agencies.





## Opening Address by Minister Masagos Zulkifli Bin Masagos Mohamad

In his opening address, Minister Masagos spoke about how the pandemic has impacted everyone everywhere including Muslim communities, forcing us to adapt our religious practices and priorities inasmuch as it has affected our lives and livelihoods.

These difficult adjustments have also affected our spiritual well-being. Although in some parts of the world, emotions flared and some rebelled against safety protocols and measures, and continued with religious gatherings to their detriment, the local situation has been better managed thanks to the role played by religious leaders and scholars.

***"Our ulama quickly understood that medically sound guidance must prevail over religious imperatives in normal times. We therefore adapted our religious practices to safeguard the safety and well-being of our communities and our country. "***

The dynamism of Islam and its traditions equipped Muslims with the principles to respond to even the most difficult and pressing issues.

Minister Masagos added that scholars have long acknowledged the need to adapt and be agile so that their communities can thrive in various environments.

Each Muslim community is distinct as it is shaped by different histories, cultures, and circumstances, and it is our shared Islamic principles, values and tenets that ultimately bind the Muslim ummah together.

Minister stated that today, about one-fifth of the world's Muslim population live in countries where Islam is not the religion of the majority, and these Muslim minorities face unique sets of challenges and needs which Muslims living in countries where they are the majority may not face or encounter.

These communities have learned the need to adapt their religious guidance and practices accordingly, and to forge successful and peaceful socio-religious co-existence with the majority, without forsaking Islamic principles and tenets.

Our responses and solutions to new and modern challenges will still come from our traditions, and it is crucial for us to examine these issues to guide us and other Muslim communities worldwide. If we get it right, other minority Muslim communities can make reference

to the relevant principles we have adopted to engender their participation with their fellow countrymen, with confidence and meaning.

Minister Masagos added that like many other Muslim minority communities, the Singapore Muslim community aspires to live and succeed as contributing citizens. Singapore is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world, and it is fortunate we are able to enjoy religious harmony, peace and stability in Singapore today. The Singapore Muslim community comprises 15 per cent of the Singapore citizen population. We take pride in our religious and social values while actively contributing to the country and the global community.

The community models itself to be a Community of Success, and we want to make meaningful contributions to the wider society as dignified citizens. He added that as a Muslim community, we embody good character, demonstrate active citizenry and contribute as a competent workforce.

Minister Masagos mentioned that there is thus much we can learn from other minority communities who have successfully strived and navigated the contemporary world in their respective countries to find new solutions and develop new knowledge to new challenges.

In order to do this, he emphasised the need to meet and exchange ideas to broaden our horizons, gain perspectives and learn about other models of success, where Muslim minorities flourish in non-Muslim majority societies as successful citizens and communities.

For this very reason, he had asked Muis to organise an International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS) in the near future. In the lead up to the Conference, Muis has convened this seminar.

Minister Masagos concluded his speech by launching the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS), as part of the Muslim Communities of Success initiative.

He stated that the programme will facilitate the exploration of

emerging issues related to governance, social development, science and technology, and develop contextualised guidance that is rooted in the rich, multifaceted and complex traditions of Islam.

The programme provides a platform for the growth and development of Singapore's own religious leaders, scholars and thinkers to guide the local Muslim community on important contemporary issues in the long run.

# Plenary 1



## PRE-ICCOS SEMINAR ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



### Panellists:

#### 1) Prof Abdullah Saeed

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

#### 2) Dr Dayang Noryati Binti Haji Ibrahim

Acting Deputy Director in the Syariah Affairs Department, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Brunei

#### 3) Ustaz Dr Mohammad Rizhan Bin Leman

Associate member in the Fatwa Committee, Singapore

*Moderator:*

#### Ustaz Alfian Yasrif Bin Kuchit

Research Fellow, Office of the Mufti, Singapore

This plenary explored the various approaches and strategies that Muslim communities in Australia, Brunei and Singapore took to address the socio-religious challenges that arose in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The session also explored how we can provide appropriate religious advice to help our community carry out their religious obligations and practices during the pandemic.



# I. NEW HORIZONS FOR ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN PREPARING FOR COMPLEX CHALLENGES: COVID-19 IN AUSTRALIA

*By: Prof Abdullah Saeed*

Islamic jurisprudence contains tools and approaches that enable us to adapt to new situations while still remaining faithful to our religion. Prof Abdullah shared the five principles that can provide a good framework to enable us to derive rulings that are suitable and relevant for our context. They are:

“

- a. Rationality*
- b. Maximizing benefit and minimizing harm*
- c. Reciprocity*
- d. Contextuality i.e. that texts need to be read in context*
- e. Flexibility / mutability (ability to change the law): change of rules based on ijihad*

”



These principles are inter-related and are based on jurisprudential maxims such as the preservation of life and protecting public interests. As there are novel issues that are not dealt by our past jurists, there is a need for Muslims to come up with new solutions so long as we do not change the immutable aspects of our faith e.g. basic beliefs, the five pillars of Islam, and our key ethical principles.

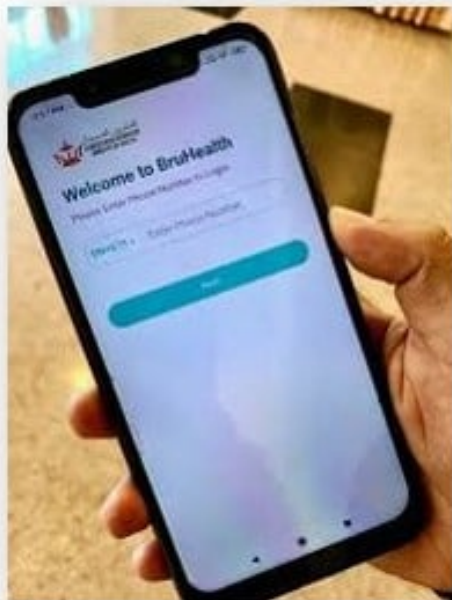
Prof Abdullah urged religious leaders to work together with other segments of society to co-create solutions and to be critical and creative in providing guidance and advice in dealing with the challenges that humanity faces today.

## II. CHALLENGES IN ADAPTING TO NEW RELIGIOUS NORMS IN BRUNEI

*By: Dr Dayang Noryati binti Haji Ibrahim*

Dr Dayang Noryati highlighted the challenges faced by Brunei in handling the COVID-19 pandemic which included the spread of rumours and misinformation.

She emphasised the importance of strong leadership as exemplified by His Majesty the Sultan who ordered that timely and strict measures be imposed during the early part of the pandemic.



Health assessment and making reservation for Friday prayer through BruHealth app



Practising social distancing during congregational prayers in mosques

Such measures included closing mosques and religious schools, banning mass gatherings, and stopping the importation of raw halal meat. Despite the difficulties caused by these measures, Bruneians came together to help each other and understood that they needed to adapt to new religious norms. It helped that there was a national effort to strengthen spiritual resilience. As a result, there has been no local transmission for over a year (up until August), and this enabled the government to ease many of the strict measures.

### III. SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY'S RELIGIOUS LIFE IN TIMES OF CRISES: A CASE STUDY OF THE FATWAS AND RELIGIOUS GUIDANCE ON COVID-19 IN SINGAPORE

*By: Ustaz Dr Mohammad Rizhan Bin Leman*



Dr Rizhan shared several fatwas and religious guidance that dealt with the impact of COVID-19 on the religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. These include the fatwa on zakat assistance which held that zakat could be used to help individuals who face difficulties meeting their basic needs due to the recession or unemployment caused by COVID-19. Dr Rizhan also provided an account of the seven fiqh approaches that the Singapore Fatwa Committee used to formulate advice in order to enable Muslim Singaporeans to practice their faith safely. These approaches are:

- i. *Fiqh Nusus*
- ii. *Fiqh Khilaf*
- iii. *Fiqh Waqi'*
- iv. *Fiqh Muwazanat*
- v. *Fiqh Awlawiyyat*
- vi. *Fiqh Taysir*
- vii. *Fiqh Ma'al*

Dr Rizhan shared that apart from a deep understanding of the sacred texts as well as an appreciation of the diversity of juristic opinions on an

issue, religious authorities should also take into consideration the lived realities such as the complexity of the pandemic, the restrictions set by the authorities during this pandemic as well as the religious needs of the community. For example, the temporary suspension of congregational and Friday prayers in mosques does not mean that protection of life is given priority over the protection of religion. Rather, this is to place every matter according to its actual order and hierarchy with justice, whether relating to rules, values, or actions. Furthermore, he urged the audience not to forget the jurisprudential maxim that states, "Averting harm takes precedence over achieving benefit". Hence, the formulation of religious advice must take into consideration public interest and the consequences of such advice.



# PLENARY I DISCUSSION



*The key themes of the discussion were as follows:*

- 1) The importance of public authorities (including religious authorities) to provide clear and consistent message to strengthen public trust and confidence in the efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) Religious authorities play a very important role in educating members of their faith as well as allaying any fears especially on issues like the need for vaccination.
- 3) Religious education should aim to help the community understand the objectives of the Shariah, not just the rules.
- 4) Religious leaders and educators can play a role in educating the public on the importance of diversity of juristic opinions.
- 5) We can benefit from past wisdom but at the same time, we also need to be aware that our contemporary concerns and needs may be different. The tools, methodology and approaches developed by past scholars were also based on logic and reason, harmonised with revelation. We can adopt the same approach in developing creative solutions to address the challenges of our times.



# Plenary II



## PRE-ICCOS SEMINAR ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



## Panellists:

### 1) Sheikh Dr Mustafa Cerić

President of the World Bosniak Congress and Grand Mufti Emeritus,  
Bosnia-Herzegovina

### 2) Sohibus Samahah Ustaz Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir

Mufti, Singapore

*Moderator:*

### Ustaz Dr Mohammad Hannan Hassan

Deputy Mufti, Singapore

---

This plenary discussed a framework that will allow the religious fraternity to provide appropriate solutions to complex and multifaceted challenges. It discussed how a recalibrated and contextualised *maqasid* approach could form the basis of this framework. The session also discussed the qualities required of religious leaders, particularly in shaping the religious life and discourse in the Muslim community as we prepare for more complex challenges ahead.

---

# I. INTERPRETING THE MAQASID AL-SHARIAH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*By: Sheikh Dr Mustafa Cerić*

In dealing with uncertainties like this pandemic, many turn to religious beliefs, rituals and faith communities. Sheikh Mustafa sees this as an obligation of religious authorities to harness the teachings of the Islamic tradition itself, to offer solutions, values and hope for humankind.

Here, the framework of the maqasid al-Shari'ah is helpful in guiding the appropriate Islamic response. However, this framework should not stay stagnant, but instead be recalibrated to prioritize different values at different times of the pandemic to ensure a more holistic recovery. He highlighted the examples of “protecting life” and “protecting religion” which are key values under the maqasid, as taking precedence over the other objectives at different points during the pandemic. Sheikh Mustafa believes that a careful elaboration of the maqasid will enable the religious leadership to offer a more responsive approach and work effectively with public health bodies and other agencies.

## II. A BLIP OR A NEW ERA? LESSONS FROM COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

*By: SS Ustaz Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir*

In his presentation, the Mufti of Singapore urged religious leadership to reflect deeply on our religious responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and assess if our interpretation and practice of faith has caused apathy, confusion, ambivalence or even brought pain and harm to some people. While many of our responses have provided solutions, these were based on emergency laws or fiqh of crisis. According to him, there are 3 problems with the assumptions in this approach:

- *there is a standard, unchanging, fixed and authoritative set of laws and practices that should apply at all times, with the exception of emergency contexts;*
- *emergencies and their impact and consequences are short-lived;*
- *the situations pre- and post-emergency situations are largely the same.*



This framework of dharurah or exigencies and emergencies puts Muslims cognitively and spiritually in a situation of temporariness that does not take enough consideration of long-term implications. Dr Nazirudin sees COVID-19 as a crisis so novel and unprecedented in its nature, scope and effect, that it caused a complete rupture or break with the past in terms of how to think ahead and move forward. He called for religious leadership to move away from dharurah towards new areas of growth and progress.

To do this, he suggested for religious leaders to focus on:

- *Identify key priorities and threats*
- *Create new social norms – “normative influence”*
- *Collaborate with medical and technological experts*
- *Create new solutions and offer hope by critically and creatively offering alternatives and keeping religious and community spirit alive*



# PLENARY II DISCUSSION



*The key themes of the discussion were as follows:*

- 1) Living in a state that is secularly-governed does not mean incompleteness in our spiritual belief and religiosity.
- 2) While we should respect and embrace differences in opinions, we must also agree on certain principles and values, for example, saving human lives is the ultimate objective and priority in exceptional times such as the pandemic.
- 3) It is also timely that we think about the challenges posed by other major existential crisis, like climate change, which will force us to rethink the roles and functions of religion. As religious leaders, we should also be open to wisdom and insights from other disciplines so that we can enrich our own discourse and work together to contribute to the betterment of humanity.
- 4) Digital tools allow us to connect and build communities. We should harness these tools to help us reimagine our socio-religious life and practices.
- 5) To rethink the idea of spirituality beyond prayer and acts of worship. For example, wearing a face mask as a way of exercising social responsibility is a profound form of spirituality and worship, and can be a very powerful symbol of ibadah too.





# CLOSING REMARKS

By: SS Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir

"I think there are basically three key ideas that we have discussed in this brief but hopefully meaningful seminar:

1. **We must recognize and come to terms with our own situation, context and challenges that we face, both in the global and local sense:**

a. **Global** – because we share many of these challenges, including some of our social contexts and environment with many other communities. Some of the minority communities will have a lot in common with other communities.

b. **Local** – because there are also unique challenges that we face. For Muslim minorities in advanced economies, the fast pace of change is unique. We have to recognize this and come to terms with our situation. If we ignore our context, then it is very difficult for us to adapt accordingly.

2. **We must think and plan beyond COVID-19.** As Sheikh Mustafa reminded, the COVID-19 pandemic will end at some point as a pandemic will cease and probably become endemic or a part of our lives, but we would be better able to deal with the virus only if we know how to live with it. So when we think and plan beyond COVID-19, we have to think of other possibilities. In this regard, the role of religious leadership is critical:

*a. It has to adapt and adjust quickly*

*b. It has to progress and contribute*

*c. It has to develop new tools to help us cope with complex challenges.*

Prof Abdullah offered 5 very important principles:

*a. Rationality/reason*

*b. Maximizing benefit and eliminating harm*

*c. Reciprocity*

*d. Contextuality*

*e. Mutability of laws*



# CLOSING REMARKS

*By: SS Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir*

3. On the way forward, this seminar is an opportunity for us to **start conceptualising a framework that will allow us to better understand, discuss, and come up with solutions in the face of complex and multifaceted challenges**, which are quite different from the kind of problems that are usually dealt with in our traditions. In a global and interconnected world, where COVID-19 is one of the best examples of how fast local landscapes change due to developments that originate elsewhere, we have witnessed how multifaceted and complex problems can become. Currently, we do not have a framework that enables us to assess this kind of crisis and challenge in a more comprehensive way. I hope this seminar will pave the way for that kind of framework to emerge. Through the RPCS and ICCOS, we can discuss and debate this, with the hope that in the near future, we are better able to assess complex problems holistically – theologically, juristically, ethically, scientifically and socially."

# UPCOMING SEMINAR

## PRE-INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS (PRE-ICCOS) SEMINAR ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF SECULAR SOCIETIES

*Saturday, 6 November 2021*

### **Event details:**

The Seminar on Muslim Communities of Success in the Context of Secular Societies is organised by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) to bring together local and international religious leaders and scholars to discuss the importance of context in interpreting texts and traditions particularly for minority Muslim communities living in modern, secular states.

The history of Muslim societies is rich with cumulative wisdom, tradition, and practices that endeavoured to contextualise and concretise core values such as peaceful coexistence, compassion, and making impactful, significant, and positive contributions to humanity. Contemporary Muslims – whether living as part of a majority or minority community – would do well to learn from the past to forge a better future.

The seminar is the second of the two Pre-ICCOS seminars in 2021, which are preludes to the upcoming International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS).

Among other things, presenters will discuss the success of Muslim minorities living in secular states as a function of how they can meet the ongoing challenges as well as thrive by actively contributing as full members of the larger society. In addition, the presenters will also discuss on ways to read Muslim traditions afresh in ways that relate to contemporary contexts and challenges, and discuss some common and shared values which unite communities of different faiths to live harmoniously whilst retaining their unique religious identities.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Fatwas issued by Fatwa Committee.  
<https://www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/Fatwa>

## **SS Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir.**

- “Socio-historical contexts in the interpretation of religious doctrines in classical and contemporary Islam.” November 15, 2018.  
<https://blog.pergas.org.sg/socio-historical-contexts-in-the-interpretation-of-religious-doctrines-in-classical-and-contemporary-islam/>
- “National Day reflections on Singapore's Muslim community.” August 27, 2021. <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/national-day-reflections-on-singapores-muslim-community>
- "Mufti: Peranan penting asatizah bimbing masyarakat tangani Covid-19." Mac 13, 2020. <https://www.beritaharian.sg/hidayah/mufti-peranan-penting-asatizah-bimbing-masyarakat-tangani-covid-19>
- "Mufti: Keseimbangan dalam segala aspek kehidupan." Julai 9, 2021. <https://www.beritaharian.sg/wacana/mufti-keseimbangan-dalam-segala-aspek-kehidupan>
- "Capai perpaduan, kesepakatan ketika cari huraian ke hadapan." Ogos 28, 2021. <https://www.beritaharian.sg/rencana/capai-perpaduan-kesepakatan-ketika-cari-huraian-ke-hadapan>

## **Ust Dr Mohammad Hannan Hassan.**

- "Bina kekuatan ketika krisis." September 12, 2021.  
<https://www.beritaharian.sg/wacana/bina-kekuatan-ketika-krisis>
- "Pelihara perpaduan sosial demi kehidupan beragama yang bermakna." Oktober 25, 2021. <https://www.beritaharian.sg/wacana/pelihara-perpaduan-sosial-demi-kehidupan-beragama-yang-bermakna>



*RPCS Quarterly is a publication of*

**RPCS**

RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY  
OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS