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**CLOSING ADDRESS BY MR KHAW BOON WAN, COORDINATING MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, AT THE 1<sup>st</sup> INDONESIA-SINGAPORE INTERFAITH & INTERCULTURAL FELLOWSHIP AND DIALOGUE CLOSING CEREMONY, ON 14 JULY 2017, AT FURAMA RIVERFRONT HOTEL, 6:30PM**

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His Excellency, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdurrahman Mohamed Fachir<sup>1</sup>,

Her Excellency, Ambassador Niniek Kun Naryati Siswojo,

His Excellency, Ambassador I Gede Ngurah<sup>2</sup> Swajaya,

Distinguished dignitaries and diplomats,  
Honourable religious leaders,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good evening.

1. Thank you for inviting me to be part of the inaugural Indonesia-Singapore Interfaith and Intercultural Exchange and Dialogue. This is part of several commemorative activities this year, to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Singapore, aptly named, ***RI SING 50***.

2. This community-led initiative was jointly organised by the Embassy of Indonesia in Singapore and our local interfaith community. Let me thank the joint committee, all participants and our guests this evening for making this event a success.

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced: Fah-here.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced: Ee Ge-deh Ngoo-rah

3. Over the past four days, faith leaders from Singapore and Indonesia have engaged in meaningful dialogues and visits to various faith institutions in Singapore. The event's institutional partners – the Inter-Religious Organisation Singapore, Hindu Endowments Board, MUIS, Mahakaruna Buddhist Society, and the Church of St Mary of the Angels – have graciously opened their doors to host these fruitful exchanges, and have constantly made our neighbours feel welcome.

4. In 2015, the Global Religious Diversity Report ranked Singapore as among the most religiously diverse nations. Indonesia is similar in this regard. Our countries both have multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. We both see our diversity as an opportunity for strength.

5. Earlier this week, participants visited the Harmony in Diversity Gallery, which was launched by President Dr Tony Tan last September. It aims to promote the importance of religious harmony in Singapore, and foster mutual respect and understanding across different faiths and cultures within and beyond our shores. Through its interactive exhibits that focus on the common ground between various faiths, visitors learn about race and religion in Singapore and the spirit of give-and-take.

### **Strong Singapore and Indonesia links**

6. Singapore and Indonesia have come a long way together. Though we celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations this year, our social, economic, cultural and people-to-people ties date back hundreds of years, when Southeast Asia was an archipelago of kingdoms on the trade routes between the Orient, the Indian Sub-Continent, Africa and the West. Singapore, then known as Temasek, was even mentioned in a Javanese epic poem written in 1365.

7. As close neighbours, our countries enjoy strong economic links. Last year, we welcomed nearly 3 (2.89) million visitors from Indonesia. In turn, Singapore was Indonesia's top investor, with nearly US\$ 10 (9.2) billion worth of investments in 2016. In November, Prime Minister Lee and President Jokowi jointly launched the Kendal Industrial Park in Semarang, Central Java. This is a good example of how our companies are expanding beyond the traditional investment locations like Jakarta and Batam, to seize new opportunities and achieve win-win outcomes. Indonesia offers so much business potential and our companies are keen to do more. The reverse is also true.

8. At people's level, our societies share a common belief in equal opportunities for growth, regardless of race, language or religion. These values are enshrined in the Singapore pledge, which our students recite on a daily basis, and also in Indonesia's twin foundational principles of *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*<sup>3</sup> (Unity in Diversity). These are old principles but they remain relevant today.

### **Our Common Challenge**

9. The world is facing great stresses. One key challenge of our time is that of extremist ideologies that stoke hatred and fear between communities. They seek to divide societies. They target their messages at the most vulnerable segments of each community – the youth and the disenfranchised – over the Internet. For both our peoples, we must do our utmost in building bridges of friendship and understanding between the different racial and religious communities. In this regard, our religious leaders play an important role to debunk, confront and prevent the spread of such destructive ideas.

10. To our religious leaders, what you say and how you act will be important points of reference for your followers. You play a critical role in condemning hatred, correcting untruths and spreading the message of love and care for others.

11. And as you guide your flock, you will also serve as beacons of harmony for the rest of society, as role models of mutual respect and understanding with other communities. Through your words and actions, you can be the unifying figures in and across your respective communities.

12. Given cultural and religious diversity, strong differences are to be expected. It is impossible to expect such differences to evaporate. However, the mark of a mature society is how it manages the differences among its members. The key is to seek out common grounds and actively grow such common grounds. This way, we will enable everyone to work through their differences in a peaceful manner, with mutual respect. We have done not too badly, considering what is happening in other parts of the world. But we must not be complacent and take current state of harmony for granted. Harmony

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<sup>3</sup> Pronounced: Be-nekka Toong-ghal Ee-kah

has to be gained and built upon through hard work, constant hard work. There is no short cut.

## **Conclusion**

13. Today's dialogue is one such measure to build upon our past achievements. Not to be contented, but to always try to reach out to other groups whose views are different, and who may not yet be as enlightened as those in the room today.

14. This is the great task ahead – to touch all with friendship and sincerity, and to arrive at a common ground where all can work together in areas of common interest. As religious leaders for whom compassion is a shared value, you are well-placed to be an active agent for forging harmony in our society.

15. Let me end by commending the spirit of action and co-operation that religious leaders from both countries have shown throughout out the dialogue. The good work that you have done, and the networks you have built, will further strengthen the warm relationship between Singapore and Indonesia.

16. Thank you.

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