

SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS AND MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF MUSLIM AFFAIRS, DR YAACOB IBRAHIM AT MUIS WORKPLAN SEMINAR ON SATURDAY, 24 MARCH 2012, SINGAPORE ISLAMIC HUB (SIH) THEATRETTE, 273 BRADDELL ROAD, 10.30 AM

President Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS),
Haji Mohd Alami Musa,

Mufti of Singapore,
Dr Mohd Fatris Bakaram

Members of MUIS Council

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy that we could come together on this Saturday morning for the MUIS Workplan Seminar 2012. MUIS is a key pillar of our community, respected at the national level as a religious authority and statutory board, and recognized beyond our shores. While MUIS guides and facilitates Muslims in our religious life, its success over the past 44 years has also been built on the consultations and support for its many efforts. So as Minister-in-charge, let me start by thanking religious-, mosque-, community-, and inter-faith leaders and the many-like minded partners for your support.

Third Year of 3rd MUIS Three Year Plan (2010 – 2012)

2 Today, MUIS will share its plans for 2012, which ends off MUIS' 3-Year Plan for 2010 to 2012. MUIS' efforts have helped move the community closer towards the objective of attaining our vision of a Singaporean Muslim community of excellence, one which is religiously profound and socially progressive.

Trust and Confidence

4 From time to time, we face challenges. Last year, we had to deal with some issues that tested our resilience and confidence, such as Hajj management and Halal certification. MUIS should continue to work hard to study best practices, and work closely with stakeholders to ensure that delivery of these essential services is improved. I am pleased to note that MUIS intends to increase its capacity in halal inspection to cater to the rising number of Halal-certified establishments. Enhancing community outreach and enabling members of our community to take decisions are also important steps within the larger context of a confident and resilient community.

Capacity Building and Strengthening Institutions

5 One group of key stakeholders are our Asatizah (religious teachers) – who play a critical role in our religious life. MUIS has made available many scholarships and run development programmes to benefit our asatizah. Such programmes have enhanced their knowledge in a wide range of emerging fields such as bioethics, gender studies, interfaith and Islamic finance, in addition to the traditional fields of Islamic jurisprudence and Quranic studies. There has also been warm and wide support from the fraternity for the enhanced Asatizah Recognition Scheme (ARS) which aims to embed the culture of lifelong learning as well as strengthen the integrity, credibility and recognition of the asatizah fraternity. In a poll conducted last month, more than 80% of asatizah found that the development programmes conducted by MUIS Academy to have benefitted our asatizah terms of enriching their knowledge, and giving them a better understanding of the issues and challenges facing Singaporean Muslims. Close to 90% of asatizah surveyed felt that the engagements and training have enabled them to be more aware and confident in handling contemporary issues. These findings also reflect the openness and enthusiasm our asatizah are showing towards enriching their perspectives.

7 I understand MUIS will organize an 'Asatizah Month' later this year. A series of lectures, seminars, forums and discussions will be

organized for our asatizah. These will in a way also provide an opportunity to share their knowledge across the fraternity. I am sure over time we will see an emerging group of asatizah with greater capacity to deal with complex issues.

8 Another new initiative in 2012 is the Diploma Programme in Mosque and Community Leadership for the pioneer batch of 20 mosque executive staff and 5 Executive Imams. This Diploma programme hopes to significantly increase the leadership and management skills of these key mosque officers to bring our mosques to the next higher level, as envisioned in Mosque Convention 2011.

Resilience and Sustainability

9 While we rejoice in the progressive steps that we have taken in developing our asatizah, mosque officers and imams, let us not forget the less fortunate among us. We need to continue to safeguard their faith in religion, in the community and for them to feel connected to the larger society. As such, MUIS will continue to review their empowerment programmes and financial assistance for those in need.

10 MUIS' Empowerment Programme is now in its eighth year. MUIS has also decided to review this programme to look into ways of strengthening the financial management skills of our zakat-receiving families. For this, professionals in the financial sector will collaborate with our Enhanced Mosque Clusters to provide financial coaching to needy families.

Enhancing Community's Religious Life

11 MUIS' priority is to help Singaporean Muslims lead religiously profound and socially progressive lives in this modern world. Towards this end, we need to prepare our Muslims through Islamic teachings that are relevant to their life's experiences. The religious content of programmes in mosques and the Islamic curriculum of the full-time madrasahs and part-time Islamic education centres have all taken cognizance of the unique situation that Singaporean Muslims live in – a modern multi-racial, multi-religious city-state well-connected to the outside world. I am therefore happy to note that a multi-disciplinary approach will be adopted in the new Adult Islamic Learning or ADIL programme that MUIS will begin piloting in ten mosques in 2012.

12 MUIS will also continue to pay attention to the needs of our young. The inaugural Youth aLIVE discourse programme was successfully conducted in 2011. The programme was well-received by the youth participants. MUIS will conduct two more runs of the Youth aLIVE discourse programme in 2012. Our youths will have the opportunity to engage scholars on areas that are critical to them such as religiosity amidst modernity today, spirituality and Islamic finance and economics.

CONCLUSION

13 In conclusion, I commend MUIS and all stakeholders for the efforts thus far and the programmes being planned. In dealing with issues of faith and community, the work is always in-progress. We have much to rejoice when we see how far we have come. At the same time, we must continue to put it more effort, strategically, to build on past successes. I am happy with MUIS's plans for the coming year. I am confident that by remaining united in vision, mind and spirit, and with close cooperation and consistent efforts by all, we are on track towards our vision of a Community of Excellence.