

**SPEECH BY DR YAACOB IBRAHIM, MINISTER FOR
INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS, AND
MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF MUSLIM AFFAIRS AT THE HARI
RAYA GET-TOGETHER, ON FRIDAY, 31 AUGUST 2012, 8PM,
AT THE FAIRMONT SINGAPORE, LEVEL 4, PADANG/COLLYER
BALLROOMS,**

Progressing with a Spirit of Giving, a Spirit of Being Together

Para pemimpin masyarakat

Hadirin Hadirat yang saya hormati sekalian

Assalamualaikum wr wb dan salam sejahtera

1. Terlebih dahulu izinkan saya dan para Anggota Parlimen Melayu/Islam untuk mengucapkan Eid Mubarak / Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri – Minal Aidin Walfaizin.

2. Tahun ini kita menyambut Hari Raya Aidilfitri dalam suasana yang lebih ceria dan bermakna. Ini kerana masyarakat Melayu/Islam sekali lagi membuktikan kita dapat bersaing dalam sebuah negara yang mengamalkan sistem meritokrasi dan mencapai kejayaan walaupun kita berhadapan dengan beberapa cabaran sosial.

3. Kejayaan Encik Adil Hakeem Mohamad Rafee, Cik Maryam Hasanah Rozlan dan Encik Muhammad Kamal Jauhari Zaini menjadi kebanggaan masyarakat kita. Kejayaan mereka turut mencetuskan obor yang menyemarakkan lagi semangat dan memberi harapan kepada anak-anak kita yang lain. Saya harap ibu

bapa dan para pemimpin masyarakat akan memastikan obor ini terus menyala dalam jiwa setiap anak kita.

4. Keinginan untuk mengecap kejayaan dan menikmati taraf kehidupan yang lebih baik merupakan impian setiap warga Singapura. Keluarga-keluarga Melayu-Islam juga mahukan mutu kehidupan yang lebih baik untuk anak dan cucu masing-masing. Seajar dengan ini, kita telah melancarkan visi 'Sebuah Masyarakat Cemerlang' pada 2002 untuk mempertingkat tahap pencapaian masyarakat kita.

5. Hasil usaha ini yang melibatkan seluruh masyarakat kita amat memberangsangkan sekali. Sejak beberapa dekad yang lalu, masyarakat Melayu/Islam berjaya meningkatkan tahap pencapaian dalam bidang pendidikan. Ramai pekerja kita tidak mahu ketinggalan dan tampil ke hadapan untuk menimba kemahiran baru atau mempertingkat kemahiran yang sudah dimiliki. Kita turut mencapai kemajuan dalam usaha menangani beberapa isu sosial seperti perceraian dan perkahwinan di kalangan pasangan muda.

6. Walaupun kita bergerak di landasan yang betul, perjalanan kita untuk membina sebuah masyarakat cemerlang masih lagi jauh. Setiap orang, terutama golongan yang berjaya dan berkemampuan, perlu bersama-sama menyingsing lengan untuk menggerakkan masyarakat ke hadapan. Kita perlu meneruskan satu tradisi murni masyarakat kita di mana golongan yang berkemampuan menabur budi dengan mewakafkan harta atau wang peninggalan demi manfaat umum.

7. Usaha kita untuk mengecap taraf hidup yang lebih baik akan tergenjot tanpa komitmen dan kerjasama setiap anggota masyarakat. Sejak sekian lama datuk nenek kita telah dipalu oleh semangat gotong royong untuk menangani pelbagai cabaran yang mereka hadapi. Marilah kita teruskan amalan yang baik ini. Kerjasama serupa ini akan memupuk kesefahaman dan membolehkan kita memberi tumpuan kepada inisiatif atau program yang boleh merubah masa depan anak-anak kita.

8. Saya ingin mengambil kesempatan ini untuk menyeru setiap orang agar memainkan peranan yang positif bagi membantu masyarakat kita bergerak mengikut arus kemajuan negara dan sejagat. Sebagai sebuah masyarakat minoriti, kita mempunyai sumber dan kepakaran yang terhad. Kita perlu menggunakan secara optimum sumber-sumber yang kita miliki demi kebaikan umum. Ini hanya boleh dicapai jika kita bergerak sebagai sebuah pasukan yang bersatu dan mempunyai tahap komitmen yang tidak berbelah bagi.

9. Kini, izinkan pula saya meneruskan ucapan dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Terima kasih.

10. In 2002, we put forth our vision of a Community of Excellence. The journey towards excellence is never easy – especially for a community that has been through so much, and about whom much has been discussed.

11. The wish to do better was not new – community leaders have been talking about uplifting the community since the 1930s,

some say even 100 years earlier during the time of Munshi Abdullah.

12. We had to be clear that excellence is doing our best in what we do – whether we are students, parents, daily-rated workers or senior executives. We had to take charge of our lives. If everyone of us puts in our best as individuals, looks out for one another and works together as a community, we could achieve better outcomes for our community. As a nation we have risen against the odds, as a community we can too.

13. Our desire for excellence would make the difference to our community. Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the author of the famous book *The Little Prince* once said :

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to go to the forest to gather wood, saw it, and nail the planks together. Instead, teach them the desire for the sea.”

So have we as a community internalised this desire for excellence?

14. The last 10 years have seen concerted efforts by our institutions, organisations, families and individuals to improve our conditions. We couldn’t have started on a more difficult note – we could have keeled over because of the Jemaah Islamiyah arrests but the Government was clear-headed. And we recovered to put our house in order. We built our capacity – opened up mosques to explain what Islam is about; started the Harmony Centre and many

inter-faith projects. We were guided by Islam, our faith which teaches us to respect people of other faiths. MUIS reviewed the religious education curriculum to bring about greater relevance to Muslims in Singapore. By making Islam a living faith for our children through the well-received aLIVE programmes, we offer them the spiritual motivation to be a blessing for society by excelling in what they do. Our madrasahs overcame the fears of taking the PSLE with continuing support from MUIS, cheered on by volunteer tutors. And the Joint Madrasah System or JMS is set as a key initiative to produce individuals with a progressive outlook steeped in Islamic traditions.

15. Both the Syariah Court and Registry of Muslim Marriages have added new functions. They now look into early intervention measures to save families and marriages, offering hope for a better future. SYC's counselling programme is now being studied by secular institutions. At the community level, we embarked on a year-long review to identify gaps in the Malay/Muslim Community Sector. We started the Community Leaders Forum or CLF with the sole objective of uplifting the community. With many more hands on board – within and beyond the community – we have been able to reach out better to all who need support. We created the Education Trust Fund, which has benefited many students from pre-primary to post-secondary levels. We launched the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award to support talent beyond the academic field.

16. There is a clear trend of Malay/Muslim students doing well. We have 3 top PSLE students in the last 10 years. More recently, we were given a pleasant Hari Raya gift: Adil Hakeem was

conferred the President's Scholarship. This is indeed a proud moment. Reading the media reports, the desire to excel on his and family's part is hard to miss. There are, of course, more individuals whose achievements are commendable. One is Mr Muhd Asraf Chumino who left school at the age of 10 to support his family after his father passed on. After 3 years out of school, Mendaki enrolled him in the Max Out programme and assisted him to join Northlight School. Today, he has overcome his difficulties to be an ITE student who has received the Lee Hsien Loong Award for Special Achievement. The second individual whom I want to mention is Mohd Kamal Jauhari, who is from a single-parent family. Despite facing many problems in secondary school and having to work as a Mendaki tutor and a security guard along the way, Kamal graduated from NTU with a First Class Honours in Sociology and the Lee Kuan Yew Book Prize. Kamal is truly a self-starter.

17. Adil, Asyraf and Kamal have done us proud. They reached for the stars and give us confidence to aspire for excellence regardless of our background. In the last 10 years, this ecosystem of individuals, families, organisations and institutions that are motivated to succeed has grown. We have these successes because we build on the hard work of our early pioneers and leaders. The late Haji Ridzwan Dzafir is one such individual, who worked tirelessly for our community. He met me from time to time and wrote to me once encouraging me to tackle our challenges decisively. To honour his contribution we have decided to set up a scholarship in his name, details of which will be announced later.

Spirit of Giving

18. Indeed, the gotong royong spirit lies at the heart of our community. It is heartening to see the successful among us taking the lead to care for the well-being of our community. A group of young, first-time mothers who are mostly professionals have come together to form a group called Ummi@Play. The doctors and teachers among them tapped into their domain knowledge to develop creative methods for mothers to cope with early childhood education for their first-borns. What is encouraging is that these useful tips are shared with other mothers, especially those from low-income households who would benefit the most from such support.

19. Another noteworthy initiative is ClubHEAL (Hope, Empowerment, Acceptance & Love), a non-profit organisation spearheaded by Dr Radiah Salim. ClubHEAL offers a psychiatric rehabilitation day care service for persons with mental illnesses and their families. On top of that, ClubHEAL has been active in raising awareness on mental health in the community, through workshops and services at mosques. As professionals do their bit in their areas of expertise for the community, we can cultivate an even stronger gotong royong spirit to meet our diverse range of needs.

20. With the wide reach of social media, virtual networks can also help us epitomise the gotong royong spirit by coming together for meaningful causes. I would like to commend Melati Tengku and her family for starting a Ramadhan Food Drive this year. What began as a simple Facebook event soon attracted enthusiastic community participation. Close to 30 food hampers and over

\$10,000 worth of cash were received. Volunteers delivered the hampers to more than 160 needy families, identified by 4PM. This is a heartwarming project, which surely brightened the Ramadhan season for the beneficiaries and everyone who contributed. I hope to see more of such ground-up community efforts in the future.

21. These community efforts are also extending beyond our shores. I heard about a group of concerned individuals wanting to help Malay/Muslim students who will be studying overseas. Similarly, organisations such as LBKM have taken small but decisive steps to go beyond their current remit to assist those heading overseas. I attended the first Hari Raya Gathering in Singapore for Malay/Muslims working and living in the UAE, organised by the Singapore Malay/Muslim Group or SMG in the UAE. SMG has been actively looking after the welfare of our community and those on short stints in the UAE. I have known SMG for many years and they indeed epitomise the notion of gotong royong without borders.

22. Now, let us hear from members of our community what the spirit of gotong-royong means to them and how it has stayed at the core of our community.

<Video 1: Spirit of Giving>

Wakaf Ilmu

23. Indeed, as shown in the video, wakaf is an important Islamic institution that we should preserve. To keep pace with the spirit of giving in our community and support our religious and charitable needs, MUIS will be launching a new wakaf which I announced at the budget debate this year. This new wakaf is called “Wakaf Ilmu”. Ilmu means knowledge in Malay, which aptly symbolises the wakaf’s intended beneficiaries — specifically MUIS’ Islamic education programmes and our full-time madrasahs.

24. Our pioneer philanthropists pooled their resources to create wakaf in the form of immovable properties. We should continue the good work, but adapt it to the current context. Wakaf Ilmu aims to be a people’s wakaf by allowing for cash donation with no minimum amount. There will be many contribution methods at the public’s convenience, whether it is cash payment at selected mosques or payment through cheque, internet or GIRO. Muslims can also will up to one third of their estates for Wakaf Ilmu as “planned giving”.

25. MUIS has started the ball rolling with a \$3-million contribution from the Baitulmal Fund to Wakaf Ilmu. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank donors who have taken the lead to give generously to Wakaf Ilmu. I hope our community will continue to embrace the spirit of giving, to support our religious needs.

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Meeting Challenges Ahead

26. We are a community on the move towards excellence. The signs are there for all to see. The outline above is a small snapshot of the many more efforts that are being carried out by organisations, institutions, families and individuals to help our community move forward. Of course, our challenges have not all gone away. The important point is that we are tackling them together through concerted efforts which have made us stronger.

27. Our organisations have matured. Jamiyah is 80, PPIS 60 – both with a long track record of contributions. Mendaki is celebrating its 30th anniversary and the 3-day learning festival to mark the occasion drew more than 30,000 participants. Many came as families, with their young ones in prams. The huge turn-out shows a keen interest in our community to learn but whether we have sufficiently met this desire is for us to ponder. AMP recently concluded its third convention. There was much discussion and reflection on the state of our community. There was also interest from new Singaporeans, PRs and visitors who attended the convention seeking to understand the community. I am pleased with the outcome of all these events. I have also received many constructive views online. As a community we are clearly proud of how far we have come, but we also feel more can be done for a better future.

Committee to Engage the Community

28. We have done a fair number of reviews in our community but there is also a sense that these reviews appeared more organisation-, group- or programme- centric. There are calls for a broad-based engagement that can throw up more ideas. Given such an interest, I have asked Mr Sallim Abdul Kadir to undertake the important role of engaging the community and to gather ideas, feedback and suggestions on what more we can do to build up our community. He will form and chair an independent committee, with the help of two vice-chairs — Mr Alwi Abdul Hafiz and Ms Saleemah Ismail. The Committee will draw its members from all quarters and seek ideas from anyone keen to contribute. More importantly, it should consult widely and comprehensively, to ensure that a broad consensus is reached on the collective aspirations of the community and the recommendations to address pertinent concerns.

29. I believe Mr Sallim is well-placed as a candidate to lead the Committee, given his vast experience in the private sector and active involvement in community work. I have asked him to submit the Committee's report to me within 6 to 9 months. I hope to be able to draw upon this report a roadmap for the future of our community.

Conclusion

30. We have come a long way since independence. As a community we have painstakingly dealt with the twin challenge of problems and aspirations. It is unjust to conclude that we have not succeeded. But it is also delusional to assume that we have arrived.

No community is immune from problems. The desire to see a better future for all is the key ethos for a community to succeed. Where have we come from? Where are we going to? Perhaps we should hear from our community – those who shaped our past, and are contributing to the present. Let's view this video.

<Video 2: Spirit of Coming Together>

31. Adil puts succinctly. And like Mdm Zahara says, if every parent works towards a better future for their children, I am confident that their dream will be realised. Similarly, every worker who upgrades his skills overcomes his limits by aspiring towards a better tomorrow — to be more useful to society and to provide better for his family.

32. As a community, we need to build pathways for all our children towards a better future. Underlying that desire is the need to excel and to see excellence in our community. I am confident we are on course towards a community of excellence.

33. Thank you.

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