

MAINTENANCE OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY

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MAINTENANCE OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This White Paper sets out proposals for legislation to maintain religious tolerance and harmony in Singapore and to establish a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

2. In his Address at the opening of Parliament on 9 January 1989, the President explained the need for ground rules in this area. He said:-

A Multi-Religious Society

Religious Tolerance and Moderation. Religious harmony is as important to us as racial harmony. Singapore is a secular state, and the supreme source of political authority is the Constitution. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. However, in Singapore racial distinctions accentuate religious ones. Religious polarization will cause sectarian strife. We can only enjoy harmonious and easy racial relationships if we practise religious tolerance and moderation.

Religion and Politics. Religious organisations have always done educational, social and charitable work. In doing so, they have contributed much to our society and nation. However, they must not stray beyond these bounds, for example by venturing into radical social action. Religion must be kept rigorously separate from politics.

Religious groups must not get themselves involved in the political process. Conversely, no group can be allowed to exploit religious issues or manipulate religious organisations, whether to excite disaffection or to win political support. It does not matter if the purpose of these actions is to achieve religious ideals or to promote secular objectives. In a multi-religious society, if one group violates this taboo, others will follow suit, and the outcome will be militancy and conflict.

We will spell out these ground-rules clearly and unequivocally. All political and religious groups must understand these ground-rules, and abide by them scrupulously. If we violate them, even with the best intentions, our political stability will be imperilled.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS IN PARLIAMENT

3. On 6 Oct 89, the Minister for Education made a statement in Parliament on the teaching of religious knowledge in schools. In the debate which followed, Members asked when the Government intended to implement the ground rules mentioned by the President. The Minister for Home Affairs replied:

..... the Government has decided to introduce legislation to give effect to these ground-rules. I expect the Bill to be ready for introduction at the

next sitting of Parliament. The Government takes a serious view of religious leaders who stray beyond the confines of religious activities or who exploit and manipulate religious organisations. If one religious group involves itself in political issues, others must follow suit to protect their own positions and one group will want to outdo the other to retain its flock. Political parties will also look for religious groups to back them up. This will lead to collision with the Government and also between different religious groups. The outcome will surely be conflict and political instability. It is extremely important therefore that priests and other religious leaders or groups never mix religion with politics or mount political campaigns.

II RATIONALE FOR PROPOSALS

RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY

4. Singaporeans belong to different races, languages and religions. All the great religions in the world are represented in Singapore - Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and many denominations of Christianity. In such a context, religious and racial harmony are not just desirable ideals to be achieved, but essential conditions for our survival as one nation.

5. The Singapore state can only accommodate such totally different spiritual and moral beliefs among the population without being torn apart if it observes several stringent conditions. It must be a strictly secular state. The Government must claim ultimate political authority from the Constitution, and not from any divine or ecclesiastical sanction. A cardinal principle of Government policy must be the maintenance of religious harmony. The Government should not be antagonistic to the religious beliefs of the population, but must remain neutral in its relations with the different religious groups, not favouring any of them in preference to the others. Its duty is to ensure that every citizen is free to choose his own religion, and that no citizen, in exercising his religious or other rights, infringes upon the rights and sensitivities of other citizens.

GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON RELIGION

6. The Government views religion as a positive factor in Singapore society. Religious groups have made, and continue to make, major contributions to the nation. The various faiths practised by Singaporeans are a source of spiritual strength and moral guidance to them. Many religious groups are engaged in educational, community and social work, running schools, helping the aged and the handicapped, and operating creches for children. Their potential future contributions to Singapore in these areas are even greater.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

7. Article 15 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion: it provides that "Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and to propagate

it."¹ At the same time, this religious freedom is subject to the over-riding considerations of the overall national interest. Hence Article 15 also states that it "does not authorise any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality."²

8. Articles 152 and 153 of the Constitution also touch on religion. Article 152 states that "It shall be the responsibility of the Government constantly to care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore", and charges the Government to recognise the special position of the Malays, and to protect and promote their interests, including religious interests. Article 153 is the basis for the existing Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) and Muslim Religious Council (MUIS).

9. The proposed legislation on religious harmony will not affect or conflict with these Articles of the Constitution.

IMPLICATIONS OF HEIGHTENED RELIGIOUS FERVOUR

10. In recent years, there has been a definite increase in religious fervour, missionary zeal, and assertiveness among the Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and other religious groups in Singapore.³ Competition for followers and converts is becoming sharper and more intense. More Singaporeans of many religions are inclining towards strongly held exclusive beliefs, rather than the relaxed, tolerant acceptance of and coexistence with other faiths.

11. This trend is part of a world-wide religious revival affecting many countries, including the US and the Middle East. Its causes lie beyond Singapore, and are not within our control. But in Singapore this trend increases the possibility of friction and misunderstanding among the different religious groups. Religion is a deeply felt matter, and when religious sensitivities are offended emotions are quickly aroused. It takes only a few incidents to inflame passions, kindle violence, and destroy the good record of religious harmony built up in recent decades. The Maria Hertogh riots were a classic example.

12. The MCD Report highlighted this problem:-

..... [the] religious composition of the population of Singapore has undergone changes in recent decades.

¹ Article 15(1).

² Article 15(4).

³ See the *Final Report on Religion and Religious Revivalism in Singapore*, published by Ministry of Community Development in October 1988, *passim*. This document will be referred to as the *MCD Report*.

Followers of some religions have also become more fervent in their religious interest and activities. The situation is complicated by the extent of geographical mobility resulting from urban relocation in the past decades. Followers of different religions are now coming into constant contact with one another. This increased contact may lead to tension and conflict on issues related to religion or religious practices. At the same time, the frequent contact also gives the opportunity for a "dominant" (in terms of influence) religion to encroach upon the territory of a "weaker" religion, thus posing a threat to the latter. The traditionally accepted "boundaries" of respective religions thus have become ambiguous and are shifting. This is a source of potential inter-religious tension when the leaders and followers of a religion take action to protect their own religion, either for ideological reasons or for self-interest.

THE FRAGILITY OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY

13. We therefore cannot assume that religious harmony will persist indefinitely as a matter of course. Conscious efforts are necessary to maintain it, especially by religious leaders and groups. So long as all Singaporeans understand that they have to live and let live, and show respect and tolerance for other faiths, harmony should prevail. Religious groups should not exceed these limits, for example by denigrating other faiths, or by insensitively trying to convert those belonging to other religions. If they do, these other groups will feel attacked and threatened, and must respond by mobilising themselves to protect their interests, if necessary militantly. Similarly, if any religious group uses its religious authority to pursue secular political objectives, other religions too must follow suit. Tensions will build up, and there will be trouble for all. Actual instances of this happening in Singapore are given in the Annex to this White Paper.

14. Two vital conditions must therefore be observed to maintain harmony. Firstly, followers of the different religions must exercise moderation and tolerance, and do nothing to cause religious enmity or hatred. Secondly, religion and politics must be kept rigorously separated.

RELIGION AND RELIGION

15. Many religions enjoin their followers to proselytise others who have not embraced the same faith, in order to propagate the religion. Christians refer to this as "bearing witness", while Muslims engage in *dakwah* activities. This liberty to proselytise is part of the freedom of religion protected by the Constitution. However, in Singapore it must be exercised very sensitively. It is one thing to preach to a person who is interested in converting to a new faith. It is another to try to convert a person of a different religion by denigrating his religion, especially if he has no desire to be converted. In such cases, the potential for giving offence is great. For this reason, the Government has always discouraged Christian groups from aggressively evangelising among the Malay Muslim community in Singapore.

16. Harm can be done even without the direct contact of proselytisation. Each religion has its own comprehensive doctrines and theology. Some faiths, for example

Buddhism, readily accept other religions and practices, but others, including both Christianity and Islam, are by their nature exclusive. Each religious group, in instructing its own followers, will naturally need to point out where its doctrines differ from other religions, and indeed from other branches of the same religion, and why it regards the others as being mistaken. While this is legitimate, it is possible to go too far. An unrestrained preacher pouring forth blood and thunder and denouncing the followers of other faiths as misguided infidels and lost souls may cause great umbrage to entire communities. If they then retaliate with equal virulence, or worse escalate the quarrel by attacking the persons and desecrating the places of worship of the opposing faithful, the tolerance and mutual trust which forms the basis of Singapore society will be permanently destroyed.

17. The futures of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism as world religions are secure regardless of how many Christians, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists there may be among Singaporeans. However, if any religious group in Singapore seeks to increase the number of its converts drastically, at the expense of the other faiths, or attempts to establish a dominant or exclusive position for itself, it will be strenuously resisted by the other groups. This is a fact of life in Singapore which has to be faced squarely.

18. To preserve harmony, Singaporeans, whether or not they belong to any organised religious group, must not cause disharmony, ill-will or hostility between different religious or non-religious groups. In particular, religious groups, in exercising their freedom of religion, should:-

- a. Acknowledge the multi-racial and multi-religious character of our society, and the sensitivities of other religious groups;
- b. Emphasise the moral values common to all faiths;
- c. Respect the right of each individual to hold his own beliefs, and to accept or not to accept any religion;
- d. Not allow their members, followers, officials or clergy from acting disrespectfully towards other religions or religious groups; and
- e. Not influence or incite their members to hostility or violence towards other groups, whether religious or non-religious.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

19. The social fabric of Singapore will also be threatened if religious groups venture into politics, or if political parties use religious sentiments to garner popular support. As the President stated in his Address, if one religious group does this, others must inevitably follow. Political parties will then also become involved, advocating or implementing policies favouring one religion or another. They may be cultivated by religious groups, who can deliver votes in exchange for political influence; or they may themselves seek the support of some religious group in self-

defence, because their opponents have done so. This will also happen if a religious group involves itself in politics to oppose the Government, or perhaps to influence it. Whichever way it occurs, the end result will again be conflict between religions, this time added to political instability and factional strife.

20. This is why religious leaders and members of religious groups should refrain from promoting any political party or cause under the cloak of religion. The leaders should not incite their faithful to defy, challenge or actively oppose secular Government policies, much less mobilise their followers or their organisations for subversive purposes.

21. The Government does not claim that it is always right in its policies, or that it is always deserving of support. But in Singapore the safeguards for political rights and democratic values must be secular, not religious, institutions. If political leaders become corrupt, or the government of the day acts contrary to the interests of the people, the remedy must be sought through checks and balances in the political system, for example by public meetings, publicity in the media, debates and motions of no confidence in Parliament, actions in the Courts and finally by campaigning to oust such a government in a general election. It is the duty of the opposition political parties and the electorate, not of any religious group, to overthrow a government which has lost the mandate of the people. Any religious group in Singapore which takes upon itself this duty runs the grave risk of making things worse instead of better.

22. Members of religious groups may, of course, participate in the democratic political process as individual citizens. They may campaign for or against the Government or any political party. But they must not do so as leaders of their religious constituency.

23. Religious leaders are in a particularly delicate position. An Archbishop, Pastor, Abbot, or Mufti is a religious personage, whether or not he puts on his robes or mounts his pulpit. It is not to be expected that every religious leader will always agree with every policy of the Government. But whatever their political views, they should express them circumspectly. They should not use their religious authority to sway their followers, much less actively incite them to oppose the Government. In the same way, judges and civil servants take no active part in politics, even though they enjoy the same political rights to hold political opinions and to vote as other citizens.

24. To some extent, this division between religion and politics is a matter of convention. When a citizen supports or opposes a political party, he does so for a mixture of reasons, some secular, others spiritual. Other things being equal, a politician who is sympathetic to the religions of his electorate will gain more popular support than one who is not. It is neither possible nor desirable to compartmentalise completely the minds of voters into secular and religious halves, and ensure that only the secular mind influences his voting behaviour.

25. Some religions explicitly deny the possibility of this separation, because to their followers the faith encompasses all aspects of life. This is so notably of Islam, and is also true for most Christians. It is precisely because more than one faith take such holistic views that they must collide if they all attempt to carry out to the full their respective visions of an ideal society.

26. There will also be issues which to the Government will be legitimate concerns for public policy, but which to some faiths pose moral or religious questions. For example:-

a. Many Christians, particularly Catholics, consider abortion to be morally wrong. The Government's policy is to allow women wanting abortions to get one. However, whether or not a pregnant woman wants to undergo an abortion, and whether or not a doctor or nurse wants to carry out abortions, are clearly issues of conscience, to be decided by each person for himself or herself. On such issues, religious groups may and do properly take positions and preach to their followers.

b. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that their religion forbids them to do any form of National Service. Under the law this is criminal conduct, not conscientious objection. Followers of this sect who refuse to obey call-up orders are court martialled and serve jail sentences.

c. Some Christian groups consider radical social action, as practised in Latin America or the Philippines, to be a vital part of Christian faith. Whether or not this is the practice elsewhere, if para-religious social action groups become an active political force in Singapore, they will cause heightened political and religious tensions.

27. The purpose of attempting to separate religion from politics is therefore not to determine the validity of various religious or ethical beliefs which have political or social implications. It is to establish working rules by which many faiths can accept fundamental differences between them, and coexist peacefully in Singapore.

28. In societies with a single dominant religion or established church, religious groups and leaders may well play more active political roles. The Catholic Church in Latin America, the Islamic *ulama* in the Middle East, and the Buddhist *Sangha* in Sri Lanka and Thailand are examples. But if in Singapore followers of the different faiths simultaneously adopt these examples, from societies very different from Singapore, as their role models, and attempt to do the same here, the country will quickly come to grief. Mutual abstention from competitive political influence is an important aspect of religious tolerance and harmony.

NEED FOR LEGISLATION

29. Ideally all religious groups will recognise and respect these rules of prudence without need for legislation. However, it would be unwise to assume that

good sense will always prevail. Irresponsible persons who ignore these imperatives will do irreparable damage to our political fabric. It is better to act now to preempt future difficulties, when the trends are already clear but relations between the religions are still good. It will be much more difficult to secure agreement to act later, after matters have deteriorated and emotions have been aroused.

30. The Government has therefore decided to introduce legislation to maintain religious harmony in Singapore. The legislation will empower it to act promptly and effectively against persons whose actions or words threaten this harmony. When someone deliberately incites his congregation to hatred of another religious group, the Minister can prohibit him from repeating such inflammatory or provocative statements. If he then violates this Order, he will be prosecuted in a Court of law and be subject to a fine or jail sentence.

PROVISIONS IN OTHER LAWS

31. The Government can already act against persons who threaten religious harmony under other existing statutes. The **Sedition Act** defines promotion of "feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population" as a seditious tendency. The **Penal Code** sets out various "Offences Relating to Religion", including injuring or defiling a place of worship, disturbing a religious assembly, trespassing in any place of worship, or uttering words to deliberately wound the religious feelings of any person. In some cases, prosecution under these provisions may be possible and justified. But often these measures will be too severe and disproportionate. Prompt action may be necessary to stop a person from repeating harmful, provocative acts. A Court trial may mean considerable delay before judgment is pronounced, and the judicial proceedings may themselves stoke passions further if the defendant turns them into political propaganda.

32. *In extremis*, the Government can use the **Internal Security Act (ISA)** to detain a person whose "religious" activity is likely to set different religious groups against one another, or to cause riots and bloodshed, or to heighten differences and intolerance between the different religions. However, the ISA was designed to combat subversion, not the misuse of religions. Not all uses of a religious group to advance political causes are necessarily subversive. Much harm may be done long before the ISA can be invoked.

33. The Government may need to take quick but less severe action against a transgressor to head off a problem. One way is for the Minister to issue him with a Prohibition Order, to place him on notice that he should not repeat the offending action. Only if he violates this Order will he be charged in Court. This will require new legislation.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY

34. There is presently an Inter-Religious Organisation. It is registered under the Societies Act, and has no powers or authority under the law. The MCD Report recommended the creation of an "Inter-Religious Council". It explained:-

The [existing] IRO does not have an official statutory status and has not been very active or visible since its inception in 1949. It can only serve limited functions under the present circumstances when religious issues have become more complicated and tended to involve larger social and political considerations.

Accordingly, we suggest that the government should set up an Inter-Religious Council (IRC), consisting of representatives from the various recognized religious groups in Singapore. The purpose of the IRC would be twofold: (1) to promote harmony between the different religions in Singapore and to monitor the relations between them; and (2) to minimize friction and misunderstanding between these religious groups and to perform an arbitration role if necessary. In Singapore, it is becoming very important that the rules of religious conduct are clearly laid out and shared and understood by the parties involved. The IRC could then play an important role in reaching a consensus on such rules.

Structurally, the IRC should come under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office. It should investigate complaints by members of any religious group against the members of another religion to ascertain the validity of such complaints and to recommend to the Prime Minister to take appropriate action.

35. Such a consultative council can play a valuable role in moderating relations between religious groups, and in advising the Government on how best to deal with sensitive religious issues. The Government therefore proposes to establish a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony.

36. The Council will consist of representatives from all the major religions in Singapore, and prominent lay persons who have distinguished themselves in the public service and community relations. The lay persons are included to complement the perspective of religious leaders on the Council, to avoid direct confrontations between leaders of opposing faiths who may have to pass judgment upon each other's errant followers, and to represent the many Singaporeans who do not belong to any organised religious group.

III MAIN FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION

THE HARMFUL CONDUCT DEALT WITH

37. The actual Bill is still being drafted. However, its main provisions follow from the argument of this White Paper. The legislation will cover the following conduct or acts of a religious leader or any member of a religious group or institution:

- a. Causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility or prejudicing the maintenance of harmony between different religious groups;

- b. Carrying out activities to promote a political cause, or a cause of any political society while, or under the guise of, propagating or practising any religious belief;
- c. Carrying out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief; or
- d. Exciting disaffection against the President or the Government.⁴

THE ACTION TO BE TAKEN: PROHIBITION ORDERS

38. Initially a person who violates these rules will not be prosecuted in court, but will be warned and enjoined not to repeat it. When the Minister is satisfied that a religious leader or a member of a religious group is engaged in such conduct, he can issue an Order to prohibit him from:

- a. Addressing any congregation, or group of worshippers on any subject specified in the order;
- b. Printing, publishing, distributing or contributing to any publication produced by that religious group;
- c. Holding office in any editorial board or committee of any publication produced by that group;

without the prior permission of the Minister. The Order will be valid for 2 years, and can be renewed.

PROHIBITION ORDERS AGAINST OTHERS

39. Where others outside the religious group or institution are instigating those within the religious group to engage in such conduct, Prohibition Orders can also be issued against them requiring them to desist.

OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD

40. Before making a Prohibition Order, the Minister must serve 14 days' notice of his intention to the person concerned, and to the head of his religious group or institution (if any), to afford them the opportunity to make written representations. The Minister must also inform the proposed Presidential Council for

⁴ This is the language used in Article 149(1)(d) of the Constitution, which covers legislation against subversion. The Sedition Act (Section 3(1)(a)) gives as one definition of Sedition "to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against the Government".

Religious Harmony, which may give its views within the same time limit. After the 14 days' notice period, the Minister may issue the Order, having regard to any submissions he has received.

41. After an Order is issued, the Minister must refer it to the Council, together with the representations he has received. The Council will consider the Order, and may recommend whether it should be continued, varied or revoked. The Minister is to have regard to any such recommendations of the Council.

PENALTIES

42. A person who contravenes a Prohibition Order will have committed an offence for which he can be prosecuted in Court. The proposed penalty is a maximum fine of \$10,000 or imprisonment for up to 2 years or both; for second or subsequent offences, it will be a maximum fine of \$20,000 or imprisonment for up to 3 years or both.

THE PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY

43. The legislation will also formally establish a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony, consisting of a Chairman and up to 15 other members. They will be appointed by the President on the advice of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights. Their term of office will be 3 years, which may be renewed.

44. The Council will consider and report on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony, which are referred to it by the Government or Parliament. It will also consider Prohibition Orders issued by the Minister, as described earlier.

IV. CONCLUSION

45. This White Paper spells out the problems we face, the need for legislation, and the main features of the proposed legislation. Following its publication, the Government intends to introduce a Bill in Parliament, intituled the Religions (Maintenance of Harmony) Bill. The Bill will be referred to a Select Committee, so that the detailed language of the legislation can be carefully scrutinised.

46. Religious harmony is fundamental to the long term stability of Singapore. It is vital to religious groups and their members, especially the smaller groups and denominations whose very survival depends on a climate of religious tolerance. It is also important to Singaporeans who do not belong to any particular religion. All interested parties should present their views, and debate fully the difficult issues involved. Singaporeans must reach a firm common understanding on the basic requirements for maintaining religious harmony, and thereafter abide scrupulously by the ground rules of prudence and good conduct.

RELIGIOUS TRENDS - A SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Internal Security Department (ISD) compiled this report to illustrate actual instances of the problems discussed in the White Paper. The cases involve individuals belonging to different religions. The compilation is not meant as criticism of the religious groups to which they belonged, or to imply that they always acted with the approval of the governing bodies of their groups. It is only to show how inter-religious tensions can arise when persons try vigorously to promote their own faiths and convictions, perhaps with good intentions, but without adequately considering the sensitivities of other groups or the delicacy of Singapore's multi-religious balance.

AGGRESSIVE & INSENSITIVE PROSELYTIZATION

INTER-RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

2. In the last 5 years, the Government has received numerous complaints about aggressive and insensitive evangelisation, mostly carried out by some Protestant churches and organizations. Some religious groups have also carried out acts and practices which offend other groups.

3. University students have been harassed by over-zealous Christian students. These student-preachers tried to convert fellow students who felt depressed after failing their examinations. In hospitals, some doctors and medical students have tried to convert critically ill patients to Christianity on their death beds, without regard for their vulnerabilities or for the sensitivities of their relatives.

4. Christians and Hindus. The complaints by other religious groups are more serious. Hindus have been perturbed by aggressive Christian proselytization. In August 86, officials and devotees of a Hindu temple found posters announcing a forthcoming Christian seminar pasted at the entrance of their temple. The Hindus also objected when Christian missionaries distributed pamphlets to devotees going into temples along Serangoon Road.

5. Christians and Muslims. The Muslims are extremely sensitive to any attempt to convert them to other faiths. They reacted indignantly when some Christian groups stepped up evangelical activities in 1986. A few groups distributed pamphlets in Malay that used the word "Allah" for God. The Muslims accused these groups of harassing and misleading them, since to them the word "Allah" was specific to Islam. Some Muslims also received extracts from an unidentified book containing inflammatory remarks - that Islam was a "cruel" and "devilish" religion which encouraged "the killing of Christians".

6. Feeling their religion threatened, the Muslims embarked on their own campaign to counter the Christian effort. Talks and sermons in mosques and Muslim gatherings harped on the danger posed by Christian evangelists. Mosques put up notices listing the names of Muslims who had converted to Christianity, warning other Muslims to stay away from them. One organization distributed 2,000 copies of a book questioning the authenticity of the Bible. Another distributed booklets questioning the cardinal beliefs of the Christians.

7. The Government has from time to time acted to prevent clashes between religious groups, especially between Christians and Muslims. In 1986, ISD called up the leaders of 11 Christian organizations which had been evangelising among Muslims, to advise them to avoid activities which could cause misunderstanding or conflict. A few ignored this advice. The senior pastor of the Calvary Charismatic Centre (CCC), Rev Rick Seaward, later said that the CCC wanted "all Malays to be Christians". In a fiery sermon in August 87, Seaward declared that "the greatest threat to Christianity to all mankind today is not Communism but Islam", that Singapore would one day become a Christian nation, and that God's special task for Singaporeans was to send them to spread the Gospel to other countries. He therefore exhorted the congregation to be willing to be martyred.

8. Burial of Muslim Converts. There have also been disputes over the funerals of non-Muslims who had converted to Islam. Two cases in July 88 and January 89 involved Chinese converts. One belonged to a Christian, and the other to a Buddhist family. The families wanted to cremate the bodies according to their respective Christian and Buddhist rites. But a Muslim organization applied for court orders to claim the bodies and bury them according to Islamic rites. This naturally upset the families, who considered themselves as next of kin entitled under the law to decide on funeral arrangements. Fortunately, these two disputes were settled amicably out of court after government officials mediated.

9. Muslims and Ahmadis. There is a long-standing dispute between orthodox local Muslim organizations and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. In the mid-1980s, when the Ahmadis called their new building at Onan Road a mosque, local Muslim organizations protested. In early 1989, the Ahmadiyya mission deposited literature in letter-boxes, including boxes belonging to Muslim residents. Some orthodox Muslims were enraged, and expressed grave concern that the pamphlets would mislead and confuse Muslim youths. Meanwhile, the Ahmadis continued to assert that they were true Muslims, and mounted a propaganda campaign to refute allegations that they were a deviant sect.

INTRA-RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

10. Even within the same broad religion, there have been instances of enmity and provocation between different sub-groups.

11. Hindus. In October 89, a Hindu sect, the Shiv Mandir, burnt an effigy of Ravana, a Hindu mythological king, during a religious festival. The Shiv Mandir claimed that the ritual was an ancient practice marking Lord Ramachandra's triumph

over the demon king Ravana and symbolised the triumph of good over evil. Tamil Hindus were incensed by the ceremony. Some saw it as an Aryan attempt to humiliate and belittle the Dravidians, for Ramachandra was an Aryan while Ravana a Dravidian. A few asserted that Ravana was not a demon king. They wanted to stage a protest demonstration at the Shiv Mandir function and threatened to burn the effigy of Lord Ramachandra in retaliation.

12. Christians. Some Protestants have distributed pamphlets and booklets denigrating the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Some of these materials described the Pope as a Communist, and even as the anti-Christ. The Catholic Church publication, the *Catholic News*, has responded by condemning these attempts by "fundamental Christian groups to confuse Catholics".⁵ Some Protestant groups have also criticized other denominations, including Charismatics and Ecumenists, in their publications.

MIXING RELIGION & POLITICS

CATHOLIC PRIESTS

13. In the mid-80s, a number of Catholic priests ventured into "social action" and acted as a political pressure group. A few of them, including Frs Patrick Goh, Edgar D'Souza, Joseph Ho and Arotcarena, formed the Church and Society Study Group which published political booklets criticising the Government on various secular issues. One of its reports in May 85 accused the Government of emasculating the trade unions and enacting labour laws which curtailed the rights of workers. It also alleged that the NWC annual recommendations were of little or no benefit to the workers and that the NWC merely controlled wage levels.

14. The *Catholic News*, under the control of Fr Edgar D'Souza, also began publishing articles and editorials on economic and political issues. It criticised multinational corporations, the amendments to citizenship laws and the Newspaper & Printing Presses Act, and Government policies on TV3 and foreign workers.

15. In May 1987, when the Government arrested Vincent Cheng's group, Fr Edgar D'Souza, Fr Patrick Goh and several other priests agitated against the arrests, holding masses and issuing inflammatory statements to work up emotions and pressure the Government to release the detainees. They misrepresented the arrests as an attack on the Church, and caused a near collision between the Government and the Church. The situation was defused only after the Prime Minister intervened and the Archbishop stated publicly that the arrests had nothing to do with the Church.

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Catholic News, 26 Jun 88.

16. On 5 Jun 87 the Archbishop specifically ordered his priests not to mix religion and politics in their sermons. Despite this, several priests continued to make political statements from their pulpits.

17. Fr Patrick Goh is the parish priest of the Church of St Bernadette. He has continued to deliver sermons portraying the ISA detainees as victims of injustice, and the political climate of Singapore as repressive. At a mass on 12 May 88, he told the congregation to pray for all the "victims of injustice, lies and untruths". He said that many people lived in fear and helplessness and urged Christians to stand up and fight against injustice. During the weekend masses on 21-22 May 88, he claimed that people had expressed fears that innocent people could be easily fixed through false or fabricated information.

18. Fr Adrian Anthony is the rector of the St Francis Xavier's Seminary. At several masses at the Church of the Risen Christ, he suggested that the ISA detainees were innocent and had been wrongfully detained. In a sermon on 4 Dec 88, he admitted that he had been "branded" as "the priest who always talks politics". On 21 May 89 he held a mass to commemorate the second anniversary of the ISA arrests, where he declared that "the Minister for Home Affairs, Jayakumar, all Judges and ISD officers would face God's punishment" for detaining them.

19. Fr Andre Victor Christophe of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes is not a citizen. He is a French national and a Singapore permanent resident. Yet he too has raised political issues in his sermons. At an evening mass on 30 Apr 88, the eve of Labour Day, he told his congregation that there had been no wage increases since 1985 and urged workers to stand up for their rights. At a Sunday mass on 28 Aug 88, he referred to the coming General Elections and exhorted his congregation to vote "with their eyes open" as the tightening government policies would inevitably affect their children.

MUSLIM THEOLOGAINS

20. Several foreign Muslim theologians have also made provocative political speeches inciting the local Malays/Muslims against the Government.

21. Imaduddin Abdul Rahim was a lecturer from Indonesia. During a religious talk on 22 Apr 73, he commented that the Malay houses in Changi Point would not have been demolished if the Muslim residents there had been united. He predicted that the village mosque would also suffer the same fate, and went on to say that in new housing estates such as Queenstown and Toa Payoh one could see church steeples piercing the skyline and large non-Muslim prayer houses, but could not find any mosques around. He branded local Muslims and Malays as "stooges" in their own country for failing to fulfil their obligations.

22. Ahmed Hoosen Deedat is a South African missionary of Indian descent well known for his attacks against Christianity. At a religious lecture on 4 Nov 82, he suggested that local Muslims should be more militant. He said that Singapore Muslims were passive and soft compared to the South African Malays, who if given

arms could wipe out all the Jews and Christians from Cape Town to Cairo. He accused the early local Muslim inhabitants of being complacent and failing to convert the Chinese immigrants, so that the Chinese had taken over power from the Muslims. At two other lectures in November 82 at the Al-Muttaqin Mosque in Ang Mo Kio and at the DBS Auditorium, he made disparaging remarks about Christianity, branding it as the most foolish religion because Christians believe Jesus Christ to be God.

23. Mat Saman bin Mohamed is a Malaysian religious teacher. At a religious function in Singapore on 20 Jan 84, he expressed his disappointment over the demolition of mosques in areas affected by urban redevelopment, saying that this was tantamount to the destruction of Allah's house. At another function on 23 Nov 86, he asserted that Singapore belonged to the Malays as they were natives of the island. He said that the Malays had become a minority as a result of the influx of foreigners to Singapore, and were now subservient to the non-Malays. He called on the Malays to be united in their stand against the majority race (the Chinese), adding that the Malaysian Malays were aware of their plight and sympathized with their predicament.

24. All 3 lecturers have been banned from re-entering Singapore.

HINDU AND SIKH ORGANIZATIONS

25. Since the mid-1980s, Hindu and Sikh religious activists have become increasingly involved with political developments in India. On 31 Oct 84, Mrs Indira Gandhi was assassinated by Sikh extremists. Hindu-Sikh riots broke out in India, leading to tension between the two communities in Singapore. There were 4 reported cases of assaults on Sikhs, acts of vandalism on Sikh properties, and a few threatening phone calls to Sikh individuals and institutions. Some Indian stall-holders refused to serve Sikh customers. Anticipating trouble, some Sikhs closed their shops in Serangoon Road and High Street. Against this background, some Hindu temples and organizations made plans to hold condolence gatherings for the late Indian leader. A Brahmin temple placed a condolence message in the Straits Times and held prayers for Mrs Gandhi. As these gatherings would have exacerbated tension between the Hindus and Sikhs in Singapore, the Police called up these activists to warn them not to proceed, and to remind them that events in India did not concern Singaporeans.

26. On their part, since 1984 Sikh temples in Singapore have been commemorating the anniversary of the storming of the Golden Temple by Indian troops by holding prayer vigils for the Sikh martyrs. During some of these functions, temple officials made emotional speeches condemning the Indian Government and exhorting local Sikhs to support the Sikhs' struggle for an independent state and to emulate the Sikh martyrs.

27. In January 89, a few Sikh temples held requiems for the two Sikhs executed by the Indian Government for the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Officials of the Niven Road Sikh Temple placed an announcement in the obituaries column of the Sunday Times stating that prayers would be held at the temple. The

announcement included photographs of the 2 executed Sikhs. Photographs and news-cuttings were also displayed in the temple. The Police called up Sikh leaders and temple officials to warn them not to hold further requiems, import foreign politics into Singapore, or involve their religious organizations in politics. Despite this, the Wilkie Road Sikh Temple held a 48-hour vigil in March 89 for the Sikh martyrs.

28. A small local Sikh group has been providing funds and logistics support to militant Sikh separatist groups in India and the UK, which are fighting for an independent Khalistan state in Punjab. It usually raises funds discreetly through personal approaches, but on several occasions made emotional appeals to congregations at Sikh temples for donations, either for the Khalistan cause, or to help the families of Sikh martyrs in India.

RELIGION & SUBVERSION

29. Another area of concern is the exploitation of religion by Marxists and other subversive elements for their own political ends, as is happening for example in Latin America, India, and the Philippines. Singapore has witnessed several cases of religious activists exploiting religion for subversive purposes, most recently the case of Vincent Cheng and his Marxist group.

THE MARXIST CONSPIRACY

30. Vincent Cheng was first exposed to Marxist ideas during his seminary training in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, Tan Wah Piow cultivated and influenced him. During visits to the Philippines in the 1970s and 1980s, Cheng learnt about liberation theology, and saw how the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) used the Church as a cover to advance the Communist cause. In 1981, Tan Wah Piow instructed him to build up extensive grassroots support to capture political power in the long term. Cheng applied what he learned in the Philippines and embarked on a systematic plan to infiltrate, subvert and control various Catholic and student organizations, including the Justice & Peace Commission of the Catholic Church, and Catholic student societies in the NUS and Singapore Polytechnic. He planned to build a united front of pressure groups for confrontation with the Government.

31. Under the aegis of the Justice & Peace Commission, he organized talks, seminars and workshops to arouse feelings of disaffection with society and the urge for revolutionary change. He manipulated Church publications like the **Highlights** and **Dossier** to subtly propagate Marxist and leftist ideas, and to politicise his readers who included priests and lay Catholics. Some of the articles adopted familiar Communist arguments to denounce the existing system as "exploitative", "unjust" and "repressive". Cheng was planning to broaden his network and branch out into various parishes when he was arrested.

THE IKHWAN (MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD)

32. A few Muslim activists have also attempted to carry out subversive activities under the guise of conducting religious activities. In mid-1978, a university graduate formed a clandestine group of extremists called "Ikhwan" or Muslim Brotherhood, with the long-term aim of establishing an Islamic state, by armed means if necessary. The group comprised 21 members, mostly recruited from religious classes conducted by a Malaysian religious teacher then living in Singapore.

33. Ikhwan planned to recruit pre-university students and undergraduates by setting up religious discussion groups in their respective schools and institutions. They were to be trained as writers and religious teachers in order to disseminate revolutionary ideas and sow disaffection among the Muslims. Led by the Ikhwan, the Muslims would then demand that the Government implement Islamic laws similar to those in Saudi Arabia or Iran. If the Government refused, the Ikhwan would spearhead an armed uprising.

34. By September 79, the Ikhwan had managed to penetrate the Malay language societies of the then Ngee Ann Technical College and the Singapore Polytechnic, and to take over a moribund Muslim organization, the Pertubohan Muslimin Singapura (PERMUSI), as a front for their clandestine activities.

35. At this point, the Government arrested 5 leading Ikhwan members under the ISA. The remaining 16 members and their parents were summoned to ISD and warned. The Mufti was present. He reminded them to adhere to the correct teachings of Islam. The Malaysian religious advisor who was involved was expelled and prohibited from entering Singapore.

CONCLUSION

36. Aggressive proselytization and exploitation of religion for political and subversive purposes pose serious threats to religious and racial harmony and public order. Unless all religious groups exercise moderation and tolerance in their efforts to win converts, and maintain a rigorous separation between religion and politics, there will be religious friction, communal strife and political instability in Singapore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this White Paper, the Government sought the views of the Government Parliamentary Committees, community leaders, and the leaders of the major religious groups in Singapore. The Paper incorporates several suggestions and comments received from these groups, including the following:

- a. The clarification that the proposed legislation is consistent with Constitutional provisions on religion (paras 7-9);
- b. The emphasis on respecting common values and the right of each individual to accept or not accept a religion (paras 18a and 18b);
- c. The suggestion to make the Council for Religious Harmony a Presidential Council (para 35),
- d. The inclusion of lay as well as clerical representatives on the Presidential Council (para 36); and
- e. The proposal to inform the Council that the Minister intends to issue a Prohibition Order, at the same time that the affected person is notified (para 40).

Other suggestions have not been incorporated in the White Paper, but the Government encourages those who made them to raise the points in the public discussions so that they can be considered by Singaporeans.

The Government thanks all those who participated in the discussions leading to this White Paper for their contributions. Their suggestions, whether or not eventually included in the White Paper, helped to clarify the issues and thus to improve the Paper. Naturally, ultimate responsibility for the contents of the Paper remains the Government's alone.



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