

# **World Interfaith Harmony Week – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

The Cabinet Committee for promoting Inter-Religious Understanding and Harmony among Adherents in Malaysia or locally known as JKMPKA was established in 2010, a few months after HM King Abdullah 2 of Jordan deliberated his initiative to help realize a more harmonious existence on earth for everyone. Members of JKMPKA are appointed by the cabinet to serve the country for a minimum of 2 years. The current committee members appointed in March 2016 are responsible for all interfaith activities within the 2016 – 2017 period. Among the planned activities, WIHW 2017 was top of the list. In fact Malaysia just celebrated WIHW2017 on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Being a multiracial and multicultural country enjoying the Chinese New Year beginning on 28 January dragging to 15 of Feb, the Federal Territory day on 1<sup>st</sup> Februari followed by Hindu Thaipusam on the 9<sup>th</sup>, the best date to celebrate WIHW with other communities of the world was only the 4<sup>th</sup> February.

WIHW celebration in Malaysia is like a signature programme not really because JKMPKA likes to be in the bandwagon but for a country with multicultural background in terms of ethnicity, culture and religions, WIHW is deemed very necessary to arrest the present as well future issues and challenges. To JKMPKA and Malaysia, peaceful and harmonious co-existence among the people that we are enjoying now need to be sustained and enhanced. WIHW is without doubt a valuable mechanism to achieve the noble struggle in a proactive manner – the so-called ‘nib in the bud’ mode.

With the above insight, sustainability can be achieved if all the sectors of the population maintains the spirit of caring, love, brotherhood, mutual understanding, acceptance and MUHIBAH high in their personal and community agenda. For these reasons JKMPKA targeted young persons, youth and adults to play important roles in WIHW2017.

## **Background**

### **What is JKMPKA**

JKMPKA is an acronym and in Malay language for the “Cabinet Committee for the Promotion of Inter-Religious Harmony And Understanding Amongst Religious Adherents”.

JKMPKA was established in 2010 to continue and extend efforts made earlier by its predecessor, The Working Committee on Interfaith relations under the National Unity Advisory Panel. The current membership composes of faith representatives, leaders in civil societies, and prominent academicians. The current committee consists of 32 members and the committee is chaired by the retired Director General of the Department of National Unity and Integration, Datuk Azman Amin bin Hassan .

The primary function is to assist the government in its continuous efforts to promoting inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding, harmony and social stability in Malaysia.

Objectives of the JKMPKA:

- a) Strengthening relationship among the multi religious communities
- b) To encourage all faith based organisations to honour and adhere to the Federal Constitution.

- c) To utilize mediation as an instrument in resolving religious and cultural issues and related matters.
- d) To provide a platform for the religious organisations for their voices are to be heard by the government.

To operationalize the scope of our work, JKMPKA is guided by principle of Muhibah with its implications of goodwill, trustworthy, and loving.

It follows then the planning of World Interfaith Harmony Week falls upon the shoulder of this committee.

### **WIHW Celebrations at Forest Reserve Institute Malaysia (FRIM)**

There are four components in the day celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week – youth dialogue on interfaith harmony, activity (interfaith amazing race) for young persons and (colours of unity drawing) children, the officiating ceremony, “bonding” tea reception, all happened in the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia.

Nestled in the north east part of Kuala Lumpur and some 15 kilometer away, declared as a national heritage, this enclave of forest reserve provided a lovely setting for the event. The relationship between Faith and the natural environment suggests we cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

To raise the consciousness that we should be in harmony with nature was an important consideration for us to select the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) in hosting the event.



**Opening Ceremony at Forest Reserve Institute Malaysia (FRIM)**

**In a sense environment is regarded as “neighbour” and a “learning laboratory”.**

In addition the organizing committee mounted a Religious Harmony exhibition, with participation from JPNIN (Department of National Unity and Integration), IKIM, JAKIM, and FRIM.



**Religious Exhibition**

We enlisted the media community to publicize this event. In days leading up to this event, we managed to secure television stations to host talks about it with our key personnel. Generous radio air time was accorded as well.

## **PRESS AND NEWS**

**Press releases and vernacular newspapers reports**



### **Media Television Interview**

Religious institutions were encouraged to provide sermons in churches, temples, mosques, spiritual centres to their fellow worshippers highlighting the importance of interfaith harmony and the celebration. It was heartening to note that interfaith devotions were organized at local level by some faith based organisations.



### **(Celebration of the WHIW at local level in state of Johore – a visit to places of worship)**

#### **Strategies employed**

Several strategies were employed to raise the awareness of the nation of the celebration and its' all purpose in reaching out to its' peoples.

- a) Task force committee comprising of several members of JKMPKA conceived and planned the event.
- b) In execution of the plan – 12 government agencies and 2 corporate bodies in the organization and managing the event in collaboration with the task force members and headed by the Department of National Unity and Integration.

- c) Media, print and communication – in different languages in publicizing it.
- d) All religious communities are urged to publicize the event and its’ purpose.
- e) Several states (provinces) are directed by the Department to celebrate the occasion
- f) Choice of location to host the event

## **Objective Outcome**

This annual event will serve to remind citizenry to employ best practices their religion and culture offer in the engagement with their fellowmen.

## **The WIHW 2017 Narrative**

“Don’t fell the tree of unity” was the earnest reminder by the Malaysian Prime Minister, the Honourable Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak, in his address to a large gathering assembled on a bright Saturday afternoon to celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week. In the serene and lovely precincts of a forest reserve populated with indigenous flora and fauna, several kilometres from the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur, he spoke on the foundational element of the formation of the Federation of Malaya/Malaysia was unity in diversity of races, harmony and peace. The Prime Minister used a pertinent analogy of the tree to relate his first visit to the Forest Reserve where he planted a young shrub in honour of his visit more than a decade ago. He alluded the founding fathers of Malaya then planted a tree of unity 60 years ago and watered by the Federal Constitution. He said that unity and harmony should be cherished, nurtured and protected.

The warp and woof of the Malaysian social fabric are the lovely interwoven strands of multi-culture, multi- faiths – Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, Tao, Bahai, Indegineous folk beliefs and members of humanity – Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban, Dayaks, Penans Kadazan Dusun, Senoi, Negrito, Semai, Jakun (and some 20 other ethnic tribes residing in the Malaysian forests – Peninsula Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak).

Of recent decades, our social landscape is significantly reconfigured with the influx of some three million of, migrant workers, refugees and young students, from Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Kampuchea, Nepal, and several African countries. The expanding business community of investors and professionals from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and China added to this rich and cultural diversity, reaffirming the moniker, “Malaysia the heart of Asia”.

This enlarged body of nationalities comprising of differing shades of thoughts, beliefs, culture and habits compels us to rethink the harmony and unity we conceived. It calls for the reconceptualization of relationships that is to sustain our evolving society and humanity’s relationship with nature.

Conscious of the emerging external and internal forces that may potentially derange the racial and religious harmony in the land and in addressing to the baneful influences, an event leading to the World Interfaith Harmony Week commemoration, “Moments of Unity” was jointly organized between the Department of National Unity and Integration and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in January 2017.

In this programme Chinese corporations to provide internship for Malay young graduates and conversely Malay corporations to invite the Chinese interns. The Prime Minister expressed his

strong desire that private sector and civil service organization initiate more projects of similar nature to foster harmony and understanding between ethnicities.



[\(Launch of the Moments of Unity by the Prime Minister at the Lakeside, Botanical Gardens KL\)](#)

## **WIHW Celebration at FRIM**

### **“Nurturing Interfaith Harmony the Malaysian Way”**

For this year celebration we continue to focus on “Muhibah”. In Arabic the word means “Loving” and in the Malaysian language it means “goodwill, love and affection, a feeling of closeness and friendship”. It becomes an operative word to theme “Love of God and Love of the neighbour”.

The accent for this year event was on “Youth and the children”. Intergeneration harmony and sustainability among Malaysians is vital. Under the project TN50 – national transformation of Malaysia by 2050, the government is holding town hall meetings and other platforms and spaces to converse with youth the Malaysia they want by year 2050. This social aspect – harmony and unity is a fundamental ingredient for the material and spiritual prosperity for the nation.

Eight youth representatives from all faith based groups were invited to a dialogue on “Religious Harmony” to give their religious perspectives on Muhibah. It was the first ever, that we invited a representative of the indigenous community residing in the deep forest of Peninsular Malaysia to share his “folk beliefs” in the context of Muhibah within their natural confines and living among the wider society.

Panelists shared their best practices in the celebration of their festivities and holy days. The audience learned and appreciated the values of these cultural traditions. It is very Malaysian that the host welcomes friends, relatives and even strangers to their home for meals to celebrate the festival. The auditorium was filled beyond its capacity with a large participation of youth and from a wide spectrum of society.



[Youth Religious Harmony Dialogue](#)



### **Youth Amazing Race**

Our youth team conceived a lively, interactive and cooperative activity and with fun for the young people “Amazing Race. It was spiritual-values and universal participation centered game. Another, a colouring activity for the children.



### **A colouring activity for the children**



The foregoing events held simultaneously culminated with an officiating ceremony to declare the launch of the World Interfaith Harmony Week by the honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak.

A crowd of more than 2000 including leaders and representative from religious and civil society organisations, diplomats, top government servants and members of the public witnessed the proceedings of ceremony – a doa recital by a Muslim cleric to bless the event, followed by singing the national anthem, a spirited pledge in the recitation of the Rukun Negara (5 national principles) by youth representatives from various religious organisations and unity songs sung by a choir from a Chinese secondary school. After a short delivery by the chairman of JKMPKA, the Prime Minister took the stage and delivered an impassioned speech on harmony, respect of other religions and culture, peace and unity – elements of these are embedded in the Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara (5 national principles) and that the government placed high priority on unity of its peoples.



**A crowd of more than 2000**

## Commemorative stamp was produced to mark the occasion.



### **Commemorative stamp**

The ceremony followed with the Prime Minister having tea with some 350 religious leaders, heads of civil service organisations, diplomats, top government officials and two cabinet ministers. It was to establish ties between top civil servants and their fellow peers in the wider society.



### **Prime Minister having tea with some 350 religious leaders**

## **Conclusion**

The Malaysian social landscape is shaped over centuries by a diversity of races and religions along with their cultures, traditions and languages. Islam being the religion of the Federation and practice by the majority, other fellow Malaysians are free to practice their beliefs.

While it is not immune to the influence in rise of religious self-righteous and intolerance, and of pockets of hard-liners, the level of co-existence among the various ethnic groups is generally acceptable.

We are beginning to engage religious organisations and likeminded civil service organizations to promote this annual affair and to have it localized. Celebration of World Interfaith Harmony is to be promoted at State level by government agencies as well. Educating the public on this all important aspect of social co-existence will be central to commemorating this annual event.