



14 October 2023

## STATEMENT BY THE INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION REAFFIRMING PEACE AND GOODWILL AMONG PEOPLE

The Inter-Religious Organisation, Singapore (IRO), shares deep concern regarding the situation in the Middle East. We recognise that communities globally and within Singapore are affected by the loss of innocent lives in this ongoing conflict.

During these challenging times, the IRO, established in 1949 in the aftermath of World War II, remains steadfast in upholding the principles enshrined in our Constitution. These principles promote the pursuit of peace and goodwill among all people. We draw inspiration from the words of our first IRO President, Rev. Dr H. B. Amstutz.

***“Positive peace would only come when men could find ways to unite themselves when men learn to stress not points of difficulty but points of agreement and to recognise the possible levels of relationship on which men live together.”***

– Rev. Dr H. B. Amstutz, President of IRO, 18 March 1949

These principles serve as the cornerstone of religious harmony in Singapore. We call upon our fellow Singaporean citizens and residents to prioritise our shared values as we endeavour for peace and unity. This begins with displaying sensitivity, care, and kindness towards one another. We echo the recent words of Mr K. Shanmugam, the Minister for Home Affairs and Law, who reminded us not to let external events affect our communal relations within Singapore.

We also draw guidance from the IRO's 1951 statement (annexed below), issued after the Maria Hertogh riots in Singapore. In that statement, leaders urged communities to promote understanding and reconciliation between those at odds. This appeal retains its relevance and significance in today's world.

In our contemporary society, we encounter a variety of viewpoints on various matters, some of which individuals may hold firmly. However, it remains crucial that we consistently refrain from expressing opinions in ways that incite anger or hatred in our speech. Such expressions can harm other communities and, in extreme cases, even lead to violence.

The rapid spread of information and the ease of online communication can amplify divisive narratives and contribute to the escalation of conflicts. Our collective responsibility is to promote respectful and constructive online and offline dialogue. And, if that is not possible, we must move to be calm in the interest of maintaining harmony and understanding in our diverse society.

Undoubtedly, the solidarity between religious communities will face tests periodically. The IRO, as the oldest interfaith organisation in our nation, comprised of religious leaders and followers from ten different religious groups, has observed how moments of conflict have also served as opportunities for us to fortify our connections and mutual understanding. Now is such a moment.

Let us strengthen our interfaith relations during these challenging times by demonstrating responsibility in our words and actions.

Mr Noor Marican  
President  
Inter-Religious Organisation, Singapore

The Maria Hertogh riots were a severe outbreak of violence in Singapore between 11 and 13 December 1950 over the custody lawsuit of Maria Hertogh. The riots left 18 dead and 173 injured, one and a reported 72 vehicles burnt, 119 vehicles damaged, and damage to personal property amounting to 20,848 Straits dollars.

Below is an extract of a statement by the members of the IRO in the aftermath of this event.

**STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS  
ORGANISATION AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES OF  
RELIGIOUS BODIES, 22nd FEBRUARY, 1951**

The world today is an arena in which forces of good and evil are locked in deadly Combat.

We summon men of goodwill to return to faithful obedience of God and His Law.  
In obedience to the Law of God is the only foundation of freedom and the only protection from slavery.

We summon men of goodwill to set men free from every force that enslaves them; from ignorance and falsehood, from want and exploitation, from persecution and Oppression.

We repudiate and condemn mob violence and political terror.

We deeply deplore the recent sad happenings in Singapore, and express our profound sorrow and grief at the sufferings caused.

We offer our condolence to the relations and friends of those who were killed in those days and sympathise with those who were injured or sustained any loss.

We will henceforth do all in our power to promote understanding and reconciliation between those at variance.

We pledge ourselves and summon all people of goodwill to further the cause of men living in freedom and righteousness according to the Law of God; and to this end to advance and protect those natural and lawful associations in which men grow to freedom and justice - the family, the school, the occupational association or union, the nation, the religious community.

We pray God to awaken in the hearts of all men the spirit of Forgiveness and Love

**SIGNED BY:**

Mohamed Abdul Aleem Siddiqui (Muslim)	Ahmad bin Mohamed Ibrahim (Muslim)
Dato Syed Ahmad Alsagoff (Muslim)	Syed Abdullah bin Yahya (Muslim)
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Ang Girn Tong (Buddhist)	Venerable Sek Hong Choon (Buddhist)
A.K. Isaac (Methodist)	Paul B. Means (Methodist)
Herbert H. Peterson (Methodist)	H.B. Amstutz (Methodist)
M. Bonamy (Vicar-General Catholic Church)	Rev. I.J. Aloysius (Catholic)
Henry, Lord Bishop of Singapore (Anglican)	R.K.S. Adams (Anglican)
Professor T.H. Silcock (Society of Friends)	Rabbi Jacob Shababo (Jewish)
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