

**SPEECH BY MR NOOR MARICAN, PRESIDENT FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION,
SINGAPORE AT THE JEWISH WELFARE BOARD INTERFAITH SUKKOT GATHERING
BEING HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2023 AT THE JACOB BALLAS CENTRE**

SALUTATIONS

Good evening,
Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong,
Our esteemed host from the Jewish Welfare Board, Mr. Nash Benjamin, the President,
and Rabbi Abergel Mordechai, the Chief Rabbi of Singapore,
Respected religious leaders and members of the interfaith community in Singapore,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the President of the Inter-Religious Organisation Singapore (IRO), it brings me great joy to be part of this interfaith Sukkot gathering alongside our members and friends. On behalf of the Council, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Jewish Welfare Board for organising this event, which serves as a prelude to the 75th Anniversary of the IRO.

SUKKOT & ITS RESONANCE FOR INTERFAITH

Sukkot, a cherished celebration within the Jewish tradition, symbolises the bountiful harvest season and reminds us of the values of giving, gratitude, and unity. These principles are deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and resonate with many other religions' teachings. Therefore, this occasion presents us with a fitting opportunity as a community to come together and reflect upon and celebrate these fundamental principles that bind us in unity.

Today's interfaith gathering for Sukkot, organised by the Jewish community, exemplifies how different faiths can come together to participate in each other's festivals and honour our shared values. This ethos aligns seamlessly with one of the core tenets of the IRO, which was established in 1949 by religious leaders representing diverse faith traditions residing in Singapore. The IRO is one of the world's oldest interfaith organisations, dedicated to promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among people of various religious backgrounds.

JEWISH COMMUNITY & THE IRO

The Jewish community has been integral to the IRO since its inception. Rabbi Jacob Shababo, who served as Chief Rabbi during that period, held a pivotal position as a founding Council Member and even assumed the role of President from 1966 to 1967. His dedication to the IRO extended throughout the late 1970s. In 1974, upon Rabbi Jacob Shababo's passing, members of the IRO Council paid their respects by attending

his funeral. An interfaith prayer was conducted near his graveside, serving as a poignant symbol of unity and mutual respect among various faiths. Additionally, IRO members visited the family to offer condolences at their home, and the final religious rites were observed at the Synagogue. This enduring legacy stands as a powerful testament to the unwavering commitment of Singapore's Jewish community to fostering interfaith harmony.

To date, the IRO has had the privilege of having five Jewish leaders serve as Presidents. This distinguished list includes Rabbi Shababo, Rabbi Ben Zakin in 1978, Rabbi Mordechai Abergel in 1997, Mr. Joseph Benjamin in 2007, and most recently, Mr. Ben Benjamin in 2019.

During Mr. Ben Benjamin's presidency, the IRO embarked on remarkable initiatives that significantly advanced the organisation's interfaith mission in the modern era. Many of my esteemed Council members would attest to the extraordinary impact of his leadership during the 70th year of the IRO. This was particularly evident in initiatives such as community outreach and digital engagement, which helped spread the message of the IRO through social media.

Despite their relatively small size, Singapore's Jewish community has displayed a dedication to fostering interfaith harmony, earning widespread admiration. Rabbi Mordechai Abergel, a highly respected figure in religious circles and the broader interfaith community, has been a devoted Council Member of the IRO since 1995. He has actively engaged in interfaith prayers and humanitarian endeavours, including responses to events like the Silk Air crash in 1997, the September 11th attacks in 2001, and the Asian Tsunami in 2004.

In 2019, under the leadership of the then President of the Jewish Welfare Board, Mr. Victor Sasson, an interfaith Ramadan iftar was graciously hosted in this very premises we gather, marking a heartwarming manifestation of camaraderie between our communities.

Currently, Mr. Nash Benjamin, serving as the President, led the community in inaugurating the Jews of Singapore Museum in 2021. This museum welcomes Singaporean citizens, residents, and tourists to explore and appreciate Jewish culture and heritage. Furthermore, in the past year, the Jewish Welfare Board organised a groundbreaking interfaith Passover Seder, with active participation from several of Singapore's faith leaders in reading from the Haggadah. These initiatives vividly illustrate the continued commitment of Singapore's Jewish community to constructing bridges of understanding and cooperation among a diverse array of religious groups.

Though I have only mentioned some key people, these efforts are not without the entire Singapore Jewish community's goodwill and hard work. Therefore, on behalf of the IRO, I thank them for being with us in the commitment to maintain religious harmony in Singapore.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a world where divisions seem to multiply, we must unite, express our solidarity, and reaffirm the shared religious values that strengthen our nation. Today's interfaith Sukkot celebration, hosted by our Jewish friends, is a significant step toward this endeavour. I invite you to express your gratitude with applause, demonstrating your support for their commendable interfaith mission as the Jewish community of Singapore.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to ESM Goh, our Patron, for gracing us with his presence on this momentous occasion.

I extend my gratitude to every one of you. Please take this opportunity to enjoy the evening, strengthen your friendships, and foster unity among us all.

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