

四大宗教咨询理事会
Unity In Diversity (MCCBCHS)



MCCBCHS 10th Anniversary

Introduction to MCCBCHS

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) was first mooted in 1981. In August that year, statements were made by the governing authorities and others regarding Malaysia's ultimate status as an Islamic State. These statements gave rise for concern to the leaders of the non-Muslim religions and they saw that as a positive opportunity to come together to promote matters of mutual interests and defend against common threats, to build a nation where religious and racial harmony reigns.

Towards this end, at an informal meeting of the same year, a decision was taken that despite their religious differences, the group could speak with a common voice on matters of common concerns. It was agreed to form an organisation which would work towards more open dialogue and co-operation among not only Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs but also with the Muslims within the reality of the multi-religious, multi racial society of Malaysia.

On August 1983, the organisation was officially registered as a society with the following aims:

- a. *to promote understanding, mutual respect and co-operation between people of different religions,*
- b. *to study and resolve problems affecting all inter-religion relationships, and*
- c. *to make representations regarding religious matters when necessary.*

Since its inception, MCCBCHS has had 5 different religious leaders: Emeritus Tan Sri Vendargon (Christianity), Rev. or, Kim Beng (Buddhism), Mr. Joginder Singh (Sikhism), Mr. A. Vaithilingam (Hinduism) and Bishop Dr. Dents C. Dutton (Christian) to head the Council. In spite of their diverse religious practices and customs these leaders have sought to work towards the common vision of unity in diversity. The measure of their sincerity and commitment towards this vision has been reflected in the close working relations they have had over the years with one another, with Muslim leaders and with the various National leaders. Each president has not only increased awareness of issues which affect religious freedom of the non-Muslims, but have also continued to underscore earlier concerns of the Council. Such seemingly diverse activities have nothing less than the objectives of the MCCBCHS in mind and these are:

- a. *To uphold and promote the ideas as enunciated in the Rukun Negara,*
- b. *To promote unity, harmony and understanding amongst people of different religions through conferences, seminars and other channels, and*
- c. *To print, publish and distribute journals, periodicals, leaflets or books that the Executive Committee may consider desirable for the promotion of its objects, where the proviso that prior approval must be obtained from the competent authority.*

Various issues relating to the freedom of religious practice have been raised by the MCCBCHS over the years. MCCBCHS has time and again expressed deep concern and objected strongly to the passing of laws which seek to undermine religious understanding and respect ever since it was registered as a Society on 6th August, 1983. Among some of the issues raised over recent years were:

- a. *the hasty amendments to State constitutions on Islamic Law affecting non-Muslims,*
- b. *the plight of wives who are automatically divorced on conversion to Islam by their husbands and left stranded without maintenance,*
- c. *the ban on using certain Islamic terms by non-Muslims,*
- d. *the problems experienced by non-Muslims with the Immigration*

- Department regarding visits for foreign priests and temple musicians, and
- e. the question of religious education not given to non-Muslim school children in their school curriculum

Although concern over such issues have been of primary importance, MCCBCHS has continued its work in promoting unity and better understanding among the different religions through the organization of and participation in various activities. Among these are:

- *Seminars on issues such as "World Religions and Human Rights", "Common Religions Values of Nation Building," and the "Role and Influence of Religions in Society",*



- Meeting of religious heads like Cardinal Arinze, head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue with other heads of various religious and Dr. Yusof Nor.
- Inter-religious days of prayer for World Day of Peace, and Aids.



Besides these, there were other forums, dialogues and discussions held between the MCCBCHS members and various government heads or politicians. Excerpts of articles written about the various concerns and activities have been reprinted in this programme,

under the 3 main aims of the Council.

How effective has the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) been in its work over the last decade?

Because of its alertness and prompt action on certain issues which surfaced in the country, MCCBCHS has been successful to some extent. The following are some of the positive responses from the authorities:

The strong protest and objections from the Council on the RTM 1 telecast of Islam Today in which the South African Islamic preacher, Mr. Ahmed Deedat criticised and ridiculed the Holy Bible led to the programme being taken off the air subsequently.

The proposed demolition of the Sri Krishan Temple at Pantai Dalam on 12th December, 1992 was ordered to stop by the Cabinet after a series of letters from MCCBCHS. The temple moved to its new location on 3rd February, 1993.

The immediate protest by MCCBCHS to the PM and DPM and the urgent contacts with the MCA, MIC and Gerakan Leaders stopped the passing of the amendment to the Federal Territories Syariah Laws in Parliament on 24th December, 1992. Amongst the proposed amendments was the facilitating clause for the easy conversion of non-Muslims irrespective of age.

The quick response from the Cabinet after our protest on the breaking down of Hindu and Buddhist temples in Perak, was that in future only the Menteri Besar or the Chief Minister could authorise the breaking down of a place of worship. It was hoped that this ruling would mean that before

any such actions were taken in the future, discussions would first be held with non-Muslim coalition partners of the ruling party and the relevant non-Muslim religious leaders.

In September, last year, at a seminar on the 'Role and Influence of Religions in Society,' our Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (in his keynote address) expressed this sentiment, "It is religion which acts as the anchor or underlying principles that govern not only the physical and material well-being but also the spiritual growth and upliftment of man... It is religion that steers people towards a more balanced life. It is also religion that provides true guidance and the strongest motivation towards achieving a more fruitful and meaningful life." YAB Dr. Mahathir emphasized, "The issue at hand is to find the ways and means of how a nation can produce a people or society that has as its core the deep sense of religious consciousness, committed to the highest moral standards of ethical and moral values and yet is most progressive, industrious, dynamic and dedicated towards advancement and progress."

The recognition by YAB Dr. Mahathir himself of the need for a strong moral and ethical backbone to the Malaysian society of his Vision 2020 and the integral role that religion plays in creating this strong moral fabric is heartening to non-Muslims. In line with his, the Council has expressed its concern recently over the lack of opportunity for religious education in school for non-Muslims and the negative consequences this will have on future generations.

Hence even as new issues arise and MCCBCHS looks into them and expresses its concerns the main thrust of the Consultative Council is still to promote understanding and respect among Malaysians of different religions through consultation and dialogue.

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