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SPEECH

6 July 2015, 8pm, The Star Performing Arts Centre

BY DEACON MATTHEW KANG, CHAIRMAN OF NEW CREATION CHURCH, CO-CHAIRMAN OF “HARMONY IN DIVERSITY: CONCERT IN CELEBRATION OF SINGAPORE’S RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL HARMONY”

Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore

Mr Sam Tan Chin Siong, Minister of State, Prime Minister’s Office, and Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth

Mr Hawazi Daipi, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC

Members of the Inter-Religious Organisation

Religious leaders, community leaders

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good evening, 晚上好, selamat malam, maalai vanakkam,

1. Fifty-one years ago, the first series of communal riots involving clashes between Malays and Chinese started in July. These riots have been described as “the worst and most prolonged in Singapore’s postwar history”.¹

2. Moving forward 51 years to this present day, not only are the Malays and Chinese not fighting, they are on stage in a joint showcase of their respective martial arts forms. Indians, Chinese, Malays and Eurasians are on stage tonight, singing with one voice and one heart, in harmony and unity.

3. If you had lived through those riotous times in 1964, you would marvel at the miracle that has happened today. Even if you were not around to witness the clashes firsthand, you only need to cast your eyes at the inter-religious and inter-racial violence around the world and you will be filled with gratitude at the peace and harmony we experience here.

¹Clutterbuck, R. L. (1984). *Conflict and violence in Singapore and Malaysia: 1945–1983*. Singapore: G. Brash, p. 321.



ORGANISERS:



4. This did not happen overnight. We are fortunate to have a good government that has established the foundations of a harmonious society built on justice and equality for all. It introduced many measures to encourage religious and racial harmony. To name just a few: Racial Harmony Day celebrations, the National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony, a wide range of community engagement programmes, and support for ground-up efforts like the Inter-Religious Organisation.

5. But a strong national identity and harmony in a society as diverse as ours do not just happen through initiatives and programmes. It takes the concerted efforts of the political, religious and community leaders. It takes the efforts of people like you and me.

6. That is why the many religions and races in Singapore decided to pool resources together to put up tonight's concert. Many of the leaders of these groups are here today seated in front.

7. We said that we must do this especially because this is the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence. And religious and racial harmony is a cornerstone of Singapore's progress. Let us celebrate it!

8. At the same time, let us resolve and commit to sustaining and growing this harmony we enjoy. It must be preserved at all costs and not be taken for granted. Achieving religious and racial harmony is a journey, a journey without a destination.

9. It is like cycling. We have to keep pedalling and not stop, because if we stop pedalling, we could glide along for a while but we will come to a standstill. The government has been cycling with us for the last 50 years. Let us all join in, young and old, and continue to cycle together. And remember — don't stop pedalling, keep on cycling.

10. So I am very happy and encouraged to see all of you here. I want to thank the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, for attending tonight's concert and being so supportive of this event. Thank you to our friends from the Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Buddhist, Taoist, Jain, Christian, Muslim, Sikh and Baha'i communities.

11. Our performers deserve special mention as they put in time and effort to practise for tonight's concert; so does The Star Performing Arts Centre for sponsoring tonight's venue; KC Gan, our creative director, for pulling the various strands together to create this beautiful tapestry of performances for tonight's show; Master Chung Kwang Tong (Weiyi) for the coordination work done; Mr Tan Thiam Lye, Chairman of Taoist Federation (Singapore), who is co-chairing this event with me — thank you for your support; and all the people labouring quietly behind the scenes even now.

12. Another person I wish to thank and appreciate is my pastor, Pastor Joseph Prince, the senior pastor of New Creation Church. Pastor Prince is a strong supporter and great



ORGANISERS:



advocate of religious and racial harmony in Singapore, and he has been very supportive of this event.

13. Last but not least, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for taking time to be with us tonight. It is heartwarming to see Singaporeans from all walks of life — everyone of you — coming together to celebrate the harmony in diversity we have in Singapore. Without your presence, this celebration will not be so meaningful.

14. I would like to end by introducing the next item, a song specially written by New Creation Church as a gift for Singapore. Entitled “Open My Heart”, this song speaks of the personal choice to open my heart — your heart — to hear, see and know someone else, to share our lives, hopes and dreams. By doing so, we will be strong together. This is why we have come so far.

15. When we continue to see things from each other’s eyes, to seek to understand and build bridges of friendship, surely we can only move together to even greater heights as a nation.

16. Open your hand to hold somebody’s hand and you will know that you are not alone. Love is the language of unity, and let music tonight be the conduit of that love. I hope you will enjoy the song. God bless you.

17. Thank you, 谢谢, terima kasih, nandri.

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