



VISIONS FOR PEACE

Association of Voices of Peace,
Conscience and Reason

PCORE AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- 1 To establish effective channels and linkages for peace building efforts at the personal, community and organizational levels
- 2 To promote a dynamic vision for nation building and development that optimizes shared resources, talents and skills among diverse groups
- 3 To develop a substantive body of oral and written discourse built upon moral conscience and reason on issues of public concern at public forums, in the media, on the Internet, in reputable journals and magazines and other relevant channels
- 4 To implement meaningful programmes and activities that promote the personal and group needs and interests of its members and members of the bigger community

Visions FOR PEACE

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PROLOGUE



Unity and Multiculturalism: Building a Future Together

H R H Raja Zarith Sofiah Sultan Idris Shah
Patron
Association of Voices of Peace, Conscience and Reason

Keynote Address presented at PCORE Forum
Unity and Multiculturalism, 29 August 2013

BismillahiRahmanir Rahim
Assalamualaikumwarahmatullahiwabarakatuh and Good Morning

I would like to start with what former US President Jimmy Carter said about racial and cultural diversity in the United States: 'We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs,

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different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.' Indeed, we Malaysians should also be proud of our own racial diversity and that we have succeeded in living together peacefully for many decades, if not centuries. In the words of John Hume, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 for his efforts in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland: 'Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace: respect for diversity.'

If Malaysians need any reminding or any convincing about how wonderful and how blessed we are to live in a country that is at peace and not in any kind of civil turmoil or conflict, and that we must stay united as a nation, we need only look at what is happening in Syria and Egypt. As outsiders and as foreigners, we do not know as much as the Syrians and the Egyptians themselves as to the causes of the conflicts in these countries, but what we see on the news and on the Internet is enough to tell us that events in both countries have spiraled out of control, that the people there have suffered and continue to suffer, and that there have been far too many deaths.

We should be truly thankful that we live in a country that is at peace. Of course, we are aware of the rising crime rate and the fact that in certain cities the streets are not safe at night. But there is a difference. We do not live in a country experiencing an armed conflict or a civil war. We do not have to seek refuge in other countries, as many Syrians have had to. So, for those who think that hurling racial or religious slurs is funny or brave, please think long and hard, and realize that all it takes is a spark to ignite anger; and that the repercussions may be more serious than we can foresee. Speaking about the present conflict in Egypt, and referring specifically to the Christian minority as well as the Muslim majority, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, said: 'Citizens are members of a nation-state rather than people of a certain religious background.'

If we wish to live in a country that enjoys peace, we must make a great effort to quell racial and religious intolerance as well as racial and religious ignorance. We cannot encourage any sort of intolerance regardless of which racial or religious community we belong to. There is no place for any sort of overt or covert hatred.

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In his book *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization* (2007), Akbar Ahmed wrote about the death of Daniel Pearl, the American journalist, in Karachi, Pakistan. Akbar Ahmed was a friend of Daniels father, Judea Pearl, and he wrote: 'Danny Pearl was killed by hatred, and the thing about hatred is that it thrives on falsehood.' How does the 'falsehood' which Akbar Ahmed speaks of, thrive? Falsehoods are bred through ignorance, which in turn breeds fear And that is why I believe we must not remain ignorant about one another's communities. If we remain ignorant about other cultures and religions, that ignorance will only fuel fear. We all fear the unknown.

I remember speaking to a group of local and international students at a university about a year ago, and advising them to learn about other cultures and countries. I mentioned that when I was at boarding school in England, I had to go to church every Sunday. I could see the eyes of a Malay girl widen in fear and horror; more fear I think, because for her a church is a strange place, one she had never been into. The difference between her reaction and mine is that a fear of the unknown still exists for her; whereas for me the unknown was no longer there. I was already familiar with going in and out of churches and there is no longer any fear of them.

When addressing issues about race and religion in Malaysia these days, we have to accept the role which social media plays in influencing us to form opinions. Social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogs, has become an integral part of our lives. It is no longer unusual to hear that a tweet, a Facebook post or a YouTube video has gone 'viral' and has spread far and wide. The use of the word 'viral' is no longer confined to the medical world.

What is apparent from these tweets, postings and videos is that there are many people who wish to be heard. But it is also obvious that there is a lot of anger, malice and hatred. There have been a few times during the last month when both newspapers and online news reported on a few Facebook postings which deliberately insulted Malaysian Muslims. I thought about writing my own opinions about them on my Facebook page but in the end I decided against it. And this is why. I believe that sometimes silence can be deafening and just as effective as hundreds of words. So our decision not to discuss what we think about certain issues can be just as important as voicing our thoughts. By deciding to ignore images and words

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that are meant to insult or challenge us, we render them unimportant. Acknowledgement can sometimes bestow attention on attention seekers. And acknowledgement and attention are exactly what these attention seekers want.

There is also another danger linked to tweets, postings and videos. That we all have a voice is a good thing, but when we make statements without any scholarly references, that is when we start to wade into dangerous and murky waters, especially where religious issues are concerned. An Islamic scholar, Shaikh Ahmad Saad, alerted me to the danger of 'citizen journalists' thinking they are experts when I listened to one of his lectures. Who is Sheikh Ahmad Saad and what are his qualifications? His full name is Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Saad Ash-Shafi'ie Al-Azhari Al-Hasani. His family lineage goes back to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Sheikh Saad completed the memorization of the Holy Qur'an at the age of 10, led his first prayer at the age of 13 and delivered his first Khutbah at the age of 15. He spent 17 years at Al-Azhar University and graduated with a BA Honours in Islamic Studies in English. He has toured the world as an Imam, speaker and lecturer, visiting Canada, the US, Germany, Sweden, Malaysia and Singapore. He now lives in the UK. He is the Founder and Director of the Ihsan Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, and was the former Imam of North London Central Mosque.

The danger I was warned about is that although we all have the right to say whatever we wish, we sometimes think we know more than we actually do. For example, let's say that Datin Halimah wants to build an extension to her house or she would like to knock down a part of her house. She would, of course, go to a qualified and established architect. But let's imagine that I say to her that I can help her build that extension because I have read many books and watched many documentaries as well as YouTube videos about architecture. And so I consider myself an expert and am able to build structures. Would she trust me to build that extension to her house? The answer is no because no matter how many books I have read or how many videos and documentaries I have watched, it will not make me a qualified architect. I did not go to university and graduate with a degree in architecture and I have not worked as an architect. All my knowledge comes from books, DVDs and online videos.

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In the same way, none of us can consider ourselves engineers because we have read hundreds of books on engineering, or can become doctors because we have read medical books. And this is one of the things we must remind ourselves when we post our thoughts or arguments on social media concerning our own religion or that of others. We do not have the formal qualifications, and although we have a right to voice our thoughts and opinions, we must not consider ourselves experts.

I believe that we should acknowledge all that is good and positive and avoid bringing to attention all that is negative. A report published in *The Star* on 9 May 2013 says that 'Malaysians of various races and creeds have joined the call for national unity, stating that they want harmony to prevail.' This was based on the The Star Online-initiated #MyWanthashtag where readers were asked what they wanted for the country. The overwhelming response was that they wanted race relations to improve, with every citizen being considered a Malaysian. A Lat cartoon of multiracial Malaysians sheltering under the national flag was iconic in showing national unity under the Jalur Gemilang with the people respecting one another and living happily together. Among the tweets were those that called for an undivided Malaysia; peace and harmony; a mature Malaysia that will learn and accept; a bridge to close the political divide, and better education for all. There were many calls to end racism and forge unity among Malaysians.

I believe that it is time to replace words such as 'tolerance', which seem to imply that we should force ourselves to live with each other. It is better, I think, that we say to ourselves that we must respect and understand one another. We should be proud of our racial and cultural diversity. We all come from cultures that are hundreds or even thousands of years old. It would be a great pity if we forgot our ancestries and our cultural backgrounds.

At this point, I would like to refer to what Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, said in a speech at a reception held by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, of which he is Patron, which was aired on the BBC on 26 February 2009: To be successful in developing a truly harmonious society.... we have to find the right ways to derive strength from our diversity.... One of the challenges we face is the process of integration, which in many ways is a dynamic one, evolved with each successive

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generation.... As inhabitants of this country we all have a role to play in shaping our society on the basis of one fundamental principle and that is understanding.'

I would like to end by saying that it is wonderful that PCORE and ASLI have worked together to organize this forum. Like many of you here, I have attended quite a few conferences, seminars and forums. At the end of each, I always feel that more should be done, whatever the theme or the subject. This forum is about multiculturalism in our country, and those of you who are here have already decided that unity is an important issue, as are mutual respect and understanding. But what about those Malaysians who think differently and who are not willing to either respect or understand people of other races and religions? How do we reach out to them? How do we convince them that what concerns us should also concern them? These are the challenges we face, and we have to find ways and means of getting our message through to all Malaysians.

Thank you.

Wabillahitaufiqwalhidayah,
Wassalamualaikumwarahmatullahi wabarakatuh

FOREWORD



I am pleased to write a Foreword for this book. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said at the end of a tradition in which he described one of the best forms of Islam: 'Extend the greeting of peace, to those you know and those you know not.'

PCORE has emerged as one of the few multiethnic citizen movements in the country whose focus on social issues of contemporary concern at both the local and global levels is indeed commendable. As we turn the pages of this book, we come to understand how critical these issues are, and how great a challenge they pose to contemporary societies in many parts of the world. This book, *Visions For Peace*, is a compendium of reports, papers, articles and essays addressing contemporary issues and how they impact the cause of peace, justice and societal well-being in the lives of people.

Overall, the silver thread binding the parts and giving them coherence is the emphasis on core values relating to a variety of themes, including balance and harmony, race relations, world peace, environmental conservation and sustainable development, integrity and transparency, social justice and morality as well as the spirituality of mankind. The voices of a wide array of writers from the ranks of the nation's thinkers, academicians, activists and laymen raise the stature of the book to that of a commendable reference

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I commend Dato' Halimah Mohd Said, the Founder-President of PCORE, for her initiative in publishing this book in the spirit of volunteerism, true patriotism and measure of love for the country.

Tun Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid
Chairman
Permodalan Nasional Berhad

PREFACE



V*isions For Peace* is testimony to the aims, objectives and areas of concern of the Association of Voices of Peace, Conscience and Reason and to its mission of realizing them through meaningful programmes. Better known by the acronym PCORE, the citizen movement was registered on 31 May 2011 and has been pursuing its cause in a steady current of ripples rather than waves.

The book spans PCORE's volunteerism over the last five years, where members, friends and associates have contributed their utmost to support several worthy events and activities. PCORE is a small organization with a big heart as we reach out to individuals, groups, organizations and the wider community to share with them our aspirations, hopes and dreams. Our work has consistently demonstrated the spirit of coexistence, collaboration, cooperation and consensus that define the soul of Malaysia.

Visions For Peace is a compilation of writings organized in three parts. Part 1 comprises two sections: six reports and recommendations in Section A and six key speeches and papers delivered at the public forums organized by PCORE in Section B. Part 2 of the book includes twenty articles contributed by Malaysian academicians, activists and members of society on the theme of balance and harmony, the two principles forming the core of human existence. Part 3 contains nineteen short essays representing the thoughts and reflections of PCORE members on the association's ten areas of concern.

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The writings in the first part of the book present the main activities of PCORE's formative years. The second part contains articles on various themes of social concern contributed by invited writers and is followed in the third part by the critical reflections of PCORE members on a range of national issues. Readers are thus taken through a progression of sorts, from understanding PCORE's aspirations to facing the country's many challenges to seeing hope in the solutions offered.

The universal themes of peace and unity, balance and harmony, fairness and justice, rights and responsibilities resonate throughout the book and rightly so as PCORE is a platform for the voices of peace, conscience and reason. These themes capture the attention of Malaysians as we constantly face a barrage of national issues, many of them impacting our quest for these societal ideals. Much as we realize that real unity is elusive, we still work at it for the sake of the country, for therein lies our hope for a better Malaysia. Although we know balance and harmony are relative to the pragmatic undertakings of the nation's life, we still try our best to instil these values in our personal life. We have learned to accept that complete, continuous peace and happiness are never attainable, not for the country, nor for ourselves, but we have learned to savour the moments when we are blessed with them.

PCORE is proud to bring together some of the best minds in the country and from outside to participate in its many public forums and talks, as well as some of the most outstanding writers from among its members, friends and associates. *Visions For Peace* contains a wealth of perspectives on these themes and deserves a place on the bookshelves of individuals, organizations and institutions of learning for the edification of all Malaysians.

Dato' Halimah Mohd Said
President
Association of Voices of Peace, Conscience and Reason

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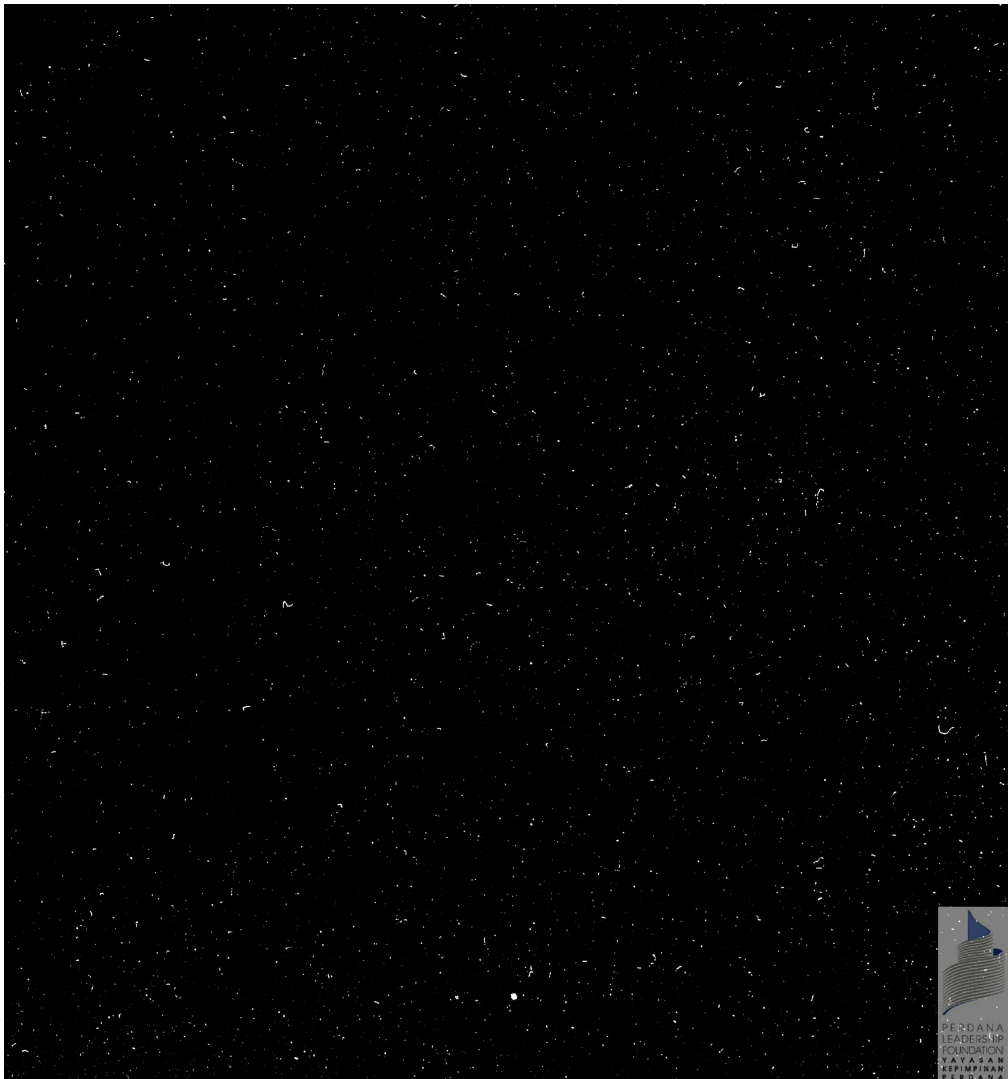
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PART I **REPORTS AND
SPEECHES FROM
PCORE EVENTS**





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A. Reports

FORUM Voices of Peace, Conscience and Reason 2010

Introduction

P CORE's inaugural forum, held on 16 November 2010, identified ten areas to be addressed within its aims and objectives of promoting peace and unity at the individual, community and organizational levels:

1. Community networking and neighbourliness.
2. Celebrating diversity and interfaith relations.
3. Synergizing the school and home in the education of the young.
4. Creating a robust environment for improving health and wellness.
5. Uplifting socio-economic status through education and training.
6. Sustaining and preserving the natural and cultural heritage.
7. Promoting effective language and communication strategies.
8. Ensuring fairness, justice and legal equity.
9. Building integrity and ethical standards.
10. Consolidating national integration and unity.

For each Round Table Track representing the area of concern, the problems and issues surrounding its success and effective management were identified. Suggestions were made on how to maximize its potential for development to achieve the desired results.

DECLARATION OF UNITY

WE, THE VOICES OF MODERATION, PLEDGE TO UPHOLD THE UNITY OF OUR BELOVED MALAYSIA BY:

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF PEACE AND HARMONY

- SPREADING MUTUAL GOODWILL AND UNDERSTANDING
- BUILDING UPON OUR SHARED REALITIES
- CONSOLIDATING OUR COMMON STRENGTHS
- ENGAGING ONE ANOTHER SINCERELY AND HONESTLY
- RESOLVING CONFLICT IN CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS

WE DECLARE THAT THROUGH OUR VOICES OF PEACE, CONSCIENCE AND REASON WE WILL REINFORCE NATIONAL UNITY IN SENSIBLE AND RATIONAL WAYS

Visions For Peace is a compilation of writings reflecting a diversity of perspectives on the themes of peace, unity, balance and harmony. Binding the three parts of the book together is the emphasis on core values relating to a variety of concerns, including world peace, environmental conservation and sustainable development, ethnic relations and social justice, integrity and transparency, morality and the spirituality of mankind.

The reports, speeches, articles and essays cover the four aims and objectives and ten areas of concern of the Association of Voices of Peace, Conscience and Reason (PCORE), a citizen movement established in Malaysia in 2011. The book represents PCORE's vision and mission of promoting peaceful coexistence through respect for and understanding of the deeper values of diversity, multiculturalism and inclusiveness.



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