

SUMMARY OF KEYNOTES

SINGAPORE, 21 JUNE 2019

The International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) featured a Plenary and six Breakout Sessions, followed by a dialogue with Singapore Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat on 21 June. The following is a summary of the sessions.

Closing Remarks and Dialogue with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance of Singapore, Mr Heng Swee Keat

DPM Heng observed that the conference had covered a wide range of issues on cohesive societies, including hard questions like balancing identities with harmonious coexistence. Drawing unity from diversity was more important because of unprecedented levels of trade, technological advancement, and human migration. Global trade has sharpened the divide between haves and have-nots, and this is exacerbated by the ease in which extremist and exclusive ideas proliferate. Nationalism and intolerance were increasingly displacing openness and harmony.

To build cohesion, DPM Heng said every society needs to find its own path. He related the Singapore experience and stated that the country need to stay vigilant against divisive forces, including evolving policies to move with the changing challenges. DPM Heng stated that the Young Leaders' Programme in the ICCS was created to reach out to the next generation of leaders, where everyone has a role to play in building cohesive societies. He said the Government is committed to working in partnership with Singaporeans through a 'democracy of deeds.' For those from around the world, he thanked them for contributing their perspectives and broadening Singapore's horizons at this conference. The common challenges facing the world could only be tackled effectively if the global community worked closely together.

Plenary Session 3 – How We Come Together (Cohesion)

Dr Dicky Sofjan felt that we have come a long way since Margaret Thatcher's remark that "There is no such thing as society."

Dr Ali Al Nuaimi said he comes from a region that suffers a lot because their religion had been hijacked by the wrong ideology. But he said we had to look at the common values as all nations seek security, stability and prosperity. These cannot be enjoyed while their neighbours are suffering. Globalism had been a tool for business and finance, and now what is needed is globalism that brings people together. He called for champions, especially religious leaders, who will take the lead in bringing people together.

Professor Lai Pan Chiu stated that religion plays a vital role in building cohesive societies, and religious education need not take place solely in religious institutions. Approaches had evolved from mono-religious to multi-religious and finally inter-religious education. Inter-religious education trains people to learn to dialogue, listen, and understand interpretation between different religions. It helps students to see that they always see things from a particular viewpoint and contributes to a humble and open position towards other religions.

Dr Anna Halafoff said there was a clash within civilisations, between those with inclusive 'Cosmopolitan' and exclusive 'Anti-Cosmopolitan' views. Anti-cosmopolitan actors feel threatened by globalisation – and this may lead to anti-cosmopolitan extremism. The interfaith movement has four aims: Developing understanding of diverse faiths, challenging exclusivity

and normalising pluralism, addressing global risks and injustices, and creating peacebuilding networks. She called for a critical religious pluralism focused on liberation from inequality, acknowledging religions' roles in both creating and ameliorating structural violence.

Bishop Emeritus Dr Wee Boon Hup noted Singapore had high religious diversity, yet also a high level of social cohesion. He described Singapore's cohesion with the acronym, 'G.R.I.P.': 'G' was for Government as the prime mover in bringing people together; 'R' was about Relationships between government and key religious leaders, in which both personal relations and formal structures played a role to ease tensions. 'I' was for Informed, where people are constantly informed about the faith and practices of other religions. 'P' is for Prayer – scripture urged believers to pray for the authorities, and prayer also positively influenced people's actions.

Breakout Session: Faith #1 – Inter-religious Dialogue and Community Building

Dr Paul Hedges said dialogue should not be confined to religious leaders, but also the whole population. He said religious literacy, attitudes, and actions were all needed to foster social cohesion. Dr Veena Howard said religion should not merely be about what is preached and believed, but also what we do – morality was the yardstick of religion. One could also be self-critical about one's own religion and emphasised working on the right path. Discussion centred on ground-up initiatives and how identities were being blurred through things such as intercultural and interreligious marriages.

Breakout Session: Faith #2 – Faith and Technology

Dr Karine Martin noted that technology and religion are not incompatible and often complement one another as faith can fill spiritual voids, using technology to spread good messages and connect people. Mr Jasvir Singh noted that while digitalisation is disruptive to a certain extent, it can be used by millennials to connect to their faith and practise it better. In general, faith and technology can be compatible and even complementary if believers and followers respect one another's stances and beliefs.

Breakout Session: Identity #1 – Social Media and Community Discourse

Dr Dicky Sofjan noted that populism, including religious varieties, is characterised by three features: A single source of authority, social mobilisation, and a need for strong, almost messianic, leadership. While discontent was pushing people to populism, happiness was built on good relationships and generativity – the opportunity to guide others. Dr Shashi Jayakumar said that there was a 'restorative nostalgia' for a pure, monocultural state behind populism, and these sentiments were driving narratives to return to 'pure' origins and a conspiracy to undermine what the majority has. This could lead to the manufacture of facts. But while harsh penalties may be one response, grassroots reactions from the bottom up could be more effective and needed to engage the young.

Breakout Session: Identity #2 – Overcoming Hate

Dr Noor Huda Ismail argued that extremists could be reintegrated into society as no one is born a terrorist. The rehabilitation process is won mentally. Christian Picciolini said that one cannot be silent in efforts to counter violent extremism. He characterised it as a need to Learn, Link, and Leverage the community, with Love to remove demonisation. Discussions followed on the marginalisation of youth, the emotional drivers of extremism, and how prevention was more important than countering hatred.

Breakout Session: Cohesion #1 – Building Bridges: Global Peacebuilding Efforts

Dr Kumar Ramakrishna offered an analysis of extremist Islamism and identitarianism, with suggestions on how intra- and inter-religious initiatives could preserve social cohesion amid violent extremist ideologies. Dr Patrice Brodeur mentioned different organisations and actors involved in these issues and gave examples of different global religious peacebuilding efforts that range from UN agencies to international and regional inter-governmental organisations. He encouraged investing in various areas to promote global religious peace-building. Discussions included the different ways that multi-religious efforts could be used to counter hate speech.

Breakout Session: Cohesion #2 – Community Initiatives towards Social Cohesion

Dr Mohamed Bin Ali spoke on strengthening social cohesion in Singapore. Religious harmony was precious and had to be based on equality between communities. This was an ongoing process. Government and communities had to have a close partnership to prevent cleavages from emerging. Pastor Tan Seow How leads a young church and thus their emphasis is on teaching and guiding the next generation. His church's key to cohesion was governed by two principles: Prevention and Intervention, with focus on the former. The panellists were asked how society could do even more to retain unique identities and also to forge a cohesive society.

For Reference

During the three plenary sessions and six breakout sessions, the delegates explored issues related to faith, identity and cohesion in a global context. The sessions drew on the diverse expertise of an excellent line-up of speakers in topical discussions including the role of technology and social media in religious and social discourse, and the rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalised people into society. The speakers are listed in the Annex according to their respective sessions.

###

Official translations of ICCS in other languages:

Malay	Persidangan Antarabangsa mengenai Masyarakat Bersatu Padu
Mandarin	社会和谐国际大会
Tamil	ஒன்றிணைந்த சமூகங்களுக்கான அனைத்துலக மாநாடு

For more information on ICCS and its related programmes, please visit

<http://www.iccs19.sg>

Follow our social media channels:

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/ICCS19>

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/ICCS19>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/ICCS19>

Media contact

For media enquiries, please contact:

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

iccs-comms@ntu.edu.sg

Lisa Koh

Portland Communications

lisa.koh@portland-communications.com

+65 9697 4392

About The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific.

For more details, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg or www.facebook.com/RSIS.NTU or www.linkedin.com/school/rsis-ntu.

Annex

Session	Speakers
<p>Perspectives on Cohesive Societies <i>Special Presentation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Paul Hedges Associate Professor, Interreligious Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies • Ms Karen Armstrong OBE; FRSL Historian of World Religion • Dr Shashi Jayakumar Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security and Executive Coordinator, Future Issues and Technology, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
<p>Plenary 1 What We Believe (Faith)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Karen Armstrong OBE; FRSL Historian of World Religion • Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue • Dr Veena Howard Associate Professor, Asian Religious Traditions and Coordinator of Peace and Conflict Studies Program, California State University, Fresno • Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir Deputy Mufti, Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) • Venerable Guo Huei Abbot-President, Dharma Drum Mountain • Dr Farish A. Noor (Moderator) Associate Professor, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
<p>Plenary 2 Who We Are (Identity)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lord John Alderdice House of Lords, UK • Mr Christian Picciolini Founder, Free Radicals Project • Dr Azza Karam Senior Advisor on Culture, United Nations Population Fund and Coordinator, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development • Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand Professor of Political Science, Thammasat University and Founder, Thai Peace Information Centre • Professor Lily Kong (Moderator) President, Singapore Management University
<p>Plenary 3 How We Come Together (Cohesion)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Lai Pan Chiu Interim Dean and Professor of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong • Dr Ali Al Nuaimi Chairman, The World Council of Muslim Communities • Dr Anna Halafoff UN Alliance of Civilizations' Global Expert in Religion and Peacebuilding • Bishop Emeritus Dr Wee Boon Hup Member, Presidential Council for Religious Harmony, Singapore

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Dicky Sofjan (<i>Moderator</i>) Core Doctoral Faculty. Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies, Universitas Gadjah Mada Graduate School
<p>Breakout Sessions Faith</p>	<p><u>Inter-religious Dialogue and Community Building</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Veena Howard Associate Professor, Asian Religious Traditions and Coordinator of Peace and Conflict Studies Program, California State University, Fresno • Dr Paul Hedges Associate Professor, Interreligious Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies <p><u>Faith and Technology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Karine Martin Chairman, French Daoist Association • Mr Jasvir Singh Co-Chair of Faiths Forums London and Chair of City Sikhs • Ms Teo Yi-Ling Senior Fellow, Centre of Excellence for National Security, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
<p>Breakout Sessions Identity</p>	<p><u>Social Media and Community Discourse</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Dicky Sofjan Core Doctoral Faculty. Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies, Universitas Gadjah Mada Graduate School • Dr Shashi Jayakumar Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security and Executive Coordinator, Future Issues and Technology, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies <p><u>Overcoming Hate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Christian Picciolini Founder, Free Radicals Project • Dr Noor Huda Ismail Visiting Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
<p>Breakout Sessions Cohesion</p>	<p><u>Building Bridges: Global Peacebuilding Efforts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Patrice Brodeur Associate Professor, Institute of Religious Studies, University of Montreal and Senior Advisor, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) • Dr Kumar Ramakrishna Head, Policy Studies and Head, National Security Studies Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies <p><u>Community Initiatives towards Social Cohesion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastor Tan Seow How Senior Pastor, Heart of God Church

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Mohamed bin Ali
Assistant Professor, Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies |
|--|--|