



# MAINSTREAMING HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRESERVING NATIONAL UNITY IN MALAYSIA

Reflections and recommendations  
from the Online Conversation  
on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2021



**PROCEEDINGS  
REPORT**

## Report compiled by



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The following is a link to the video recording of the online conversations from which these findings are based upon:

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oGmaZCr\\_4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oGmaZCr_4s)**

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## PREFACE

**Opening Remarks Dr. Khoo Ying Hooi, Secretary-General, Society for the Promotion of Human Rights (PROHAM) and Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, Chair, PROHAM**

Human rights have returned as a major agenda for Malaysia's foreign policy with implications for its domestic policies. As Malaysia seeks a place as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2022-2024 term, it has released a set of voluntary pledges and commitments. Here, Malaysia made promises to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) towards the commitment of human rights domestically as well as globally. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, Malaysia joined another 105 countries to sign the UN General Assembly resolution for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration. Malaysia has also issued its Voluntary National Review (VNR) during a United Nations (UN) high-level political forum on the SDGs. Among those under review is SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Inclusive Societies. Another related development is the launch of a new publication by Professor Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria, *Understanding ICERD in the Wider Context of the Federal Constitution, Human Rights, and Malaysian Society* at the Human Rights 365 Group meeting which was hosted by UN Malaysia's country team and KITA-UKM. With a high foreign policy reference to human rights, building inclusive societies in preserving national unity, Malaysia must review its human rights commitments with a special focus on addressing racism both domestically and globally.

Malaysia is at a crucial juncture in history where there is a need for greater unity and respect for human rights that need to be better protected. The Federal Constitution must be respected and upheld to facilitate national unity. Public policy for national unity should be crafted from a human rights dimension. Human rights should be mainstreamed in public policy and in upholding national unity in Malaysia. Malaysia needs to live up to its international obligations. PROHAM calls upon the Malaysian government to ratify all the United Nations human rights conventions, such as the

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

## UNDERSTANDING ICERD IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND MALAYSIAN SOCIETY

**Reflections from Prof Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria, PROHAM Deputy Chair**

The present Malaysian government taking on human rights issues on the international stage has been a positive development, but at the same time, this information must be disseminated locally, discussed, and become a public policy agenda. There is a climate for engagement and dialogue to intensify policy advocacy as Malaysia has engaged in voluntary pledges and made commitments to the global and domestic human rights issues. The UN General Assembly resolution calling for "A Global Call to Combat Racism" was also signed by the present Malaysian government at the end of December 2020 which is consistent with Malaysia's support of international resolutions, such as the Durban Conference. However, Malaysia has not ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

In Malaysia's VNR Report on the SDGs, there is a commitment to increase awareness and capacity building in human rights (page 128). SDG 16 highlights some of the challenges and ways forward. However, the commitment to ratify other human rights conventions is not mentioned in the VNR report but is nonetheless part of the UPR process. The stage is set to reintroduce the ICERD. An attempt was made on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021 with the *Understanding ICERD* document which was published to demystify misconceptions surrounding the ICERD ratification. This will enable discussion and drive policy advocacy. It was also realised that most of the materials surrounding ICERD were not available in the Malay language and thus translations are being made, which should be available by September 2021.

The publication's methodology took into account of sentiments from social media, parliamentary Hansard, and views from personalities, leading to a 91-page document that employed the use of a question-and-answer format. It comprises four chapters,

setting the content alongside the Federal Constitution, human rights, and Malaysian society. It is presented this way as objectors to ICERD questioned the fundamentals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Federal Constitution, particularly relating to Article 153 as a segment of Malaysian society felt threatened. It also addresses other ASEAN and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries that have ratified ICERD. Of the 57 membered-countries of the OIC, 55 out of 57 have ratified ICERD, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Ultimately, ICERD looks at the balance of the Federal Constitution so that it is not in conflict with Article 153. If Article 153 is viewed as special rights and not an affirmative action it is considered discrimination by ICERD's definition. It is critical that there is no notion of racial superiority in the Federal Constitution and it is important for Malaysian society to foster a shared history, commitment for non-discrimination and equality, and revisit the National Unity Consultative Council's (NUCC) documents like the National Harmony Bill to address hate speech and to foster community mediation. Malaysia has to take the issue of human rights seriously. It is concerning that it is one of the very few countries that have yet to ratify ICERD.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE MALAYSIAN FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

*Reflections from Emeritus Prof. Datuk Dr. Hj Shad Saleem Faruqi, PROHAM Member*

Malaysia's human rights situation is mixed, challenged by historical, cultural, religious, economic, geographical, and systemic structural issues that act as impediments to the implementation of the spirit of the Federal Constitution. Any assessment of the human rights situation in Malaysia is bound to be affected by one's perception of human rights – whether human rights go beyond civil liberties to socio-economic entitlements. Do human rights go beyond civil liberties to socio-economic entitlements? Are the rights of future generations, and the right to sustainable development and environmental protection part of human rights jurisprudence? Are “personal autonomy” rights issues like homosexuality, cross-dressing, and pornography part of fundamental freedoms? These are issues that

do not have unanimity of views in Malaysia and other countries. Can community morality and religious prescriptions justify the curtailment of some of these “human rights”? If one is of the position that religion is a personal matter that is not of concern to the state, then this amounts to secular militancy. If medical health is important, why is moral health not important?

In making an evaluation, one's fortunes must be reflected upon. A holistic perspective of human rights can unearth much that is positive in the Malaysian body politic. The Malaysian legal system has all the constituents of a constitutional state. There is a supreme Constitution and a chapter on fundamental liberties in Articles 5-13. Judicial review is available if rights are transgressed not in accordance with the law. Some judges have interpreted the concepts of “life”, “liberty” and “law” prismatically to read into the Constitution some unenumerated, non-posit, non-textual, implied rights. Therefore, freedom does not imply freedom from arrest but it is about the right to breathe. Law is not simply any law passed by parliament, but a proportionate law.

There is enough in Malaysian constitutional jurisprudence to provide a renaissance in public, constitutional law. Some developments kindle hope that the Constitution is returning from the peripheries to the centre and that the judiciary is waking up from the judicial winter that descended on the land after the tragic Salleh Abbas episode of the late 1980s.

In the socio-economic sphere, Malaysia has done fairly well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Undeniably, food is just as important as freedom; just as bread is as important as the ballot box. Before the covid catastrophe, the country's success in economic development had reduced poverty significantly; kept unemployment low; and had provided a bountiful market. There was good cooperation between the public and private sector, with the Malaysian economy globalised long before globalisation. The building of a peaceful and harmonious multi-racial society was indeed exceptional and provided a peaceful and harmonious environment in which human rights can flower. Only when one has lived in a country where there is a shortage of food and extensive poverty can one fully appreciate that an economic environment is necessary for human rights to flourish. In the last six decades, Malaysia's social welfare policies have brought

human dignity and the graces of life to many who were living on the fringe of existence.

There are many unmet challenges along with the chapter on human rights, constitutional supremacy, and judicial review as there are overriding powers to combat subversion and emergency powers – these powers are overriding. The Constitution provides substantive procedural controls over the use of Article 149 and 150 powers. However, these have not worked well as the judiciary has been conservative and not been the bulwark it was intended to be. The chapter on human rights has not been the force it was designed for as human rights jurisprudence has not yet taken firm hold. There are allegations of selective prosecution. Check and balance have been ineffective despite the presence of many institutions and procedures provided to check powers. They have not able to perform their functions as they are influenced by the executive or impeded by external forces

There is a conflict between the shariah and civil court that has subsequently led to unintended violations of human rights. The Constitution in schedule 9, list 2, paragraph 1 clearly states that shariah courts shall have no jurisdiction over persons not professing the religion of Islam. However, when the shariah courts dissolve a marriage in which one party practices Hinduism and the other had converted to Islam, the shariah court grants custody of the child and converts the religion of the child, then there is a clear violation of the rights of the non-converting spouse. Malaysia has been grappling with this conflict with some positive developments made, but the problem remains.

Concerning the special position of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, in legal theory or jurisprudence, affirmative action is fully acknowledged and justified as part of the human rights quest. John Rawls describes affirmative action as a “just inequality”. In many constitutions, such as India, and to some extent in the constitutional system of the United States, there are provisions for affirmative action. In Malaysia, there are provisions for affirmative action for the Malays, natives of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli. However, Article 153 of the Constitution was surrounded by many safeguards, and these safeguards are either not known or have not been enforced. For example, along with the duty protecting the

special position of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, the King is also enjoined to safeguard the legitimate interest of other communities. However, such “legitimate interest” remains a broad and difficult generality to define. From time to time, necessity, politics, expediency, and change of circumstances will define it differently.

The special position of Malays is protected only in the public sector, but not in the private sector. The reservation and quotas are not across the board and only apply in four prescribed sectors. The Yang Di-Pertuan Agong may reserve such proportion as may be necessary and deemed reasonable. The use of the word *proportion* implies monopoly or exclusivity and was not considered by the Constitution. Under Article 153, it says that “..no non-Malay or his heir should be deprived of what he has already acquired under the legal system, no business and profession can be exclusively assigned to any race and ethnic monopoly is permitted.” Article 153 does not derogate from Article 136, which states that there is to be no discrimination in the public service. In reading both articles together, Tun Suffian interpreted that entry point quotas are allowed, but once a public servant is in service there should not be any discrimination on grounds of race. Sadly, due to lack of constitution literacy, Article 153 has not been interpreted and enforced in the spirit of affirmative action in which it was framed. This has serious implications for national unity, justice, and equity for all.

There are new frontiers in human rights. It is a journey and not a destination, with new demands and expectations arising. There has been a necessity for new thinking. At the horizon, there is a beckoning of the idea of the rights of future generations. The idea of development and sustainability rights is emerging. Poverty eradication is intimately connected with human dignity and human development. Free speech is needed to combat economic vulnerability. An equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens of growth is more likely in a society with freedom of speech and transparency in decision-making than in an authoritarian setup.

New threats are emerging. The k-economy poses threats to the rights of workers. In the era of cyber information, the right to privacy faces extinction. Globalisation threatens local ownership of indigenous resources.

Uncontrolled capitalism is leading to the emergence of private sources of tyranny. Employers and business conglomerates are becoming as powerful as the mighty state. Up to now, constitutional law was concerned with the tyranny of the state. Transnational corporations inflict cross-border violations on human rights. Despite the benefits of globalisation, it has rejected subsidies, abhors programmes of re-distributive justice, and frowns upon social welfare policies. There is also the threat of environmental catastrophe. Hence, the human rights movement in the decades must rethink human rights, articulate alternative approaches to dominant concepts, interpretations, and practices spawned by mainstream capitalism, and formulate a more holistic understanding of human dignity founded upon social justice. All have a role to play in solving these issues.

While the New Economic Policy (NEP) is under Article 153, many of its provisions were meant to benefit the entire Malaysian community, not only the Bumiputera. It was part of affirmative action, but in many areas, it went beyond Article 153 due to a lack of knowledge of the Constitution and electoral or political pressure. All in all, Article 153 and the NEP can be in line with ICERD and other international norms if its benefits are distributed based on needs. NEP emphasises the retribution of wealth, not limited to a particular race, and within and amongst the communities. The economy should not be monopolised by just a few.

## DIGITAL HATE AND VIOLENCE

*Reflections from Serene Lim, Partner/Director, KRYSS Network*

Hate and violence in the digital space are structural problems as the issues advocated are not one-off, incidental, or spontaneous. The internet offers a diverse and dynamic platform for all individuals and political spectrums to air their views, building a more vibrant democratic space, especially when mobility is limited. However, activities taking place online creates a system of verification for speeches and actions committed by individuals. For example, a post that degrades the LGBT will receive validation from protestors, academia, and government authorities such as JAKIM. In contrast, unpopular topics like Orang Asli's land ownership right fail to capture the interest of the

public and government over digital platforms. This implies that the digital space could manifest uneven power where one group is presumed to be more influential or important than the other. This is an unfair practice as not everyone has access to freedom of expression and participation in the digital space, and is, therefore, unable to express their identity, ethnicity, and beliefs.

Social norms are factors that determine what can and cannot be spoken in public spaces. Thus, the ability to acknowledge and identify what is considered hate speech and violence in the digital space is crucial to avoid aggregated and long-term harm. For example, although statements like "the Rohingya are taking away our jobs" by politicians has not been categorised as a hate speech, it has the potential to induce people to behave more aggressively and violently against this group. Thus, distinguishing hate speech and violence in the digital space is not as straightforward as expected. Business models that created social media platforms do not provide strong legislation toward these issues as sensationalised content that have elements of hate and violence creates larger traction to build engagement and interaction among netizens.

The media has described this situation as cyberbullying. However, there are different levels of violence and hate. The most fundamental layer of violence and hate is known as xenophobia whereby individuals commit cyberbullying on others with connections to migrants and refugees. Besides amending laws to strengthen human rights, the government should move towards designing a mechanism that counters hate speech, provide education and training, and carry out intercultural dialogues to controls hate and violent speech.

## COMMONALITIES AND SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTS TO FOSTER UNITY

*Reflections from Dr. Wan Puspa Melati Bt Wan Abdul Halim, Faculty of Social Sciences & Leisure Management, Taylors University*

Instances of racial prejudice and stereotype are prevalent in Malaysian society which is experienced by each individual. The concept of

unity involves the idea of national identity, patriotism, compassion, tolerance, respect, and collective responsibility. However, one of the key sentiments is the lack of certainty of what Malaysians are proud of. With the current woes in the political and economic environment and its effect on education and work, people have begun to question the fundamentals of what makes a Malaysian and what they can be proud about.

National unity is fostered when Malaysians relate to a common history that allows them to be proud and be a part of the nation, be it the Constitution, historical memories, or a common cause. To decipher such sentiments systematically requires an understanding of socialising agents. These agents comprise of the government, educators, parents, and community leaders, all of whom play an important role as role models. This also raises the question as to whether or not these agents are being exemplary role models to begin with. However, the socialising process is a two-way exchange as the young can also influence their seniors.

There have been many plans involving what educators can do to improve inter-ethnic relations. They appear ideal on the surface, but it is questionable if educators themselves can manage students in terms of social inclusion and if they are capable of resolving inter-ethnic conflict in the classroom. This requires educators to be trained in handling such scenarios

Community leaders should play a role in enforcing unity amongst their communities. Unfortunately, this matter has been politicised over the years. As such, these leaders require support to effectively engage their communities. Parents too have to be part of the system, but an institutionalised system is lacking, preventing them from effectively play their role as a socialising agent. National unity is an organic process that requires an immersive experience rather than a mechanical, deliberated one that appears good in theory. The voice of the young needs to be heard and not suppressed as their involvement in the unity process is crucial.

## REMEMBERING THE DURBAN DECLARATION

*Reflections from Jerald Joseph, Commissioner, SUHAKAM*

The Malaysian government signed the Durban Declaration and Programme Action (DDPA) which contained a comprehensive action plan to eradicate racism during the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2002. Two decades on, no further conferences focused on racism were organised and few countries have taken interest in following through the DDPA, including Malaysia.

In November 2020, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution for *A global call for concrete action for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action*. Malaysia was among 106 countries voting in favour of the resolution, which is something that it can be proud of. The resolution reaffirms the aspirations of the DDPA that highlights the suffering of victims of racism and racial discrimination.

It is time to acknowledge victims of racism in Malaysia. While there are constitutional provisions to balance rights, the reality is such where there are those who suffer from racism, such as those not able to secure placements in public universities despite achieving perfect grades in their examinations due to different ethnic orientations.

The UN General Assembly resolution also emphasised the importance of the DDPA to which Malaysia agrees is a solid basis for comprehensive measures to combat racism. It also acknowledges the increase of hate speech that can lead to the incitement of racial discrimination. It also agrees that various racist extremist movements based on ideology for the sake of promoting nationalist right-wing agendas and racial superiority has been occurring in the world. This phenomenon is also happening in Malaysia and must be stopped by calling out these groups.

Despite efforts, millions of people continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia. Much needs to be done as racism has a deep impact on human rights. Failure to

tackle racism will also affect other rights, be it economic rights, social rights, or political rights. The resolution also called specifically for any doctrine of racial superiority to be scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially dangerous and must be rejected.

If the Malaysian government can agree internationally to this resolution, then more serious efforts need to be undertaken by the Malaysian people to end racial superiority doctrines and the separation of citizenship where the majority holds a set of perceived rights and the non-majority being left with something they simply have to follow through. Human rights can only work when it is applied consistently across the board, regardless of the majority or minority groups, ethnicity, or class. Should the government be sincere in addressing the issue of racism, there need to be steps to acknowledge the major flaws in attempting to manage race relations in Malaysia due to the lack of honesty in the Malaysian political framework that thrives on racism. Serious effort is needed to bring back equality and inclusion in Malaysia

## **UNITY PLANS AND A SINCERE WAY FORWARD**

*Reflections from Dr. Ryan Chua, Programme Director, Pusat KOMAS*

Initiatives such as the 2013 National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and National Unity Action Plan 2021-2030 (NUAP) demonstrate commendable efforts by the government in promoting national unity. However, there is a notable disparity between the initiation of policies and the execution of them. The publication of the NUCC Blueprint exemplifies this issue, wherein the blueprint remained unreleased under the Official Secrets Act 1972 until the change of government in 2018. The continuation of national unity policies and councils is also at the wrath of changes to the government. Pakatan Harapan's National Harmony and Reconciliation Bill was abruptly discontinued in 2020 while a Unity Advisory Council (MPPN) was introduced – both of which resulted from Perikatan Nasional's (PN) rule. It is paradoxical that efforts to achieve national unity lack a unified vision, with initiatives either failing to come into completion or abandoned in the pursuit of yet another project of a similar vein.

The effectiveness of policies aimed at upholding human rights and preserving national unity remains contentious at best. Existing laws including the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 have proven to be ineffective in curtailing hate speech. Policies such as the NEP also present themselves as an impediment to progress, promoting the indiscriminate continuation of favouring one ethnic group over another. As for engagement with local communities, discussions relating to the critical issue of racial equality have yet to be initiated. Efforts to capture moments of national unity often materialise as one-off events and lack a critical engagement point with the community. As such, there needs to be a more retrospective approach in promoting racial and cultural understanding at the grassroots level.

Malaysia's National Unity Action Plan 2021-2030 marks a step forward in promoting unity in the current social and political climate. Yet, it is integral that reservations regarding the NUAP are accounted for in order to prevent a repetition of the National Human Rights Action Plan wherein excellent ideas fail to reach the execution stage. The integrity of the NUAP is first and foremost compromised by the insincerity of the PN government that is advocating for national unity as a Malay-Muslim government. This is an irony that is hypocritical and must be questioned before advancing with the NUAP. The questionable credibility of the NUAP implementers further exacerbates this issue and warrants a re-evaluation of the blueprint before its enactment. It is also disconcerting that the NUAP fails to consider the minority groups of Malaysia or address Article 8 of the Federal Constitution. Racial discrimination is not recognised within the NUAP as a hindrance towards national unity, thus indicating that there is no vision for such injustices to be rooted out.

A collective effort is required to advance efforts to promote national unity in a holistic rather than top-down manner. When communities on the ground are unprepared or unaware of the enactment of unifying policies, such efforts become redundant. Dismantling and replacing policies that promote racial discrimination with those which advance equal opportunities will be pivotal in this endeavour. KOMAS has drafted a code of conduct with the state government of Penang which aims to achieve equal opportunities in the business sector. Its success

lies in its recognition of the injustices faced by both minority and majority groups in Penang, paving the way for comprehensive policies which consider the extensive reach of racial discrimination to all communities. Politicians will also need to take accountability for the weaponisation of race which fan racial sentiments if they are to lead exemplary changes. These are changes that must be able to reach the ground level, extending its impact beyond communities who are already engaged in conversations surrounding human rights to those who are not.

The implementation of 'Bangsa Malaysia' must be taken with great precaution, lest it follows the demise of Suharto's efforts to assimilate the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Research undertaken by KOMAS regarding the subject has found that a deep-seated sense of ethnic identity was prevalent amongst its participants, regardless of race. There is a fundamental lack of awareness and understanding of different cultural identities and practices, most of which can be attributed to systemic issues such as the fragmentation of ethnic groups by neighbourhoods and vernacular schools. Similarly, if the Rukun Negara is to be utilised as a tool for national unity, there must be an internalisation of its principles among the people. If we are to achieve racial equality, the moderates and the passionate must embrace the tension it will bring as complacency has no place in progress.

### **THE UNITY JOURNEY, HARMONY MOMENTS, AND ADHERENCE TO A CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT**

#### **Reflections from Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman, Dialog Rakyat**

The generally accepted definition of human rights is "...the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life...". The UNICEF definition of human rights spells out the responsibilities of individuals in its preservation where "... rights are standards that recognise and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other.. Individuals also

have responsibilities.. in using their human rights, they must respect the rights of others..".

The responsibilities of individuals towards each other is an aspect of human rights that has received less attention than what governments do or do not do relative to human rights. In Malaysia, the government's failure to ratify ICERD, for example, elicited major civil outrage. On the other hand, hate politics in the form of less civil utterance and the toxic rhetoric with veiled racism of politicians, especially during elections, receive no more than merely a whimper. The insidious divisive and polarising influences emanating from hate politics threaten Malaysia's national cohesion, unity, and harmony, and challenge adherence to moderation, eroding the country's value system that has been nurtured through generations and perpetuating latent racial animus. There are infringements to human rights.

There have been calls by Malaysian leaders from time to time to preserve harmony. The Prime Minister in February 2019 called Malaysians "...not to be taken in or influenced by groups threatening the country's peace and harmony..[and] to defend the stability, harmony, and peace". In September 2019, The DYMM Yang DiPertuan Agong called Malaysians to "refrain from inciting misunderstanding by raising matters that could undermine and destroy harmony in the country". The Agong during his 2020 new year's messages reminded Malaysians to "maintain unity and harmony [that Malaysia has] enjoyed over the past 62 years, because many issues related to racial and religious sensitivities have been raised.. [and to] remove any basis for racial prejudice among people for the sake of unity, harmony, and the spirit of love for the country".

Concerns of the threat towards national cohesion and unity, as well as the realisation that the preservation of these values is not the sole responsibility of government, led to the coming together of civil society organisations. Rallying platforms, like Dialog Rakyat, are intended to bring together like-minded individuals for the purpose of countering racism and to promote national cohesion, unity, and social harmony. A Code of Ethical Conduct was adopted based on the principles of Smart Partnership to provide a set of behavioural guidelines for individuals which can facilitate this challenging journey to sustained harmony.

The journey to sustain harmony consists of three milestones. The first is integration, which requires coming together, working together, teamwork for a specific purpose, sports, celebrations, cultural events, community action (eg. gotong royong), open houses, and so on. These help to create ‘harmony moments’, social behaviours for short-term objectives. The second milestone is cohesion which involves a deeper understanding of the reasons and principles for long-term bonding that is fostered by cooperation, collaboration, partnership, security, stability, civility, survivability, and prosperity to create “harmony-mesra” (cordial harmony) – a rational behavior governed by the brain. The third milestone is unity which requires full commitment, collective responsibility, loyalty, shared destiny, civic nationalism, and patriotism to create emotional behaviour that is governed by the heart. With this, conditions for sustained harmony can be achieved.

Harmoni-mesra is the recognition of the importance and needs to increase “harmony moments” with activities that bring members of the community together to interact, socialise, break down barriers, exchange experiences, strengthen friendship, and rekindle the spirit of *Muhibbah* and community that constitute social components. Harmony moments can be enhanced by instilling rational elements through meetings and discussions to promote understanding of a common national heritage, culture, values, and national aspirations. Rituals and instruments that inspire emotional attachment need to be introduced. The strengthening of social, rational, and emotional elements will establish strong bonds and the spirit of goodwill amongst Malaysians to secure sustained and enduring national unity and social harmony.



*Screenshot of role players of the Mainstreaming Human Rights and Preserving National Unity in Malaysia online conversation on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2021 via Zoom*

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