

CommUnity

Communicating Unity

FEBRUARY 2022



In this issue:

Just 30 Seconds (p2) • Some Research (p2) • Charting Sarawak's Future (p3)
• Inspirations (p4) • Conversation (p6) • Quick Take (p8)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED @ YPS

Courtesy of Today's Catholic Publication, Archdiocese of Kuching

JUST 30 SECONDS

Gongxi Fa Chai.

*S*arawak is a land that is blessed with major religious traditions of the world – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i and some other local beliefs. It is indeed appropriate that we focus on interfaith harmonious relations for this issue of *CommUnity*. YAB the Chief Minister used the term “bond of understanding” to describe this harmonious relationship among Sarawakians.

As we celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week, an annual event designated by the United Nations, we tried to corroborate with research that interfaith harmony and interfaith relations in Sarawak are not merely based on observations and gut-feelings. Here are some of those relevant research, although not specifically on interfaith relations in Sarawak.

In this issue, we also share some of our activities that we believe could contribute significantly to unity and solidarity in this beloved state of ours.

Happy reading.

Thank you.

Datu Aloysius J. Dris

*Chief Executive
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak*

SOME RESEARCH

In our quest to put forth *empirical evidence* and proper documentation of interfaith relations in Sarawak, we sought the help of Pustaka Negeri Sarawak for information on research or studies in this field. The following are some of these studies/researches (as reference) although we could not find much information specifically to interfaith harmonious relations in Sarawak.

1. *Wasatiyyah* and Its Relevancy to Religious Tolerance & Co-Existence in a Multi-religious State: Malaysia as a Case Study (Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar 2019)
2. Islamic Knowledge and Interfaith Perceptions (Islamic Information Centre, 2018)
3. The expression of Sunni Islamic and Confucian ethics of war and peace in Malaysia from the nation's inception in 1957 to the present (California State University, 2005)
4. Religion and state-building in post-colonial Southeast Asia: A comparative analysis of state-building strategies in Indonesia and Malaysia (University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2004)
5. A comparative study on religious tolerance in post-independence Malaysia and Nigeria with special reference to Christian-Muslim relations (University of Aberdeen, 1988)

CHARTING SARAWAK'S FUTURE



YPS recently carried out **Projek SUARA (Strength through Unity, Alliance & Responsive Action)** in Kuching and Miri. The purpose of this project is to better understand the growing importance and potential of youth participation in the development of Sarawak. A total of 84 young people from various background participated in the project. Areas discussed include a shared vision and identity, socio-economic development, intergenerational understanding, young people's political participation and religious harmony. The highlight of the project would be a dialogue session with YAB the Chief Minister.

INSPIRATIONS



**TUN PEHIN SRI HAJI
ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD**

*Governor of Sarawak
Chairman of
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak*

The task of building a nation for the people of various religious and ethnic groups is like a flow of water from tributaries to a river and down to the sea. The water may have different colours; some may be clear while others may be yellow, red, green or even black. As the water flows downward to the sea, the colours gradually change and by the time it reaches the sea, they become blended into one colour of blue.

*(Excerpt from Concept of Anak Sarawak,
A Way to depict State's Cultural Mosaic, 2010)*

**Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri (Dr) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman
Zohari bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg**

Chief Minister of Sarawak



Sarawak is a land of diversity. Not only our nature is rich and diverse but the culture, ways of life and beliefs of our people is also diverse. But we are always free to practice our culture, tradition, and religion. We celebrate and find strength in our diversity, find common ground in our differences. That is Sarawak that we know today – united and cohesive, that has been an example for the rest of the country to emulate.

(YAB the Chief Minister's Chinese New Year Message, 2018)



CONVERSATION



The World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) is an annual event observed during the first week of February (1-7 February), after the United Nations General Assembly designation in 2010. The purpose of the WIHW is to promote cultural peace and nonviolence.

We talked to **Dr. Zufar Yadi Brendan Abdullah**, Executive Secretary of Majlis Pembangunan Sosial Sarawak recently to share his thoughts and insights on interfaith harmony in Sarawak.

YPS : Sarawak is blessed with the presence of all major world religions. How important is multi-religious or **interfaith understanding** in our country?

Dr. Zufar : I believe that interfaith understanding is very important to Malaysia, particularly Sarawak with our diverse ethnicity, various religions and cultures. Interfaith cooperation and communication amongst Sarawakians are indeed very important. It will help in religious tolerance and promote a peaceful coexistence.

I believe in such an atmosphere where we can create harmonious spaces to enable us to organise social events and foster effective interaction between people of different faiths. More importantly, we will be able to share a common life together.

YPS : What roles do you think **people of faith** could play to sustain or strengthen the harmonious relations that we have?

Dr. Zufar : I believe that **people of faith** play a great role in strengthening and sustaining harmonious relations that already existed here in Sarawak.

I believe each one of us, irrespective of whatever religions we profess, we must actually be engaged with interfaith works. What I meant by interfaith works is that there is a coalition of faith-based communities, working together to serve the public through a lot of activities. For example, carrying out activities for charitable causes, or organising social activities and educational programs. I saw a lot of these happening at the grassroots level where **people of faith** continue to work together and help to provide a conducive and harmonious environment among the people of Sarawak.

YPS : In some parts of the world, religion or faith becomes a source of conflicts among the people. How could we avoid this? What measures can we take?

Dr. Zufar : I believe that to ensure religion or faith does not become a source of conflict, various measures must be taken.

At the **micro level**, one must have sufficient grounding and knowledge in one's own faith. At the same time, one must have sufficient knowledge and a deep understanding of other faiths to be able to appreciate the significance of other religions. And this would actually help to avoid a lot of misunderstanding, especially misinterpretation or misperceptions.

Another measure is to **celebrate our differences** which I believe is happening very well here in Sarawak. For me, it is important that we must be engaged in dialogues, not debates. Besides, we must continue to work together with people of different faiths in various activities or programmes so that we could know and understand each other better.

At the **societal level**, I believe every one of us must be honest. We must be permitted to define our own religious experience. And others must respect this. For me, violence and conflicts emerge partly due to intolerance and a lack of constructive interaction with others. We have to focus more on understanding, which for me is the core strategy to mitigate any conflicts or violence.

YPS : YAB our Chief Minister used the term **bond of understanding** to describe the seamless relations that we have here in Sarawak. Can Sarawak lead the way in terms of interfaith harmony?

Dr. Zufar : I believe Sarawak definitely can lead the way in terms of interfaith harmony in Malaysia because we have a lot of lead experiences in inter-ethnic as well as inter-racial harmony and solidarity in our communities. Even inter-

marriages are common, and this binds us as families.

Moreover, numerous functional governance also exists at the highest level in the state such as the *Jawatankuasa Tindakan Perpaduan Negeri*, chaired by the Minister for Welfare, Community Wellbeing, Women, Family and Childhood Development Sarawak.

At the divisional level, we have a lot of governance or committees for religious coordination (in terms of activities). Also, there are NGOs that work to promote and celebrate interfaith understanding and get-togethers.

At the grassroot level, interfaith celebrations are very commonplace. One good example is in Miri where a mosque is located near to a church and they share a common parking lot, utilised by their respective congregants. When it is time for Friday prayers, the church

opens up the parking space for Muslims to park their cars and then on Sundays, the mosque opens up the parking space for the Christians. This is very unique in Sarawak.

One area that I hope can be looked into is **proper research** to document what we have so that we can share with other states. This would actually confirm that we are the leading and the model state in terms of interfaith, intercultural and interracial harmony and unity in Malaysia.

YPS : Is there anything you would like to add as regard interfaith harmony in Sarawak?

Dr. Zufar : As a way forward, we could raise that **bond of understanding** that we have from its current level of *having a good relationship* to a quality relationship among our people, which to me is actually a **shared understanding** for interfaith harmony to flourish in our state.



One of the initiatives taken by faith-based organisations in Sarawak was organising a 3-4km walk, called the Harmony Walk, with the theme *Unity is Our Calling*. The first walk was hosted by the Sarawak Islamic Information Centre in 2017, followed by the Kuching Buddhist Society in 2018 and the Association of Churches in Sarawak in 2019. The walk was participated by more than 3,000 participants from various faiths. The Harmony Walk is one of the opportunities for Sarawakians to get to know each other from various faiths in a relaxed ambience.

QUICK TAKE



Courtesy of Today's Catholic Publication, Archdiocese of Kuching

DID YOU MISS OUT ON OUR PREVIOUS ISSUES?



Contact us

CommUnity is published monthly by Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak. We welcome any suggestions or contributions to further improve your experience with our newsletter.

Thank you.

Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

D270, Level 2, Block D, iCom Square, Jalan Pending, 93450 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.
Email: hello@yps.org.my • Tel: +60 82 332 700



YayasanPerpaduanSarawak



unitysarawak

www.yps.org.my