

CommUnity

Communicating Unity

SPECIAL INAUGURAL EDITION, DECEMBER 2021



In this issue:

Proponents of Unity (p2) • Just 30 seconds (p2) • Inspirations (p3)
National Unity Policy (p4) • Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak (p4)
Conversations (p5) • Quick Take (p8) • Communicating Unity (p8)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED @ YPS

PROponents OF UNITY

Our **Board of Trustees**, with their vast experience, extensive knowledge and wisdom, provide the vision and drive towards preserving and enhancing unity and harmonious relations in our State.



Chairman

TYT TUN PEHIN SRI HAJI
ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD



Deputy Chairman

YBHG. DATUK
PATINGGI TAN SRI
(DR) ALFRED JABU
ANAK NUMPANG



Deputy Chairman

YBHG. DATUK
PATINGGI TAN SRI
DR GEORGE CHAN
HONG NAM



Board Member

YB DATUK AMAR
HAJI AWANG
TENGAH BIN ALI
HASSAN



Board Member

YBHG. DATO SRI
FONG JOO CHUNG

Just 30 seconds

CommUnity aims to have a conversation on and about unity and what it means to each and every one of us, and more importantly the values that we hold dear, that make it possible to live together harmoniously all these years. And these are the real gems of Sarawak – an intangible treasure indeed.

Our newsletter also endeavours to provide us with the going-ons at the local, national and global arena as they relate to not only our sense of unity but also our present-day concerns.

For our inaugural issue, we decided to focus on various themes – education, inter-faith, women, families and older persons or senior citizens. These are common themes with uncommon insights and standpoints. We hope that from these conversations, we could synthesize “unity tangibles” that could be shared and nurtured for generations to come.

Happy reading.

Thank you.

Datu Aloysius J. Dris

*Chief Executive
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak*



Inspirations



TUN PEHIN SRI HAJI ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD

*Governor of Sarawak
Chairman of Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak*

We can take a lot of inspirations from the flow of water from tributaries to a river and down to the sea, which depicts the common efforts of the people to develop the State and the nation. It is synonymous with the philosophy of the **confluence of races** through common activities that can bring about greater national unity...

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

People must endeavour to **strengthen their culture and unity** and promote interactions among them until Sarawak can produce a new generation that can undertake any tasks, how difficult they may be, successfully and still remain strong and united.

*(Excerpt from Pehin Sri Abdul Taib's
Vision 2063 for Sarawak, 2014)*



DATUK PATINGGI TAN SRI (DR) ABANG HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN ZOHARI BIN TUN DATUK ABANG HAJI OPENG

Chief Minister of Sarawak

“...bukanlah mudah untuk membina perpaduan dalam kalangan rakyat kita yang terdiri daripada pelbagai kaum dan agama tetapi kita telah membuktikan kita mampu melakukannya. Perpaduan dan keharmonian kaum dalam masyarakat majmuk tidak datang bergolek. We have to work together towards unity. **Budaya hormat-menghormati** adalah tonggak perpaduan kita di Sarawak.

(YAB the Chief Minister's Gawai Dayak Message, 2021)

National Unity Policy

The **National Unity Policy (Dasar Perpaduan Negara)** was launched in February this year by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin is an important initiative to ensure that Malaysia continues to enjoy racial harmony and socio-political stability, whilst helping to boost the country's development in various sectors.

Based on the concept of "Unity in Diversity", the policy outlines continuous efforts to nurture, strengthen and preserve the unity of the people.

The three main objectives of the policy are:

- i. to strengthen unity and national integration based on the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara;
- ii. to form a national identity with character, patriotism, the attitude of caring, tolerance, mutual respect and responsibility;
- iii. to produce Malaysians who appreciate and foster unity.

To support the strategies outlined in National Unity Policy, the National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030 was produced.

There are 3 Core elements of the National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030: patriotism & democracy; national identity and unity ecosystem.

For further information on the National Unity Policy and National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030, please visit <https://www.perpaduan.gov.my>.



Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

 YayasanPerpaduanSarawak

 unitysarawak

Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak (YPS) was established on 16th May 1994 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to nurturing and sustaining unity, harmony, and peaceful coexistence among Sarawak's communities.

With a vision of *creating a peaceful and harmonious Sarawak through understanding, and an appreciation of cultural diversity for future generations*, YPS outlined 3 strategic objectives:

1. To create a peaceful and conducive environment for continuous development and progress of the state.
2. To foster, develop and improve cultural and educational exchanges among the various communities in Sarawak.
3. To promote unity through education and interaction by contributing towards cultural research and teaching.

These objectives are translated through its programs and activities throughout Sarawak, such as Unity Talks, Empowerment Series, MakanMakan and Camp United.

Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak is currently running a project entitled **Advancing Racial Cohesion & Harmony (ARCH)** which includes a series of webinars, focus groups and workshops based on the **National Unity Policy**.

To date, YPS has completed 9 focus groups in Kuching, Bau, Samarahan, Sibul, Kapit, Mukah, Bintulu, Miri and Limbang. A series of workshops are planned for next year in these locations.



ADVANCING RACIAL
COHESION AND
HARMONY


arch

Framing the National Unity Blueprint
2021 - 2030 in Sarawak's Context

Conversations

We organised some conversations recently with 6 personalities - Li Na, Zayn, Richard, Datu Rashidah, Bala and Jac. The following are some interesting insights to those conversations.

1. INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING & EDUCATION: CRITICAL INGREDIENTS FOR UNITY?

YPS : The government has introduced and promoted a number of policies to inculcate national unity among our people - National Education Blueprint (2006), Wawasan 2020 and 1Malaysia concepts. The latest effort was the National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030. In your opinion, has this been successful?

Li Na (Yong Li Na, Councillor for the City of Kuching South) : What I thought worked

really well actually is the focus on the KRT (Kawasan Rukun Tetangga).



At the local council level, we see a lot of people coming together from

different background, age, race, gender for a cause in their community. So, I think a focus on that level in the community works well. It's not an explicit focus on fostering unity but it's effective in getting people who live in an area, to come together and do something together.

In an urban area like Kuching, we're becoming more segregated. If we can have KRT exchange programs, or work on a singular or collaborative project, then you can see a lot of changes happening.

Zayn : It would be hard, to come out and say that it's been all that successful. When any kind of an issue comes up in the news, we find that it's either sensitive, or people are confused about. So, it's simply not enough to try to instruct the rakyat with the correct answer. It has to be a situation where people are free to interact with one another and discuss with one another in perhaps a supervised or structured manner, but in a way that is nonetheless open to exploration.

Richard : Yeah, I agree with that. But basically, the way I see it is that, the policies

that we have now are actually recycled. We're talking about the same thing all over again. KRT is not new. It's not for the lack of ideas, but because these are pertinent points or programs that we should continue. So that is why you tend to see why these programs are repeatedly promoted. And whatever is good from the previous policies should be continued and enhanced or highlighted again today to improve unity amongst us.

YPS : Sarawak has always been regarded as a model state in terms of unity and harmonious co-existence amongst its people. What values, or inherent ingredients that we have that we could share to enhance national unity?

Richard : Sarawak does not have any secret ingredients. I think the one thing that we did is we practice what we preach. In Sarawak we have years of living in the same neighbourhood, we make friends, we play with friends from different race or religion. And we studied together in the same school, especially when we studied in mission schools. It is open to all, not just for one religion. We don't just talk about it, but we do it. Maybe you can call it our secret recipe for unity.

Zayn (Zayn Al-Abideen Gregory, senior lecturer in the Dept of Architecture, UNIMAS) : Well, there is something about



Sarawak. I think there's a greater awareness of the fact that Malaysia is and always has been comprised of a great number of different groups of people. You know, the diversity of tribes and languages and ways of life in Borneo is undeniable and obvious to everyone. I think that is what we have to offer, really.

Li Na : It's something that we can't take for granted. I definitely see it more in the older generations. That is the key point. Unity is driven by people who have had the opportunity to actually mingle and live with

people from different ethnic groups. But I find that for my generation, we don't have that sort of opportunity, and we don't really see that happening. I find that people of my own age, those in the 1980s who grew up in the urban areas, their knowledge of people outside their immediate community is really lacking. And, it's definitely something we can't take for granted.

YPS : How can interfaith understanding or interfaith dialogues contribute towards a culture of peace and unity in our country? We are not referring to theological dialogues here but more on contemporary issues or concerns where people of various faith could find solutions together, while accepting and respecting each other's differences.

Zayn : Yes, we need to go beyond just a theological dialogue and look for ways to cooperate as people of faith on real issues. I remember a few years back, the Islamic Information Center organised the Harmony Walk. And I think that's a good step where all faiths share common values of charity and social welfare. Things like soup kitchens, housing and shelter for the poor, gotong-royong, care for the environment like tree plantings, and so on. These are how zakat, and charitable donations could be pooled together to bring people of faiths to actually do something together for the rakyat, and I don't see how or why there should be any religious objection in service to humanity.

Richard : I think nowadays, people will prefer to use *Civilisational Dialogues* instead of Interfaith Dialogues. But my concern is that this type of dialogue tends to address the intellectual and academic circles. There should be another level of dialogue that touches on the daily lives of the people. I call this the *Dialogue of Life*, where people and families of different faiths, for instance seek to be good neighbours to each other, where children play together, parents share and do errands for each other. And probably the next one is the *Dialogue of Action*, where people come together to work for a common project like helping the poor and the needy.

Li Na : Yeah, I absolutely agree with that. I think those are great suggestions. We should also encourage our people to explore our state, you know, like cuti cuti Sarawak, let people from Kuching get to meet people from different walks of life, and people of different ethnicities. They have to feel inspired to go and visit these places. So, it's very much interlinked. Our tourism ministry comes into play. And then you have KRT, local government coming into play. That's a big step forward already.

YPS : How do you see the future of national unity in our country? Are we there yet? Or what else do we need to put in place to be there?

Li Na : This may not be politically correct to say but, when we think of a progressive future, we should be moving towards a science-based society. Instead, we are moving backwards and going towards tribal feelings, defending our own religion or our own race instead of focusing on progress, like science. I think definitely big steps have to be taken to overcome this regression. I'm sorry... the thing is people my age, with young families, are talking about moving overseas because they just don't feel like they can make a home here and it's really sad to hear that but that's the fact.

Richard (Richard Lon, Director of Unit for Other Religions (UNIFOR), CMD) : Yes,



we are starting to drift apart, to be brutally honest. We could no longer sweep the problems under the carpet. We should be open enough to discuss our problems albeit how sensitive they are. But then again, our government has taken some steps to bind us back together. And I think one of these steps is the setting up of my unit, the *Unit for Other Religions (UNIFOR)*. This kind of effort should be continuous and the policy of inclusivity that the current Chief Minister adopts is a good effort towards that.

Sarawak is still a model state for the rest, but let's try to do more to prevent ourselves from regressing as well.

Zayn : Richard brings up a good point. The vision of Malaysia that was bringing

everybody together for a very long time was this idea of achieving a developed nation status, becoming more prosperous. And as soon as we hit this, for the last 10 years, that level of prosperity has stagnated, we don't see that rapid increase that we did in the past, well, then things begin to fall apart. Now the stress lines begin to show. So, what is the new vision for the country that can replace this, some kind of a shared vision that goes beyond just more money and bigger highways, to something that gets at the heart or the soul of the nation.

YPS : A word of hope perhaps, before we end our conversation?

Li Na : It's not all doom and gloom. I have hope, especially for Sarawak. Because I think as Richard mentioned, we're not that backwards yet. There's still a lot of things that can be done. We need strong leaders in Sarawak to guide us forward.

Richard : There must be a willingness and sincerity to actually achieve unity. I think those will be the key factor.

Zayn : Malaysia is a country with a bright future. In contrast to my own country, the United States, Malaysia is a small country. It's like a small boat, and thus it's easy to turn. We can very easily strike out in new directions and, set out for a new destination. All it takes is the will of the people to make it happen.

2. WOMEN, FAMILIES & SENIOR CITIZENS: UNTAPPED PLAYERS IN FOSTERING & STRENGTHENING NATIONAL UNITY?

YPS : Most national conversations on how to foster or strengthen national unity have been focusing on the responsibilities of institutions and government, with little or less discussions on how all segments of society can contribute towards building and enhancing national unity. What are your thoughts on this?

Datu Rashidah : For Sarawak, a lot has been done by a number of agencies, NGOs, and our Ministry is one of them. The latest, where I am involved in are on the *digital community centers*. This is also a point for unity and solidarity amongst the people based on the belief that no one should be left behind in

whatever initiatives that the government has introduced. The digital community centers are there to assist the people, especially those who are not digital-savvy, or digital literate. For me, if you do not have access to information that can improve your quality of life, the feeling of inequality, the feeling of you-do-not-have-enough, are actually the seeds to disunite people.

Sarawak is one of the states that has the most *ketua kampungs*, *ketua kaums*, because these are the intermediaries between the government and the people. And definitely, unity and solidarity initiatives have got to be from all sectors - the government, NGOs and even individuals, right down to the family - the nucleus of a society.

Bala (Balachandran Annamalai, Language Lecturer (Retired), Institute of Teacher Education, Batu Lintang Campus) : We



have to go back to the grassroots, to the family. Ask ourselves "What am I teaching my children about my neighbours? Do I teach my children on how to respect them,

help them, love them, care for them, look into their basic needs? During our grandparents' days, they just walked into the neighbour's house and asked, "Are you all okay? Do you have enough food...?" I see this happening during this pandemic. It's a grace of God, whereby, during this pandemic, everybody is helping everyone else regardless of racial or ethnic background.

We have to look into the family aspect, how do we bring up our children. That's how the problems of national unity can be solved, rather than solely depending on the government.

Jac : For me, individuals, communities and social institutions, they all have a role to play in building unity, depending on how well these three protagonists of change work together towards this aim. So, in order to build a common understanding, love is needed. Unity is about loving one another despite our differences, because for me, love is patient and kind, love does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant nor rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable nor

resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. So, love bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. This is the key to be united.

YPS : We are always talking about how we should educate, cultivate and instill the values of inter-racial harmony, unity and peace among our youth but there are in fact, this huge **untapped unity players** – women, families and senior citizens. How could they be engaged more actively in fostering or nurturing unity? Let's say in Sarawak itself?

Datu Rashidah : I agree with what Bala mentioned. We have to go back to our grassroots. In our family there is already, unity in diversity. I had that privilege to be brought up in such a family where we do not see the differences when we are together. In Sarawak, we are multiracial. We already have a strong foundation there. But that foundation needs to be strengthened all the time, and to be reinforced with more understanding. And now what I'm scared of is outside influences that are out of our control. And this is where we need to step up, to inform, create awareness and provide more education to our people on how to address these external influences. In the olden days, we shielded our people from war or from calamities. But our war now is a war of the mind, a war of information. It is about knowing how to filter what's wrong, what's right, and how to be able to take things that is good.

Jac : I would like to suggest providing resources for enhancing home, community and school collaboration as part of a comprehensive and safe school planning. When the schools are an integral part of our community, it would enhance academic performance, fewer discipline problems, high staff morale and an improved use of resources. Community collaboration with schools can strengthen the fabric of our family and community life. That's one of the ways to instill a strong belief in family and unity.

Bala : Nowadays, senior citizens, families and women are playing very important roles as unity protagonists, but at the same time, we should not forget the antagonists. They are those who feed youngsters with all kinds of information. This could sabotage the unity that we have now. So, we have to be mindful of this. The protagonists should go out more

to instill that feeling of oneness, that we are one human. Once we have the oneness, then we will have the trust. These are the values that can be used by the protagonists as shields against the antagonists.

YPS : Living in this new normal, where face-to-face social interaction is limited, how could these **untapped unity players** come to the fore front? What challenges would they have to face?

Datu Rashidah (Datu Dr Hjh Rashidah Bolhassan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Welfare, Community Wellbeing,



Women, Family & Childhood Development, Sarawak) : Trust

is something that you cannot teach, you cannot learn. It is something you have to gain. That is the thing that we

have to have at the moment, we have to have that trust.

So how do we get our families, our women, our elders to be engaged in this *COVID-induced situation* at the moment? Some of our elders are still not tech-savvy, for example.

We have to blend unity elements or values in our curriculum, blend those in our everyday conversation, blend them in our activities. For example, I know for a fact that our local authorities have programs with the community. This is where they can induce and instill unity among our people so that they have that sense of belonging that this *kampung* is ours. Even campaigns on *kebersihan*, or growing of greens around the *kampung*, we have to ensure that we instill, integrate and embed elements of unity in those programs.

Jac : The social media does bring a big challenge to us, because people tend to believe what the social media is sharing without checking or verifying the story. So, for me, it goes back to the individual because as an individual, we do play a big role. If one person can learn to be humble and forgiving, to love and understand the other person, the other person will also behave in that manner. That way, I think you can promote understanding towards each other. We should listen more instead of talking more.

Bala : One of the challenges for me is how do we perceive the information that we received. Sometimes we do not ask ourselves "Is this true?" And when we share this information especially, to the younger people, it could be mis-interpreted. So how do we ensure that these young people when they go out into society, they do not have preconceived ideas. We need to find ways how the information that is given to the protagonist, is good or authenticated and verified. Maybe we can use other media, for example, the newspapers that have a focus on unity, where our protagonists can check and verify the information they received. The seniors are not digital natives and we are not even digital immigrants yet.

We can't put the burden of unity and solidarity on any one organisation alone. We should walk on this unity journey together.

YPS : What are your hopes for the future of national unity in our country?

Bala : My hope is only one - I want to leave a peaceful environment for my children, for my grandchildren. I want my son to walk, holding hands with another person from a different race or religion, walking freely on this earth. And I don't want anybody to talk bad about other races because that will fall back on us. So, you don't look at me as an Indian but look at me instead, as a bangsa Malaysia.

Jac (Jackie Barahim, Image Consultant Practitioner, Ragam Cahaya Sdn. Bhd.) :



For me, as an individual, we should be more humble, more forgiving and more understanding towards one another. Teamwork is the key to living a life in harmony. I

believe there is blessings upon us as a nation and we are called upon to grow together in unity over time while respecting our differences.

Datu Rashidah : We can be what we want to be while still acknowledging each other's differences. I totally agree with both Bala and Jackie, that those are the things that we need in our society. We want a fair and safe place not for us, but for our future generation. That is how unity and solidarity can be sustainable. We have to plant the seeds now for them later. And hopefully, for their next generation too.

Quick Take



Dewan Suarrah, Kuching

The Sarawak Cultural Symposiums and Seminars were initiated by the Sarawak State Government in 1988, and subsequently held every 5 years. The main objective of these symposia was to bring together all the major communities in Sarawak to share, discuss, appreciate and understand the diverse cultures. More importantly, the symposia became landmark events to foster unity among the various communities in Sarawak. One of the milestones of this symposia was the construction of **12 Dewan Suarahs** depicting various ethnic cultural designs.

(Excerpt from 5th Sarawak Cultural Symposium, 2009)

Communicating Unity



Communicating Unity or CommUnity believes in 3 tangible actions:

- i. open discussions or conversations with a broad spectrum of our society on topics relating to unity and contemporary concerns;
- ii. sharing of stories from our community on initiatives they have taken to live harmoniously with and among each other.
- iii. providing our readers with the necessary knowledge to be more informed advocates or proponents of unity.

CommUnity is published monthly by Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak.

We welcome any suggestions or contributions to further improve your experience with our newsletter.

Thank you.

Contact Us

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

