

# SINGAPORE 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution, laws, and policies provide for religious freedom, subject to restrictions relating to public order, public health, and morality. The constitution requires the government to protect the interests of Malays as “the Indigenous people of Singapore,” including religious interests. The government maintains a ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unification Church as well as several other small religious groups. The law does not recognize a right to conscientious objection to military service, including for religious reasons.

The government restricted speech or actions it perceived as detrimental to “religious harmony.” In November, the government enacted amendments passed in 2019 to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA), among others, introducing restrictions on foreigners holding religious leadership positions and consolidating provisions on religious harmony under the penal code to the MRHA. The government held 14 members of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the armed forces’ detention facility for refusing to enter mandatory national service on religious grounds, compared with 17 in 2021. In May, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) denied an Indonesian Muslim preacher and his travel companions entry into the country due to his history of extremist and segregationist teachings. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), an organization of religious scholars formed to counter religious radicalization, urged Muslims to reject preachers who held views that went against Islamic and universal values of humanity and mercy. Police investigated several incidents of social media messages intended to harm specific ethnic and religious groups. The government’s media and telecommunications regulator, Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), blocked the screening of two films on the grounds they could potentially cause enmity between religious communities and disrupt religious harmony, one because it purportedly gave a biased pro-Hindu view of the Kashmir conflict in India, and the other because it allegedly promoted negative stereotypes of Muslims. The government made regular high-level affirmations of the importance of religious harmony and respect for religious differences and supported initiatives to promote religious tolerance and interfaith understanding.

Multiple religious groups held virtual interfaith events and celebrations. Religious groups and civil society organizations continued to promote interfaith understanding.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy officers promoted the importance of respect for religious diversity and religious freedom throughout the year. In February, the Ambassador met with Minister for Social and Family Development and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli to discuss approaches to countering violent extremism and the importance of working with religious leaders in that effort. The Ambassador met with various religious groups to discuss interfaith relations and joined an iftar with interfaith community leaders during Ramadan, emphasizing freedom of religion as a core value in promoting interreligious harmony. Embassy staff met with RRG leaders to discuss deradicalization efforts and related programs in the United States and Singapore. In June, eight leaders from Malay Muslim organizations participated in a State Department exchange program that examined religion in the United States and efforts to foster dialogue and mutual respect among persons of diverse faiths and cultures.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.9 million (midyear 2022) while the Singapore government estimates it at 5.64 million (June 2022). According to 2020 census data, of the four million citizens and permanent residents, 31.1 percent are Buddhist, 20 percent identify as having no religion, 18.9 percent Christian, 15.6 percent Muslim (predominantly Sunni), 8.8 percent Taoist, and 5 percent Hindu. Groups together constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, and Jews. Although estimates varied widely, the Jewish Welfare Board estimates there are 2,000 Jews in the country. Christians include small numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church).

According to the 2020 census, 74.3 percent of the resident population is ethnic Chinese, 13.5 percent ethnic Malay, 9 percent ethnic Indian, and 3.2 percent other, including Eurasian. Nearly all ethnic Malays are Muslim. Among ethnic Indians, 57.3 percent are Hindu, 23.4 percent Muslim, and 12.6 percent Christian.

The ethnic Chinese population includes Buddhists (40.4 percent), Christians (21.6 percent), Taoists (11.6 percent), and 25.7 percent with no religion.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution states every person has a constitutional right to profess, practice, or propagate his or her religious belief as long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality. The constitution also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion in the administration of any law or in the appointment to, or employment in, any office under a public authority. It states that every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs. It does not prohibit restrictions on employment by a religious institution. The constitution states that no person shall be required to receive instruction or take part in any ceremony or act of worship in a religion other than his or her own.

The government maintains a decades-long ban on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 on the grounds the religion was prejudicial to public welfare and order because it objected to military service, reciting the national pledge, or singing the national anthem. A 1996 decision by the Singapore Appeals Court upheld the ban and stated that individuals (including Jehovah's Witnesses) have the right to profess, practice, and propagate their own beliefs but may not act as members of an unlawful society or attend meetings of such banned groups. In practice, the government does not arrest members of Jehovah's Witnesses for attending or holding meetings in private homes but also does not allow them to hold public meetings or publish or import their literature. The government banned the Unification Church in 1982 on the grounds it was a "cult" that could have detrimental effects on society.

The MRHA authorizes the use of a "restraining order" against persons of authority within a religious group who cause feelings of enmity or hostility between different religious groups, promote political causes, carry out subversive activities, or encourage disaffection against the government under the guise of practicing

religion. A restraining order places various restrictions on public activities in which a religious authority can participate.

On November 1, the government enacted amendments passed in 2019 to the MRHA. Under the law as amended, only citizens or permanent residents may fill key leadership roles in religious organizations, and religious organizations must disclose foreign donations of 10,000 Singapore dollars (SGD) (\$7,500) or more and disclose any affiliation to foreign groups that may be in a position to exert influence on the organization. The amendments make any restraining order issued by the Minister of Home Affairs effective immediately, whereas before there was a 14-day notice period. They allow for restraining orders against a religious organization if there is any foreign influence in the group that undermines religious harmony in the country. Subjects of a restraining order also must remove any online content deemed offensive. The amended law also consolidates offenses that carry a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment, such as urging the use of force or violence, inciting feelings of enmity or ill-will, and insults against religious groups, which were previously covered separately under the penal code. The amended MRHA also introduces a new mechanism allowing individuals who “wound the religious feelings” of a religious group to voluntarily reconcile with the aggrieved group to avoid criminal prosecution, as long as the individual has not violated a current or prior restraining order.

In addition to these provisions under the MRHA, a person may receive double the maximum penalties for offenses under the penal code if any such offense is racially or religiously aggravated, except for offenses that already incorporate racially aggravating factors and those that are punishable with death or imprisonment for life.

The country has two advisory groups on topics related to religious freedom. The Presidential Council for Religious Harmony (PCRH) reports on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony and considers cases that could cause religious tensions referred to it by the MHA or Parliament. The President appoints the PCRH’s 10 members, seven of whom represent the Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Sikh, and Taoist communities and three, including the chair, who do not represent any religious group. The Presidential Council for Minority Rights is part of the legislative process and examines all legislation to ensure it does not disadvantage specific religious groups. The

council also considers and reports on matters concerning any religious group that the Parliament or the government refers to it.

In November, Parliament passed the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, which, in part, requires social media platforms to limit users' exposure to online content considered harmful, including material that incites racial or religious tensions or promotes intolerance. The bill allows the government to designate platforms with significant reach and impact as "regulated online communication services," which must put in place system-wide processes and community standards for online safety, particularly among users under the age of 18. IMDA may direct social media services to take down or disable access for users to "egregious content" or to disallow specific accounts to interact with and communicate content to users in the country. Platforms will also be required to proactively detect and remove such content. Social media services failing to comply with the law could be fined up to one million SGD (\$746,000) or have their services blocked in the country. The bill does not apply to private messaging communications.

Under the law, a person is subject to arrest and prosecution for making, publishing, or circulating material or electronic records, or giving speeches with the intent to incite violence against another group of persons or to lead to a breach of the peace. The penalty for an offense is up to five years imprisonment.

The law requires all associations of 10 or more persons, including religious groups, to register with the government. Registration confers legal identity, which allows registered groups to own property, hold public meetings, and conduct financial transactions. Registered religious groups may apply to establish and maintain charitable and humanitarian institutions, which enables them to solicit and receive funding and tax benefits, such as income tax exemptions. Registered societies are subject to potential deregistration by the government on a variety of grounds, such as having purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or good order. Deregistration makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a religious group, with consequences related to owning property, conducting financial transactions, and holding public meetings. A person who acts as a member of or attends a meeting of an unregistered group may be punished with a fine of up to 5,000 SGD (\$3,750), imprisonment of up to three years, or both.

Prisoners, including those in solitary confinement, are allowed access to chaplains of registered religious groups. Members of unregistered or banned religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Christian Conference of Asia, and the South Korea-based Shincheonji Church, do not have this right.

Citizens must obtain a permit prior to speaking at indoor gatherings open to the public that are outside of the hearing or view of nonparticipants if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor, private (invitation-only) events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests or they may be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

By law the government may prohibit publications that are considered objectionable because they describe, depict, express, or deal with matters of race or religion (among other things) in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility among racial or religious groups. The government may prohibit the importation of publications, including religious publications, under the law. For offenses involving the publication of material deemed objectionable, an individual may be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding 5,000 SGD (\$3,750), imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both. A person in possession of a prohibited publication may be fined up to 2,000 SGD (\$1,500) and imprisoned for up to 12 months for a first conviction. All written materials published by the International Bible Students Association and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, as the publishing arms of Jehovah's Witnesses, remained banned by the government.

The Ministry of National Development and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) establish guidelines on land development and use of space for religious activities. The URA regulates all land usage and decides where organizations may be located; a religious group seeking a new place of worship must apply to the URA for a permit. URA guidelines regulate the use of commercially and industrially zoned space for religious activities and religious groups; they apply equally to all religious groups.

The constitution states Malays are “the Indigenous people of Singapore” and it requires the government to protect and promote their interests, including religious interests. The Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), a statutory board established under the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth (MCCY), administers affairs for all Muslims in the country – including Sunnis and minority groups such as Shia – to ensure their religious interests are protected. The government appoints all members of the MUIS. The government also appoints the members of the Hindu Endowments Board, Hindu Advisory Board, and Sikh Advisory Board. These councils under the MCCY manage various aspects of their faith communities, mainly practiced by the Indian minority.

The law allows members of the Muslim community, irrespective of their school of Islam or ethnicity, to have personal status issues governed by Islamic law “as varied where applicable by Malay custom.” Ordinarily the Shafi’i school of law is used, but there are legal provisions for use of “other accepted schools of Islamic law as may be appropriate.” Sharia courts have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage issues where both parties are or were married as Muslims. The sharia court has concurrent jurisdiction with the secular family court and family division of the high court over disputes related to custody of minors and disposition of property upon divorce. The President appoints the president of the sharia court. A breach of a sharia court order is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment of up to six months; an individual may file a complaint alleging breach in family court. The sharia court does not have jurisdiction over personal protection orders or applications for maintenance payments, as these are orders issued by a secular family court. Appeals within the sharia system go to an appeals board, also in the sharia system, that is composed of three members selected by the president of the MUIS from a panel of at least seven Muslims nominated every three years by the President of the country. The ruling of the appeals board is final and may not be appealed to any other court.

The law allows Muslim men to practice polygamy, but the Registry of Muslim Marriages may refuse requests to marry additional wives after soliciting the views of existing wives, reviewing the husband’s financial capability, and evaluating his ability to treat the wives and families fairly and equitably. By law, the President of the country appoints a “male Muslim of good character and suitable attainments” as the Registrar of Muslim Marriages.

Under the law, certain criminal offenses apply only to those who profess Islam, including publicly teaching or expounding any doctrine relating to Islam in a manner contrary to Islamic law, which carries a maximum fine of 2,000 SGD (\$1,500), maximum imprisonment of 12 months, or both. It is also a criminal offense for Muslims to cohabit outside of marriage, but the government has not enforced that law in decades. Under the law, Muslim couples in which one or both parties are under the age of 21 must complete a marriage preparation program and obtain parental or guardian consent before applying to marry. Each party to the marriage must be at least 18 years of age.

According to legal experts, Islamic law governs Muslims in the context of inheritance issues by default, but under certain circumstances, civil law takes precedence when invoked. Islamic law may result in a man receiving twice the share of a woman's inheritance of the same family relational level. Under Islamic law, a man may also incur financial responsibilities for his female next of kin, although this provision is not codified in the country's secular law.

Wearing of headscarves is generally allowed by law in the workplace, including, since 2021, in the healthcare sector. Headscarves remain banned for uniformed services such as police and military personnel.

Ministry of Education (MOE) rules prohibit elementary and secondary school students (but not teachers) in public schools from wearing anything not forming part of an official school uniform, including hijabs or headscarves. Schools have the discretion to exempt a child from wearing the official uniform based on health but not on religious grounds. International and other private schools are not subject to the same restrictions. For example, in madrassahs, which are all under the purview of the MUIS, headscarves are part of the uniform. Headscarves are not banned at institutions of higher learning.

The government does not permit religious instruction in public schools, although it is allowed in the country's 57 government-subsidized religiously affiliated schools (mostly Christian but including three Buddhist schools). Religious instruction in these schools is provided outside of regular curriculum time and must not involve proselytization; students have the right to opt out and be given alternatives, such as civics and moral education, in lieu of religious instruction. Religious instruction is allowed in private schools that are not subsidized by the



government. At the primary level, however, the law allows only seven designated private schools (six Sunni madrassahs, which both Sunni and Shia students attend, and one Seventh-day Adventist school) to provide religious education to citizen students; these schools must also continue to meet or exceed public school performance benchmarks in annual national exams. Other Muslim minority groups may operate part-time schools. Public schools finish early on Fridays, which enables Muslim students to attend Friday prayers, or administrators allow Muslim students to leave early to attend prayers. Secondary school students learn about the diversity of the country's religious practices as a component of their character and citizenship education.

The law does not recognize a right to conscientious objection to military service, including for religious reasons. Male citizens or second-generation permanent residents are required to complete 24 months of uniformed national service upon reaching age 18, with no alternative provided to national service. Conscientious objectors are generally court-martialed and sentenced to detention, typically for 12 to 39 months. Although they remain technically obliged to perform national service, men who refuse to serve on religious grounds are generally not called up for reservist duties. They do not, however, receive any form of legal documentation that officially discharges them from reservist duties.

The government may detain individuals considered security threats, including those expressing religious motivations, under internal security laws and regulations. The individuals receive religious, psychological, and social rehabilitation through state and civil society groups, including the RRG. All groups, including the RRG, must concur that a detainee is successfully rehabilitated before authorities can approve a release.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Government Practices**

The official website of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that, as of December, 14 Jehovah's Witnesses were being held in the armed forces' detention facility for refusing on religious grounds to complete national service, compared with 17 members who were held the previous year.

Throughout the year, the government detained several individuals under internal security legislation for planning religiously linked terrorist activities.

In May, the MHA disclosed that its Internal Security Department detained a 29-year-old Muslim man in April for planning travel to overseas conflict zones to undertake armed violence against those whom he perceived as enemies of Islam. According to the MHA, the detainee was reportedly radicalized by a foreign radical preacher online and had unsuccessfully tried to influence his family and friends.

In June, authorities disclosed the detention in April of Mohamed Hassan Bin Saynudin, a senior member of the Singapore Jemaah Islamiah network who fled the country in 2001. Authorities said he had continued to be involved in terrorism activities overseas and was subsequently incarcerated by another government. Upon completion of his sentence there in March, that country deported Hassan back to Singapore where officials arrested him on arrival for holding violent radical beliefs and as an imminent security threat.

In October, the MHA arrested a 38-year-old teacher for planning to travel to Gaza under the guise of providing humanitarian aid to join Hamas and its military wing in armed combat against the Israel Defense Forces.

In December, authorities detained an 18-year-old student for planning to undertake armed violence in the country and overseas. According to MHA, he was self-radicalized by propaganda from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and unsuccessfully tried to recruit others. The student designed a flag and planted it on an island in Singapore, claiming it as his own caliphate. He further planned to kill “disbelievers,” including non-Muslims as well as Shia and Sufi Muslims, carry out a mass-casualty attack on an army camp, and bomb a mosque.

Also in December, authorities arrested a 15-year-old for developing plans to conduct attacks in the country and support establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

In January, the MHA announced that a secondary school student was released on a restriction order. The student was the youngest detainee under internal security legislation when he was arrested at the age of 17 in 2020. The MHA stated the student underwent “religious rehabilitation” through counselling from

the RRG. He then enrolled for further studies at a post-secondary institution. Authorities released two other ISA detainees from previous years in January and February respectively.

In September, Minister for Home Affairs and Law Shanmugam said that 78 out of 92 persons detained under internal security laws since 2002, most accused of planning religiously motivated terrorist attacks, had met the requirements for successful rehabilitation and been released and reintegrated into society. The Minister said counseling from trained volunteers, including those from the RRG, contributed to the process.

The government prosecuted a number of incidents involving comments on social media throughout the year that were directed against racial and religious groups.

In January, authorities charged Charles Yeo, former chairman of the opposition Reform Party, with wounding the religious feelings of the Christian community. Between November 2020 and February 2021, Yeo posted comments on social media that attacked Christians who view homosexuality as contrary to their religious beliefs. In the posts, he reportedly referred to these Christians as “radical and dogmatic” and remarked that certain Christian churches were “homophobes with their trash agenda” who “distort the message of Christ.” Yeo relocated to the United Kingdom before the case was set for trial.

In February, a court heard the case of rapper Subhas Nair, charged with four counts of attempting to promote feelings of ill-will between different religious and ethnic groups and committing acts prejudicial to the maintenance of religious harmony. In social media posts, Nair said that Malay Muslims would receive harsher treatment under the law than Chinese Christians for expressing religious hatred on social media and that a Chinese Christian man involved in the 2019 murder of an Indian national received lenient punishment. The case was on-going at year’s end.

In May, IMDA banned the Hindi-language movie *The Kashmir Files* and stated it would potentially cause enmity between different communities and disrupt religious harmony in the country. IMDA said the film provided a provocative and one-sided portrayal of Muslims and depicted Hindus as being persecuted in the ongoing conflict in Kashmir. In May, the Ministry of Communication and

Information removed from its website a short film for Eid al-Fitr after it was criticized for portraying stereotypes of the Malay-Muslim community.

In December, a court convicted former university lecturer Tan Boon Lee and sentenced him to five weeks in jail and a fine for wounding racial feeling and making comments prejudicial to the maintenance of religious harmony. Tan made racist remarks to a couple in June 2021; he was later accused of insensitive remarks about Islam during a lecture in 2017, when he singled out a Muslim student in his class to try and start a debate on specific Quranic verses, and regarding religion in general in an online forum in 2020.

In May, authorities denied Indonesian Muslim preacher Abdul Somad Batubara and his six travel companions entry into the country due to the preacher's history of extremist and segregationist teachings, according to the MHA. Minister Shanmugam stated there was evidence that Somad had radicalized individuals in Singapore online and his followers had made direct threats of violence against the country following the denial of entry. Everyone was free to practice their religion in the country, but nobody should cross a line, Shanmugam added, urging individuals to be careful about foreign preachers and their teachings. Separately, the RRG released a statement urging Muslims to reject preachers who hold views that go against Islamic and universal values of humanity and mercy. Several interfaith nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) supported Minister Shanmugam's remarks on social media.

In June, a court sentenced a Chinese national with permanent residency to 18 months' probation for wounding religious feelings and making insulting comments. Authorities arrested the man in 2020 for posting anti-Islam comments on social media in 2018 and 2019, including statements about wanting to kill Muslims.

In October, IMDA disallowed the screening of a local film, *#LookAtMe*, stating it had the potential to cause enmity and social division by denigrating a religious community. In the movie, a character feels offended by a pastor's stance on homosexuality, uploads an incendiary social media post, and plots a revenge attack on the pastor. IMDA said it disallowed the movie because it was suggestive of an actual pastor in the country, could be seen as encouraging violence, and claimed to be based on "true events."

Police completed an investigation of a local unregistered chapter of the Shincheonji Church. Police issued 12-month conditional warnings to 19 members for managing or assisting in the management of an unlawful society; among the 19, 12 members were also issued 12-month conditional warnings for unlawful possession of propaganda of an unlawful society. The police further issued warnings to 44 individuals for being members of an unlawful society; one of these individuals was also issued a warning for unlawful possession of propaganda of an unlawful society.

Police investigations into a 2021 online poll on social media platform MeWe that ranked women Islamic religious teachers according to their sexual attractiveness were ongoing at year's end. IMDA had asked MeWe to remove the poll because the published content was prohibited under the law, and prominent figures such as President Halimah Yacob, MUIS, the country's Mufti, and several members of Parliament condemned the poll.

Police investigations against Kho Kwang Po for allegedly making comments online against Islam and Muslims were ongoing at year's end. In social media posts between 2014 and April 2021, Koh stated, among other things, that Islam was a violent religion.

The government helped religious groups locate spaces for religious observance in public housing, where most citizens live. The government continued to enforce the maintenance of ethnic ratios in public housing to prevent the emergence of ethnic and religious enclaves in concentrated geographic areas.

Various Christian and Muslim religious groups and leaders expressed differing viewpoints upon the government's repeal of the law criminalizing sexual conduct between men, with some criticizing the change in the law and tying their positions to their right to their own beliefs.

The government continued to prohibit religious content from being broadcast on television "in order to maintain a secular public broadcast service." The communal call to prayer and Ramadan sermons continued to be broadcast on radio and to be available on the internet.

While there is no law prohibiting proselytization, the government continued to limit its practice through the application of laws regarding public speech, assembly, and broadcasting; authorities cited concerns that proselytizing might offend other religious groups and upset intergroup relations.

As part of the MOE's National Education Program, the official primary and secondary public school curricula encouraged religious harmony and tolerance. Secondary-school students visited diverse religious sites, including Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques, churches, and synagogues. All schools celebrated the annual Racial Harmony Day in July, which the government introduced to promote understanding and acceptance of all races and religions within the country. On that day, children wore traditional clothing and celebrated the country's racial and religious diversity. Students were also encouraged to recite a "Declaration of Religious Harmony," which repeatedly affirmed the importance of religious harmony for the country. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that although the country dedicated one day each year to racial and religious harmony in the country's diverse society, the efforts to maintain it were constant and never-ending.

President Halimah, Prime Minister Lee, and government ministers regularly stressed the government's commitment to the country as a multiracial and multireligious society and cited religious harmony as an important policy goal.

Cabinet members repeatedly acknowledged that COVID-19 affected religious groups and thanked them for following regulations, especially during festive periods and as the country moved to relax restrictions. They emphasized the importance of religious harmony during the pandemic in statements delivered on major religious commemorations such as Easter, Ramadan, Vesak Day, and Diwali. For the first time in two years, President Halimah and Prime Minister Lee joined in-person iftars. On April 21, Lee participated in an iftar with religious community and interfaith leaders. Lee thanked Muslim and other faith leaders for their efforts to deepen the harmony and trust amongst different communities, saying the religious harmony within the country was hard-earned and very precious.

Cabinet ministers frequently gave speeches on strengthening religious pluralism and participated in virtual interfaith dialogues led by societal organizations.

Under the auspices of the MCCY, local government and government-affiliated organizations advocated for interreligious understanding and support for followers of other religions.

Interfaith activities occurred in each of the country's five mayoral districts through programs such as Common Sense for Common Spaces. Racial and Religious Harmony Circles (Harmony Circles), previously known as Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles, operated in each of the country's 31 electoral constituencies. The groups seek to deepen trust, understanding, and confidence among different communities and address new challenges such as evolving societal attitudes, fault lines, and the impact of social media. During the year, the country had 91 Harmony Circles with more than 1,500 volunteers and organized more than 250 activities. The Harmony Circles conducted a variety of local interreligious dialogues, counseling, and trust-building workshops, community celebrations, and religious awareness campaigns on social media. During the year, Harmony Circles supported interreligious dialogues by civil society groups such as hash.peace, Interfaith Youth Circle, and the Institute of Chinese Buddhism.

The government continued to work with religious groups through the Community Engagement Program, which trained community leaders in techniques for promoting religious harmony. Through the Crisis Preparedness for Religious Organizations (CPRO) program, the MCCY helped to prepare religious organizations for terror threats and other crises by improving their ability to protect their premises and congregants, prepare emergency plans, and help the larger community during a crisis. The MCCY continued to work through the Broadening Religious/Racial Interaction through Dialogue and General Education initiative, which provided financial support for community-based initiatives that fostered understanding of different religious practices and beliefs.

The MUIS continued to operate the Harmony Center, established to promote greater interfaith understanding. The center housed artifacts and information about Islam and nine other major religious groups in the country. It also organized interfaith programs, including dialogues with leaders from different religious groups.

In February, the government launched the enhanced Faithful Footprints Interfaith Heritage Program (run by the interfaith organization Humanity Matters) to build awareness, understanding, and trust across faith groups. The program was first piloted in 2019 to assimilate nonnative citizens and residents and students but was expanded to include a wider audience and more grassroot organizations, such as the Harmony Circles.

In July, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli led the country's Hajj delegation to Saudi Arabia.

In September, the MCCY, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), and Nanyang Technological University held the second International Conference on Cohesive Societies with over 800 participants from more than 40 countries. The conference attracted religious leaders, policymakers, academics, and civil-society leaders to discuss faiths, beliefs, identities, and cohesion. Also in September, the MUIS held the inaugural International Conference on Communities of Success, which brought together 500 religious leaders, scholars, and officials from around the world. Prime Minister Lee addressed the participants and said that in a multireligious society, no group could get everything it wanted but each one had to accommodate the sensitivities of other faiths.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

In April, *Channel News Asia* and the Institute of Policy Studies released the results of a survey which showed that 34 percent of 2,000 survey respondents felt the country had already built a society that was blind to race, language, and religion. Another 34 percent felt the country would never reach this goal or that it would take at least 50 more years, while another 34 percent believed it would happen sometime within the next 20 years.

In September, RSIS released the first *Southeast Asian Cohesion Radar Report*, which measured the country's social cohesion, taking into account racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities and incorporated religious belonging. In the survey of 1,000 thought leaders, 61 percent viewed the level of social cohesion in the country as strong and only 1 percent viewed it as weak. A survey by the Ministry of Manpower released in March showed that 1 percent of employees



indicated religion as the reason they faced discrimination in 2021. In a September survey by the women's rights advocacy group Association of Women for Action Research and consumer research company Milieu Insight, 15 percent of the 41 percent of respondents who indicated they had experienced workplace discrimination in the previous five years said it was due to religion.

Religious groups and civil society organizations continued to promote religious freedom by strengthening both interfaith and intrafaith understanding. Ahead of their respective festive holidays, leaders of the different religious groups commonly exchanged letters conveying the well wishes of their communities to the other community.

Shia and Sunni Muslims continued to cooperate to share Sunni mosques.

The NGO Inter-Religious Organization, which included leaders of the 10 largest religious groups in the country, had the stated objective of inculcating a spirit of friendship among various religious groups by conducting inter-religious prayer services, seminars, and public talks throughout the year.

Hash.peace and the NGO OnePeople.sg organized a conversation series on religious stereotypes and identities. OnePeople.sg also started a community exploration series for individuals to visit different places of worship and learn about different religious communities. In May, OnePeople.sg and the Institute of Policy Studies organized a community leaders conference to discuss racial and religious discrimination in the workplace. In July, OnePeople.sg held its annual HarmonyWorks! Conference, with a speech by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong in which he emphasized that individuals may have different racial and religious identities but all shared commonalities which formed the country's identity.

In March, leaders from different religious groups participated in the first-ever interfaith Passover Seder, organized by the Jewish Welfare Board. The country's Chief Rabbi, Mordechai Abergel, was joined by Mufti Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, Roman Catholic Archbishop William Goh, president of the country's Taoist Federation Tan Thiam Lye, religious leaders from 10 other groups, and Minister of Culture, Community, and Youth and Second Minister of Law Edwin Tong.

In July, the Muslim group Jamiyah Singapore celebrated its 90th anniversary and initiated an annual Interfaith Harmony Exemplary Award to recognize individuals and organizations that have shown a commitment to inter-religious understanding and harmony. With the award, Jamiyah said it hopes to encourage more people to work toward greater religious peace and harmony.

In August, Archbishop Goh, the country's first Cardinal, declared that he wanted to promote religious harmony in Asia through strengthened dialogue between different religions based on the country's unique brand of interreligious exchanges. The archdiocese began plans for a research institute to identify methodologies on how to best promote friendship with other religious leaders and then share findings across the region.

Humanity Matters organized multiple editions of its four-day SG Core (Cohesion and Resilience) pilot program, aimed at promoting support of multiculturalism in the country through dialogues and activities focused on interfaith and interethnic relations. In August, 400 individuals who had taken part in the program since it began in 2021 attended a ceremony with Minister of State for Home Affairs Sun Xueling.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Ambassador and other embassy officials promoted religious freedom and respect for religious diversity at a variety of events and engagements. In February, the Ambassador met with Minister for Social and Family Development and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Zulkifli to discuss approaches to countering violent extremism, including communication with like-minded religious voices and the importance of collaboration.

The Ambassador regularly met with different religious groups to discuss interfaith relations and support religious freedom. During Ramadan in April, the Ambassador joined an iftar with interfaith community leaders and delivered a speech about the commitment to freedom of religion as a core value to promote interreligious harmony. He participated in a robe ceremony for venerable Buddhist monks and discussed interfaith issues with the religious advisor to the Mahakaruna Buddhist Society. The Ambassador also met with the Jewish Welfare Board and visited a Hindu temple during Deepavali.

In June, eight leaders from Malay Muslims Organizations in Singapore participated in a State Department exchange program that examined religion in the United States and efforts to foster dialogue and respect among persons of diverse faiths and cultures.

In November, embassy staff visited the RRG to discuss deradicalization efforts and exchange views on the experiences of programs related to such efforts in both the United States and Singapore.

Throughout the year, the embassy used its website and social media to promote religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and respect for religious diversity.