

SINGAPORE 2019 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 government continued to ban Jehovah's Witnesses and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church). The government restricted speech or actions it perceived as detrimental to "religious harmony." In October parliament passed legislation (not yet in effect at year's end) that will allow the minister of home affairs to take immediate action against individuals deemed to have insulted a religion or to have incited violence or feelings of enmity against a religious group. The same bill will limit foreign funding to, leadership of, and influence over, local religious organizations. There is no legal provision for conscientious objection to military service, including on religious grounds. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 11 conscientious objectors remained detained at year's end. The government continued to ban all religious processions on foot, except for those of three Hindu festivals, including Thaipusam, and it reduced restrictions on the use of live music during Thaipusam. Authorities cancelled a concert by Swedish band Watain after public complaints that the group was offensive towards Christians and Jews. Authorities banned a foreign clergyman from preaching in Singapore after he refused to return to the country for a police investigation into anti-Muslim comments he had reportedly made at a Christian evangelical conference in 2018. The government made multiple high-level affirmations of the importance of religious harmony and respect for religious differences, including in June during a 1,000-person international conference it had organized to discuss religious diversity and cohesion in diverse societies. Government organizations initiated interfaith programs and funded community-led interfaith initiatives.

Seventy-seven percent of the population said they followed a religion, according to survey data. Most local residents perceived followers of other religions positively, although 16 percent saw Muslims as "threatening," or "somewhat threatening." A separate survey found that 97 percent of residents described the level of racial and religious harmony in Singapore as moderate, high, or very high. There were numerous community-led initiatives to promote religious tolerance and build interfaith understanding.

The Charge d'Affaires discussed the country's approach to religious harmony and amendments to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) legislation with the minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. U.S. embassy officials engaged

with senior government officials and religious leaders at a May iftar, during which the Charge d'Affaires gave a speech embracing religious diversity. Visiting representatives from the Office of International Religious Freedom met with the imam of Ba'alwie Mosque. Embassy representatives engaged with a variety of groups to support religious freedom including the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), the government's Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), the Singapore Muslim Women's Association (PPIS), and representatives from Buddhist, Christian, Shia Muslim, Sikh, Sunni Muslim, Taoist, and interfaith groups. The embassy used social media, including a Facebook item featuring the work of a former participant in a U.S.-sponsored exchange program, to highlight its religious outreach and to demonstrate respect for the country's religious diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 6.1 million (midyear 2019 estimate). Of the four million individuals the local government counts as citizens or permanent residents, 81.5 percent stated a religious affiliation in the 2015 General Household Survey. According to the data, approximately 33.2 percent of the population of citizens and permanent residents are Buddhist, 18.8 percent Christian, 14 percent Muslim (predominantly Sunni), 10 percent Taoist, and 5 percent Hindu. Groups together constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of the Unification Church. Although estimates varied widely, the government estimated there are 2,500 members in the Jewish community.

According to a report by the Department of Statistics, 74.3 percent of the resident population is ethnic Chinese, 13.4 percent ethnic Malay, 9.0 percent ethnic Indian, and 3.2 percent other, including Eurasians. Nearly all ethnic Malays are Muslim. According to a 2016 national survey, among ethnic Indians, 59.9 percent are Hindu, 21.3 percent Muslim, and 12.1 percent Christian. The ethnic Chinese population includes Buddhists (42.3 percent), Christians (20.9 percent), and Taoists (12.9 percent).

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 grounds of religion in the administration of any law or in the appointment to or employment in any office under a public authority. It states every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs, and it does not prohibit restrictions on employment by a religious institution. The constitution states no person shall be required to receive instruction or take part in any ceremony or act of worship 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 national service, reciting the national pledge, or singing the national anthem. A 1996 decision by the Singapore Appeals Court upheld the rights of individual members of the Jehovah's Witnesses to profess, practice, and propagate their religious beliefs. The government does not arrest Jehovah's Witnesses for attending or holding meetings in private homes; however, it does not allow them to hold public meetings or publish or import their literature. The government banned the Unification Church in 1982 on grounds it was a "cult" that could have detrimental effects on society.

The MRHA authorizes the minister for home affairs to issue a "restraining order" (RO) against a person in a position of authority within a religious group if the minister ascertains the person is causing feelings of enmity or hostility between different religious groups, promotes political causes, carries out subversive activities, or encourages disaffection against the government under the guise of practicing religion. An RO places various restrictions on public activities in which a religious authority can participate. Under the MRHA, the minister must provide any individuals or religious groups 14 days to make written representations before an RO may be issued against them, and the minister must also consult and take into consideration the views of the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony (PCRH) as to whether an RO should be issued. In addition, under the penal code, "Wounding the religious or racial feelings of any person" or knowingly promoting "disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred, or ill will between different religious or racial groups" may result in detention or imprisonment. Imprisonment may last up to five years.

In October parliament passed legislation to amend the MRHA, although the revised law did not take effect by year's end. The amendment will authorize the minister for home affairs to issue an RO with immediate effect against any person whom the minister ascertains incites violence on the basis of religion, or against a religious group or its members. The minister could also issue an RO with

immediate effect against any person who incites feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility against a religious group, or who insults or wounds the religious feelings of another person, if the act risked disturbing public peace. The risk of disturbing public peace will not need to be present if the offender is a religious leader. The law will have extraterritorial reach in instances where an offense by someone outside the country is deemed to have targeted and affected Singapore. An RO prevents an offender from making additional statements and may require a person to take down online posts. Any restraining order issued must be referred to the PCRH, which recommends to the president that the order be confirmed, cancelled, or amended. An offender has 14 days to make written representations to the PCRH. The minister must review a confirmed restraining order at least once every 12 months and may revoke such an order at any time. The law prohibits judicial review of such restraining orders. The amended law will introduce a community-based tool that enables offenders to voluntarily reconcile their differences with the religion the offender was alleged to have insulted rather than face prosecution.

The amended MRHA will require that key leadership roles in religious organizations be filled by Singaporeans or permanent residents, and that the majority of each organization's governing body be composed of Singapore citizens. The law, as amended, will hold that, with some exceptions, religious organizations must disclose foreign donations of 10,000 Singapore dollars (SGD) (\$7,400) or more, and that they must declare any affiliation to foreign groups that are in a position to exert influence. The minister could issue an RO against any religious group, which would prevent or reduce foreign influence affecting the group, if he or she believed this foreign influence could undermine religious tolerance or present a threat to public peace and order.

The PCRH reports on matters affecting the maintenance of religious harmony and considers cases referred by the minister for home affairs or by parliament. The president appoints the council's members on the advice of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights. The law requires two-thirds of PCRH members to be representatives of the major religions in the country, which according to law are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

The constitution states Malays are "the indigenous people of Singapore" and requires the government to protect and promote their interests, including religious interests. The MUIS, established under the Ministry for Culture, Community, and Youth (MCCY), administers affairs for all Muslims in the country such as the construction and management of mosques, halal certification, fatwa issuances,

preparation of Friday sermons, and the Hajj. The MUIS includes representatives from the Sunni majority as well as Muslim minority groups, including Shia. Use of MUIS sermons is not compulsory, but imams who use their own content are responsible for it and may be investigated if there are complaints.

The government appoints all members of the MUIS and the Hindu Endowments Board and nominates four of the 11 members of the Sikh Advisory Board. These statutory boards manage various aspects of their faith communities, ranging from managing properties and endowments to safeguarding customs and the general welfare of the community.

The law requires all associations of 10 or more persons, including religious groups, to register with the government. Registration confers legal identity, which allows property ownership, the ability to hold public meetings, and the ability to conduct financial transactions. Registered religious groups may apply to establish and maintain charitable and humanitarian institutions, which enable 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 society may be punished with a fine of up to 5,000 SGD (\$3,700), imprisonment of up to three years, or both.

Prisoners, including those in solitary confinement, are allowed access to chaplains of registered religious groups.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings outside of the hearing or view of nonparticipants if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor, private events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests, or they could be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

By law, a publication is considered objectionable if it describes, depicts, expresses, or deals with, among other things, matters of race or religion in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill will, or hostility between racial or religious groups. The government may prohibit the importation of publications, including religious publications, under the law. For offenses involving the publication of objectionable material, an individual may

be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding 5,000 SGD (\$3,700), 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, publishing arms of the Jehovah's Witnesses, remain banned by the government.

The Ministry of National Development and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) establish the guidelines on land development and use of space for religious activities. The URA regulates all land usage and decides where organizations may be located. Religious buildings are primarily classified as places of worship. A group seeking a new place of worship must apply to the URA for a permit. The ministry and the URA determine whether a religious institution meets the requirements as a place of worship, such as being located in an allotted zone and meeting the maximum plot ratio and building height. URA guidelines regulate the use of commercially and industrially zoned space for religious activities and religious groups; they apply equally to all religious groups. Commercial or industrial premises that host religious activities but are not zoned as places of worship must be approved by the URA. They may not be owned by or exclusively leased to religious organizations or limited to religious use and must also be available to rent out for nonreligious events. They may not display signage, advertisements, or posters of the religious use; be furnished to resemble a worship hall; or display any religious symbols, icons, or religious paraphernalia when the premises are not in use by the religious organization. Use of the space for religious purposes must not cause parking, noise, or other problems.

Registration with the MUIS is compulsory for all Muslim religious teachers and centers of learning. Registration requires adherence to minimum standards and a code of ethics, as well as fulfillment of certain training requirements.

The law allows the Muslim community, irrespective of 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 provisions for use of "other accepted schools of Muslim law as may be appropriate." Under the law, a sharia court has nonexclusive jurisdiction over marriage issues where both parties are or were married as Muslims, including disposition of property upon divorce, custody of minor children, and inheritance. The president of the country appoints the president of the sharia court. A breach of sharia court orders is a criminal offense punishable with imprisonment of up to six

months, and an individual may lodge a complaint for breach in the civil courts. The sharia court does not have jurisdiction over personal protection orders or applications for maintenance payments. Divorce proceedings in the sharia court may be moved to the civil courts for decisions on custody or division of matrimonial assets. Appeals within the sharia system go to an appeals board, which is composed of three members selected by the president of the MUIS from a panel of at least seven Muslim individuals 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. This includes 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 that law has not been enforced in decades.

Under the law, Muslim couples where one or both parties are under the age of 21 must complete a marriage-preparation program and obtain parental or guardian consent before applying for marriage. Each party to the marriage must be at least 18.

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

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 include

proselytization; students have a 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 not aided by the government. At the primary level, however, the law allows only seven designated private schools (six Sunni madrassahs and one Seventh-day Adventist school) to educate citizen students; these schools must 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 they 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 empowers the Ministry of Education (MOE) to regulate primary and secondary schools. MOE rules prohibit students (but not teachers) in public schools from wearing anything not forming part of an official school uniform, including hijabs or headscarves. Schools have discretion to grant a child dispensation from wearing the official uniform based on health but not religious requirements. 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 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.

The Presidential Council for Minority Rights, an advisory body that is part of the legislative process, examines all legislation to ensure it does not disadvantage particular religious groups. The council also considers and reports on matters concerning any religious group the parliament or the government refers to it.

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 at year's end, 11 Jehovah's Witnesses were held in the armed forces' detention facility for refusing

on religious grounds to complete national service. Conscientious objectors are generally court martialled and sentenced to detention, typically for 12 to 39 months. Although they remained technically liable for national service, men who had refused to serve on religious grounds were generally not called up for reservist duties. They do not, however, receive any form of legal documentation that officially discharged them from reservist duties.

The government reduced restrictions on the use of live music at the Tamil Hindu procession for Thaipusam, one of three religious foot processions, all Hindu festivals, permitted in the country. In January authorities permitted the use of percussion instruments in the two-day procession for the first time since 1973, and increased the number of hours, from 7:00 a.m. (one hour earlier than the previous year) to 10:30 p.m., during which live music could be played.

In March the authorities cancelled a concert by the Swedish band Watain. Authorities initially agreed to the band performing under an R18 (Restricted to 18 years and above) rating and with “religiously offensive” songs and “ritualistic acts” removed from the performance, but they retracted permission on the day of the concert after Minister for Home Affairs K. Shanmugam raised concerns about the group’s history of denigrating religions and promoting violence. The ministry assessed that allowing what they called a Satanist band to play had the “potential to cause enmity and disrupt Singapore’s social harmony.”

Although government policy prohibited the wearing of hijabs by certain public sector professionals, such as nurses and uniformed military officers, many statutory boards within government agencies continued to allow Muslim staff to wear the hijab while the government continued to evolve its stance “gradually and carefully.” Some in the Muslim community continued to quietly petition for a change in government policy.

In March authorities banned a U.S. clergyman from preaching in the country after he refused to return to the country for a police investigation into anti-Muslim comments he reportedly made at a Christian evangelical conference in 2018.

While the government did not formally prohibit proselytization, it continued to discourage its practice through the application of laws regarding public speech and assembly based on concerns that proselytizing might offend other religious groups and upset the balance of intergroup relations. In March media reported that police investigated a complaint against a Christian man for allegedly preaching to Muslim schoolchildren; media did not report that charges were filed.

The government assisted religious groups in locating spaces for religious observance in government-built housing, where most citizens lived. The government continued to enforce the maintenance of ethnic ratios in public housing and to prevent the emergence of religious enclaves in concentrated geographic areas.

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 promoted understanding and acceptance of all religions within the country. Children wore traditional clothing and celebrated the country's racial and religious diversity. Students were encouraged to recite the "Declaration of Religious Harmony," which repeatedly affirms the importance of religious harmony for the country.

The government instituted a requirement that Islamic teachers, known as *asatizah*, must complete a mandatory three-hour ethics class prior to 2020 in order to fulfil registration requirements. Among other requirements, the code of ethics requires teachers not to denigrate any individual or group by means of terms or concepts that could erode social harmony.

In July the director of the Public Service Commission defended awarding a taxpayer-funded scholarship to a student of Buddhist studies after the local newspaper published two letters of complaint about the award. She said that to make sound policy, the public service needed a diversity of strengths and a deep understanding of the country's religions: "Secularism does not mean being devoid of religious content."

President Halimah Yacob, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 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. Ministers frequently gave speeches on strengthening religious pluralism. In October Prime Minister Lee wished Hindus a happy Diwali on his Facebook page and wrote, "Here in Singapore, we are fortunate that we can share in the joy of one another's cultural and religious festivals." In September when accepting a World Statesman Award from the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, he praised the country's institutions that protect multiculturalism, including the Presidential Council for Minority Rights and the IRO.

In June 1,000 delegates attended the government's inaugural International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS), at which President Halimah celebrated religious diversity and distinctive cultures, while calling on different communities to accommodate others' differences and to build interfaith understanding. Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat delivered the conference's closing speech, during which he noted that the country must also learn to take into account the perspectives of the nonreligious, who comprise approximately 20 percent of the local population.

Members of parliament (MPs) expressed support for religious freedom, respect, and harmony. In July Ruling People's Action Party MP Zainal Bin Sapari recommended on Facebook that employers accommodate male Muslim employees by allowing them to attend Friday afternoon prayers at mosques.

In May Muslim MPs from the ruling party, the opposition, and independent lawmakers held the first ever cross-party breaking of the fast within parliament. In March in the wake of the Christchurch massacre, Muslim MP Amrin Amin led a political-constituency visit by Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists to St. Andrew's Cathedral, built on land donated by an Arab Muslim.

Under the auspices of the MCCY, local government and government-affiliated organizations advocated for interreligious understanding and support for followers of other religions. In February the country's five district mayors launched a national interfaith initiative called Common Senses for Common Spaces, which included activities such as community dialogues on Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism.

Interfaith activities occurred in each of the country's five mayoral districts through the expansion of programs such as Common Sense for Common Spaces, while 89 "Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles" (IRCCs) continued to operate in each of the country's 27 electoral constituencies. The IRCCs conducted a variety of local interreligious dialogues, counseling and trust-building workshops, community celebrations, and similar activities. In May more than 100 volunteers from IRCCs, district council Racial Harmony Youth Ambassadors, and religious organizations joined Muslim MP and Mayor Maliki Osman in an interfaith iftar after the group had packaged and distributed adult diapers to the elderly in local nursing homes.

The government continued to work with religious groups through a community engagement program which trained community leaders in emergency preparedness and techniques for promoting religious harmony. It also worked through the BRIDGE initiative (Broadening Religious/Racial Interaction through Dialogue and General Education), 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, which was established to promote greater religious understanding. The Harmony Center houses 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.

Authorities helped Muslims undertake travel for religious reasons through the MUIS, which maintains a national Hajj registration process, and which provides medical and welfare support for citizens making the Hajj. Ministers continued to advocate an increase in the number of permits that Saudi Arabia allocates to the country for pilgrims annually.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

A joint study of more than 4,000 residents by the National University of Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and OnePeople.sg found that almost 97 percent of local residents described the level of racial and religious harmony as moderate, high, or very high. When asked if they knew someone of another religion to clarify any concerns about religious practices, more than half of respondents said they were acquainted with a Buddhist, Catholic, other Christian, Muslim, or Taoist, while 40 percent of respondents knew a Hindu, and 22 percent a Sikh with whom they could do the same. While 88 percent of respondents reported not experiencing any form of religious tension in their daily lives, some respondents reported negative experiences associated with religion; more than a quarter reported being upset in the last year over proselytization attempts as well as by something they watched on social or mainstream media that insulted their racial or religious customs. Religion was identified as an important potential fault line, with just under half of respondents saying the mismanagement of religion could result in suspicion, mistrust, and anger among communities in Singapore, while a third said it had the potential to engender violence.

Seventy-seven percent of the population said they followed a religion, according to a separate IPS survey of 1,800 residents. Most local residents perceived adherents

of other religions positively, although 16 percent saw Muslims as “threatening,” or “somewhat threatening.” Seventy-three percent believed that persons of different religious backgrounds could get along when living close together.

Led by the country’s religious leaders, more than 300 religious groups and other organizations signed a pledge during the ICCS affirming the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and committing themselves to safeguarding national religious harmony

Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, the patron of the IRO, called on followers of all religious beliefs to “always protect the freedom to interact with each other as friends, neighbors, and fellow Singaporeans” when he opened the organization’s 70th anniversary Harmony of Faiths exhibition in March. The exhibition encouraged visitors to learn about all the religions practiced in the country. The IRO also worked with the National Library Board to organize interfaith gatherings. The IRO includes leaders of the 10 major religious groups in the country with the stated objective of inculcating a spirit of friendship among various religious groups by conducting interreligious prayer services, seminars, and public talks throughout the year.

In September remarks made on social media by a local blogger about the turbans of two Sikh men “obstructing” her view during an event gained national attention for their insensitivity. A subsequent invitation to the blogger from the Young Sikh Association to visit the Central Sikh Temple to learn about Sikhism was widely reported on social and local media.

Religious groups and humanists continued to promote interfaith and intrafaith understanding. In August the Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Interreligious Dialogue hosted Buddhist, Muslim, and Catholic representatives to discuss the concept of fasting. Throughout the year, the Center for Interfaith Understanding, chaired by a Muslim and a Taoist, hosted a range of seminars, including on such subjects as Chinese religion in everyday life, Christian-Muslim relations, and interfaith dialogue.

Shia and Sunni Muslims continued to cooperate and to share Sunni mosques, hosting intrafaith iftars during Ramadan. The organization Roses of Peace held several events in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, including a forum of Singaporean youth, to exchange ideas on race and religion.

Religious groups cooperated to provide practical support for their communities. Under a program run by the local community organization Giving Back Beyond Faith, religious groups collaborated with Sewa Pledge, a Sikh community project, and a Sikh temple, Gurdwara Sahib Yishun, to host an event for migrant workers in a place of worship, during which participants learned about Sikh culture and worship. Buddhist volunteers from Shinnyo-en served as road marshals to divert traffic from the nearby Abdul Razak Mosque during the Eid al-Adha prayers in August, when the road was closed off due to an overflow from the mosque. During Ramadan, the Hindu Endowments Board donated two tons of rice to local mosques, while the Singapore Buddhist Lodge donated 35 tons.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires discussed the country’s approach to religious harmony and amendments to its MRHA with the minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. In May at an embassy iftar attended by Senior Minister of State for Defense and Foreign Affairs Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, religious leaders of numerous faiths, the diplomatic corps, and others, the Charge d’Affaires gave remarks promoting religious freedom and embracing religious diversity. The Charge’s speech was featured on Malay language television and in the leading English- and Malay-language newspapers.

Embassy representatives engaged with a variety of religious groups, including the IRO, MUIS, PPIS, interfaith groups such as the Center for Interfaith Understanding, and representatives from Buddhist, Christian, Shia Muslim, Sikh, Sunni Muslim, Taoist, and interfaith groups, to reinforce the importance of religious freedom. Visiting representatives from the Office of International Religious Freedom met with the imam of Ba’alwie Mosque, who displayed the mosque’s collection of old Qurans, Bibles, Judaica, and Buddhist scriptures. The embassy used social media to highlight the visit, including a post covering the embassy iftar in May, and to demonstrate appreciation of and respect for the country’s religious diversity. The embassy used social media to feature the work of a former participant in a U.S.-sponsored exchange program focused on peace, social cohesion, and interfaith harmony.

The embassy facilitated the engagement of visiting U.S. citizens with local community and religious groups to support the promotion of religious freedom. In September embassy representatives and the U.S. nongovernmental organization Writing Through conducted workshops with the staff of PPIS and the youth that benefit from its programs. The workshops focused on building the research and

persuasive writing abilities of the staff and on improving critical thinking and writing skills of the at-risk youth PPIS supports. In April embassy representatives organized a visit by a Muslim American entrepreneur, who spoke with Muslim organizations, student groups, the business community, and media about becoming a successful entrepreneur and how being a Muslim impacted his perspective in business.