



Preface

THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF SINGAPORE MUSLIM PROFESSIONALS: CHARTING THE DIRECTION FOR THE COMMUNITY

Thought Leader, Problem Solver & Mobiliser

IN 1990, the First National Convention of Malay/Muslim Professionals in Singapore was convened. It was a ground-breaking event as 500 professionals gathered for the first time to brainstorm their contribution to the well-being and future of the community. The gathering was epochal. It signified the emergence of a generation of Muslims who had gone through higher education and were trained in varied disciplines from doctors, engineers, architects to IT professionals, teachers and journalists. They symbolised the progress of the Muslim community since Singapore's independence in 1965. By coming together, the professionals signaled that they were now ready to serve the community.

One of the most significant outcomes of that inaugural convention was the emergence of the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP). Over the course of the first decade since its formation, AMP acted as a catalyst for the development of the community by playing a three-pronged role as a think tank or *Thought Leader* as well as *Problem Solver* and *Mobiliser*.

Ten years later, in 2000, AMP held its second National Convention of Malay/Muslim Professionals. As in 1990, the professionals, by then a movement of volunteers in their own right, gathered to review the progress of the community and brainstorm its future. Again, the underlying intent was to mobilise the professionals and the community at large to discuss our common direction.

Today, on 30 June 2012, in the tradition of holding a major convention once every decade, we are gathered again to ponder the future of the community for the next ten years, even as we review our past and present. Our mission remains constant – to review the state of the community and offer ideas and possible strategies for the future direction of the community. Undergirding the reason for this third Convention again is our three-pronged role as *Thought Leader*, *Problem Solver* and *Mobiliser*.

A Convention Every Decade

We have deliberately and consciously pursued this tradition of holding a major convention of professionals every decade for an important reason: As a major group within the educated class, the professionals, as part of the intelligentsia, must lead the thinking process within the community. At regular junctures in the progress of the community, there must be occasions when the professionals and the community they serve come together to ponder what they have achieved and chart their common future. In so doing, we hope to embed and engender the growth of a thinking culture so that the professionals as a movement act as a *Thought Leader* for the community.

Playing the role as *Thought Leader*, the professionals must then help the community solve its various problems and challenges. Once these have been identified, strategies should be offered to the community for consideration. To complete their Trilogy of Social Action, the professionals should next mobilise the various resources needed – from human capital to community participation – to transform ideas into action. In the overall scheme of things, the professionals must never act in isolation but always in partnership with the community. In this way, we will ensure that we have come together to serve the community, not to be an elitist group pursuing our own agendas.

In the spirit of AMP's thinking tradition, this third Convention is offering a slew of possible strategies for the next decade for the community to ponder. There is no doubt that our community has progressed over two decades. The indicators of progress are many and varied – in education, in jobs, in material possessions such as ownership of flats and properties and cars, etc. In terms of socio-economic mobility, the community has certainly moved up. At the same time, we also notice that some of the community's challenges remain stubbornly the same after two decades – even as new ones emerged. Our perpetual challenge remains in the core areas of education and social development. The community's self-help strategies have been effective in mobilising many organisations and harnessing their goodwill. Our community organisations are also working together even more. In the face of a more demanding era, we must sustain this. Even more so, our community architecture must be strengthened so that our self-help efforts can be supported and become even more effective.

The strategies we are proposing at this third Convention are targeted at addressing new challenges – such as the demographic trends within the community – as well as those on the socio-economic front. As our challenges remain varied and multi-frontal, we need to develop further our “many helping hands” or *gotong-royong* approach and involve as many Malay/Muslim organisations as possible. The demand for group cohesion and solidarity remains stronger than ever. There must be a growing convergence of spirit, resources and effort even as we encourage a diversity of ideas and approaches in bringing the community forward.

But as we pay attention to our challenges ahead, there is a need for us to ensure that there are groups that go “upstream” in their strategies by doing more “software” than “hardware” work. Our proposal for a Muslim Expatriates (MEX) Network to address the demographic challenge is one example. Another is our call for an Institute for Social Action Workers to produce more trained community workers to address the severe shortage of such activists to help tackle the seemingly growing social problems.

In the spirit of AMP’s Convention tradition, all these strategies are tabled for the community to ponder and participate in. AMP is prepared to work with any group or organisation that is prepared to even take the lead.

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