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MEDIA RELEASE

Convention to Rally Young Professionals to Play More Active Role in Future of Muslim Community

1. At the recent National University of Singapore Kent Ridge Ministerial Forum in August, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong had urged youths to be active citizens in shaping Singapore's future. Heeding this call, AMP's 4th National Convention aims to mobilise young professionals to play a more active role in planning for the future of the Muslim community in Singapore. Findings from a recent online survey by the Community Advocates (CA) Panel of the Convention show that a majority of respondents (88%) view community advocates as playing an important role in bringing about positive change in the community. The survey, which involved 432 individuals, also found that 86% agreed that advocates for the community and political leaders ought to work together for the best possible outcome for society.
2. In order to develop and equip young professionals with the necessary skills and know-how to be effective advocates for the community, three key issues will be discussed at the Convention. These are: 1) barriers against community advocacy; 2) women in community advocacy; and 3) community advocacy on social media. Details of the Panel's key findings can be found in the Annex.
3. To kickstart the discussion, the CA Panel invites members of the public to join in the forum online at convo4.sg/communityadvocates. They can also visit the Convention social media channels on Instagram and Facebook: [instagram.com/convo_4](https://www.instagram.com/convo_4) and [facebook.com/convo4.sg](https://www.facebook.com/convo4.sg) for more information.
4. **The AMP 4th National Convention will be held on Saturday 15 October 2022 at 8.30am at MAX Atria at the Singapore EXPO (1 Expo Drive, Level 2). To register for the Convention, members of the public can visit convo4.sg.**
5. AMP Singapore organises a national convention every decade and dedicates it as a platform for local Muslim professionals to discuss new strategies that can propel the Muslim community in Singapore towards greater success. Each convention has resulted in significant solutions that have been critical to the development of the Singapore Muslim community, including the formation of AMP in 1991, a year

after the first Convention was held. As a platform, the Convention offers opportunities for critical discourse on issues relevant to the community, which is reflective of AMP's consultative and collaborative approach. The 1st Convention was held in 1990; the 2nd Convention was held in 2000, while the 3rd Convention was held in 2012. The 4th Convention will differ from previous Conventions as it will adopt a human-centred design thinking approach for the first time ever. Through this approach, the Convention will look at issues from the perspective of four personas pertinent to the long-term development of the community, namely youths, community advocates, families and seniors. Panels looking into these personas have been established, comprising professionals from different backgrounds to lend their expertise in identifying issues that concern these personas and to facilitate the ideation process for strategies and solutions to these issues.

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KEY FINDINGS & ISSUES FROM COMMUNITY ADVOCATES PANEL RESEARCH

Methodology

The Panel adopted a qualitative, three-pronged approach in their research, which comprised:

1. Extensive discussions among panel members to identify the various problems, issues, definitions, complexities, and personalities involved
2. Online survey, using convenience sampling
 - 432 respondents
 - Majority (86.1%) had at least a diploma or higher education level
 - Income levels were quite diverse, although the majority had a household income of between \$3,000 and \$4,999
 - 52.3% of respondents were male while the rest (47.7%) were female
3. 5 focus group discussions (FGD)
 - A total of 22 community advocates
 - Each session was with between 4 and 6 advocates, and lasted for about 2 hours
 - The following themes were discussed in relation to community advocacy:
 - Strengthening the role of Muslim professionals
 - Role of community/Islamic values
 - Role and impact of social media
 - Role of women

Key Findings

- Almost all respondents (95.8%) believe it is important to give back to the community, with 76.1% agreeing that the community still values doing so. 72.2% felt that there are sufficient opportunities to do so.
- While 43% of them serve the community through monetary donations, 25% do it through volunteerism, 17% through food distributions, and 14% through mentorship. Majority were likely to do so seasonally or monthly and would usually serve the community through personal networks and other non-profits in equal proportions, followed by Muslim organisations and mosques in almost equal proportions as well.
- 'Providing a voice for the community' and 'influencing government decisions' emerged as **two key areas** in which they believed Muslim organisations and mosques should improve the most; followed by collaborating with others to positively influence the community as well as providing thought leadership to the community in equal proportions.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (87.7%) felt that community advocates and political leaders are equally important in bringing about positive change, and ought to work together for the best possible outcome (85.9%).

- 57.4% believe there is sufficient talent to ensure a renewal of high-quality community advocates. While 33.6% believe there are enough Muslims stepping up to advocate for the community, 35.2% remain neutral, while 31.2% disagree.

Key Issues

1. Enabling a More Open Environment for Advocacy

One of the main issues community advocates face is self-censorship. From the FGDs, the respondents – some of whom are extremely socially active – discussed the fear of reprisal as a significant factor that deters a lot of advocacy work. Scholars have discussed how activists, journalists and even ordinary citizens often censor themselves. The Panel finds that this remains to be an issue. The apprehension stems from perceptions that individuals who are seen to have challenged the state or perceived to be controversial are reprimanded by government leaders.

The Community Advocates Panel suggests the construction of a more open and enabling environment for advocacy.

2. Embrace Social Media, but with Caution

Social media has become a key arena for advocacy. The barriers to entry for advocacy are much lower and as such, individuals are able to overcome obstacles which previously inhibited the airing of opinions such as mainstream media, only being able to articulate their thoughts publicly through organisations, or even self-censorship. Movements have started because of social media, and a lot of good work has been enabled by it.

At the same time, a culture of narcissism has most definitely been enabled by social media, and it has also affected how advocacy is carried out. It may be that advocates become more interested in social media likes and shares rather than getting things done. Worse, the nature of social media may lead to polarisation, as advocates may be in their respective silos and echo chambers and may not wish to find solutions on difficult issues which cut across different interest groups, and hence may require significant compromise.

3. Islamic Values in Advocacy

The Panel believes that baseline Islamic values can contribute to the problems which face humanity. Social media has contributed to a more narcissistic, and perhaps less selfless culture, where people are always eager to inflate themselves under the guise of self-affirmation. The Panel contends that one of the key teachings of Islam is to deflate one's own ego to the point that one becomes in service of others; one is always encouraged to de-emphasise (not devalue) one's self.

The Islamic value of respecting differences while debating can also be instructive. A culture of agreeing to disagree, and being passionate without being disrespectful, must be encouraged.

4. A Network of Advocacy: Understanding the Various Layers

Advocates must realise that they are part of a network and must be comfortable with the fact that there is a need and space for different actors. Creating both this network and sense of solidarity among advocates would mean that each one is acutely aware of each other's role in the system.

5. Women as Advocates

For Muslim women, in addition to the challenges already mentioned for advocates in general, like other women, they have the added burden of cultural-societal expectations: being expected to be working women while juggling all other identities as well. These hurdles exist and is not advocacy-specific, but a note on the importance of having male allies is still due, as mentioned by the respondents.