

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY MAYOR ZAINUDIN NORDIN, CHAIRMAN
ONEPEOPLE.SG AT ONEPEOPLE.SG'S COMMUNITY LEADERS'
CONFERENCE 2010 ON 20 NOVEMBER AT STI AUDITORIUM**

Good Afternoon

Fellow Board Members

Imam Ashafa and Pastor James

Distinguished Guests

Community and Religious Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 First, let me thank all of you for your active participation. I am heartened by the robust exchange of thoughts and ideas at today's Conference. The depth of discussions we had today would not have been possible without your keen involvement.

2 OnePeople.sg's Community Leaders' Conference seeks to gather thoughts and exchange views on critical issues which have a bearing on our social fabric. This biennial Conference is a key platform to stimulate frank discussions among community leaders on matters concerning race and religious relations, and provides a common ground in addressing challenges and opportunities.

3 Many years ago, discussions on community relations would have been considered taboo or too sensitive. But as today's Conference has

shown, we are able to discuss these issues with an open mind, and in a mature fashion. Where some countries are embroiled in ethnic and religious disputes, we have gathered here to speak of building inter-faith engagement. This exemplifies how far we have come as a country, and how much we have matured as a society.

4 While we can be proud of the progress we have made thus far, racial and religious harmony is not a natural state of affairs. It requires effort and is something we can never take for granted. That is the reality in a multi-racial and multi-religious society like ours. The sharing today by our two international guest speakers bears testimony to this.

5 I believe today's Conference would have provoked deep thoughts in all of us. Our distinguished panel of speakers have given us a lot to ponder upon. While there are many learning lessons, I would like to touch on three messages that I hope you can take back home with. First, religious differences are never the cause of communal conflicts. The senseless violence occurring in some parts of the world in the name of religion, in fact, has nothing to do with religion. There are many other contributing factors.

6 There is no religion that preaches hate. For all intent and purposes, our religious beliefs teach us to do good to those around us. I am told that the "golden rule" which sets the foundations for peace, with its principle, "do unto others what you would have them do unto you" can be found in over 20 world religions; in different forms, but essentially with the same meaning.

7 Pastor James and Imam Ashafa's inspiring journey have shown us how their own religious convictions played an instrumental role in ending communal conflicts and conveying the mission of peace. The guidance from their spiritual leaders as well as deeper reflections on their own religious beliefs brought about an amazing change of heart, an end to their bitter conflict and a concerted effort to build trust among religious communities in Nigeria. As Imam Ashafa and Pastor James have proven, engagement between faiths has immense potential to overcome challenges and bring about lasting peace in the world.

8 Second, even extreme foes can become the best of friends, when differences are set aside for the larger goal of peace and understanding. Imam Ashafa and Pastor James are indeed role models of reconciliation. Their ground up inter-faith trust and peace building efforts in Nigeria, have transformed communities who were once in deep suspicion of one another in war-torn settings, to communities which now make space for each other in pursuit of peace and harmony. Their story certainly gives inspiration to the world.

9 Third, dialogue needs to be a way of life, especially in a multicultural society like ours. When we begin to engage each other, we are better able to appreciate shared values and commonalities despite differences. In many ways, we share similar goals and aspirations for ourselves, our families, loved ones and our children. Though we are religiously diverse, our religions share values such as filial piety, compassion, charity and respect for humanity that brings a positive influence to society.

10 It is through dialogue that we begin to appreciate the finer things that we share. Dialogues can range from what we have today like a Conference, to smaller scale inter-faith initiatives such as collaborations between various religious groups to even at our doorsteps, such as having a conversation with our neighbours. Such conversations help build bridges of understanding and appreciation for one another.

11 Whether we are Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian, when we get to know each other better, we are more likely to go past our differences, give and take, live and let live. This mutual understanding is what we need to build to strengthen cohesiveness in our community. And it all starts with one hand extending to another in meaningful dialogue.

12 I hope you would reflect on today's Conference and in your own ways seek to build bridges of understanding, appreciation and respect in our community. Beyond this Conference, OnePeople.sg and the Inter Religious Organisation do hold bi monthly inter-faith dialogues. I hope you would join us at these sessions and bring in your members as well to participate in these dialogues.

13 I would like to take this opportunity to thank our distinguished guest speakers, Imam Ashafa and Pastor James, Associate Professor Cherian George from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University and Mr Ashvin Desai, Vice-President, IRO for taking time to be with us here today and sharing their insightful thoughts.

14 I would also like to thank the Inter Religious Organisation, Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and volunteers from Ngee Ann Polytechnic for their support. Last but not least, I would like to thank my fellow Board Member, Gerald Singham for hosting today's dialogue session.

15 Once again, I thank you all for being with us here today. It has certainly been a meaningful learning journey. Let us continue to take this journey forward.

16 I wish you all an enjoyable evening ahead.

Thank you.