



National Council of Churches of Singapore

新加坡基督教全国教会理事会

Majlis Kebangsaan Gereja-Gereja Singapura

திருச்சபைகளின் தேசிய மன்றம்

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MAINTENANCE OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019 A Statement by the National Council of Churches of Singapore

The Singapore government has proposed some amendments to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) which was enacted in 1990. The purpose of these amendments is to enable the government 'to respond effectively to tackle new threats that could harm religious harmony and strengthen the Government's ability to safeguard against these threats.'

The amendments impose more stringent requirements for leaders of religious organisations and transparency in donations, especially for single-time donations of \$10,000 or more, if the donors are not Singaporeans or permanent residents or persons residing in Singapore on long-term passes. Religious organisations must also declare affiliations with foreign individuals and organisations that are in the position to exercise control over them. The amendments also require a person who has offended a religious community to participate in activities under a Community Remedial Initiative (CRI) which are purposed 'to help him/her better understand the affected religious community, and mend ties with them.'

The amendments to the Act also made changes to the scope of the Restraining Order (RO) which is already included in the current MRHA. In place of the current practice which requires a 14-day notice, the amendments allow the RO to take immediate effect once issued. The RO can be issued against a local religious organisation to prohibit it from receiving donations from specific or all foreign donors and to require its entire Exco to be Singapore citizens. In addition, the RO can be used to suspend or remove foreigners from office.

The amendments also hold religious leaders to a higher standard of conduct and greater accountability.

The National Council of Churches of Singapore is committed to protecting and enhancing harmony among the religious communities in Singapore. It therefore supports these amendments to the MRHA.

The NCCS believes that these measures will enhance our efforts to preserve and maintain peace and harmony among the different religious communities in Singapore. These measures will also encourage religious communities and their leaders to practise good governance and to be more alert to the influence of foreign sources that have the potential to sow seeds of distrust and conflict.

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"...one body in Christ" Romans 12:5

NCCS recognises that the good and peaceable relationship among the various religious communities in our nation-state, which we have worked hard to foster and cultivate, remains fragile. They can be disrupted by both international and regional events and developments that are beyond our control. It is therefore extremely important that the different faith communities and their leaders develop trust in and respect for one another.

The NCCS is therefore committed to working with the different faith communities and with the government, not only to ensure that the peace and goodwill that we currently enjoy are not compromised, but are further strengthened and deepened.