



KEMENTERIAN PERPADUAN NEGARA

OPENING ADDRESS

**YB DATUK AARON AGO DAGANG
MINISTER OF NATIONAL UNITY**

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

**SECOND INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH PEACE
AND HARMONY FORUM (IIPHF II) 2026**

**27th JUNE 2026 (SATURDAY)
10.00 AM**

MALAYSIA HANS STUDIES, MELAKA

Salam Perpaduan dan Salam Malaysia MADANI

SALUTATIONS

**(latest salutations will provided separately)*

INTRODUCTION

1. It is a profound privilege to welcome our international friends and global delegates to the **Second International Interfaith Peace and Harmony Forum 2026** which jointly organised by **Ministry of National Unity, Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia and the Pure Land Amitabha Group**.
2. I understand that this forum brings together religious leaders and practitioners, academics, government agencies, local and **international non-governmental organisations from Singapore, Indonesia and Australia**, as well as students from local higher education institutions. Your presence here reflects a shared commitment to dialogue, understanding, and peacebuilding across borders and beliefs.
3. The theme of this year's forum, ***“Human Flourishing: Individual and Global Community – Deepening Bonds and Unified Action for Sustainable Social Peace and Harmony,”*** is both timely and deeply significant. Peace must be actively built, sustained, and renewed through trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility among individuals, communities, and nations.

SOCIAL PEACE AND HARMONY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Social peace is not simply the absence of violence or open conflict. It is a deeper condition of society **where trust exists between individuals and communities, where differences are managed fairly, and where people feel a shared sense of security, dignity, and belonging within the same social fabric.**
5. In this sense, **social peace is closely aligned with the aspirations reflected in the United Nations Declaration on a Culture of Peace**, which calls for values such as respect for human rights, non-violence, tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding as the foundation of peaceful coexistence. Yet we must also ask honestly, what causes societies to lose peace and harmony?
6. **History shows us that nations fracture when divisions are deepened rather than managed whether along ethnic, religious, regional, or ideological lines.** We have seen countries and regions torn apart when identity becomes a tool of exclusion rather than a bridge of unity.
7. In the present era, the challenges are even more complex. **We are living in what many describe as a time of volatility,**

uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Global crises no longer occur in isolation. They are interconnected, fast-moving, and often amplified by digital ecosystems. **Polarisation, misinformation, and echo chambers are reshaping how people perceive one another.**

8. Increasingly, we also recognise the important role that religion continues to play as a source of compassion, peace, and moral guidance. **Across many contexts and traditions, faith communities and religious leaders have remained powerful forces for reconciliation, social cohesion, and humanitarian action.** Rooted in deep ethical teachings and spiritual values, religion has consistently inspired efforts to protect human dignity, promote charity, strengthen solidarity, and respond to suffering often across boundaries of race, culture, and nationality.
9. In this context, **interfaith engagement becomes not optional, but essential. Our strength does not lie in uniformity, but in our capacity to manage differences fairly, justly, and constructively, while upholding mutual respect and shared human dignity.** It is through this spirit of principled engagement that societies can preserve harmony, even amid diversity of belief, worldview, and tradition.

10. There is great value in organic, everyday intercultural and interreligious relations that take place within families, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and communities. These lived experiences form the foundation of trust at the societal level. At the same time, **structured and formal interfaith platforms such as this forum play a critical role in strengthening that broader ecosystem of coexistence.** Both dimensions are complementary and mutually reinforcing, one building authenticity through daily interaction, and the other providing continuity, reflection, and collective direction for sustained peace and understanding.
11. We must also recognise that sustaining social peace is not the responsibility of institutions alone. **Families, educators, community leaders, and civil society all play a decisive role in shaping values from an early age,** by teaching respect, empathy, and the ability to engage with difference constructively.
12. **Perhaps what is most lacking today is not information, but wisdom; not connectivity, but understanding; not diversity, but the capacity to engage diversity with maturity and restraint.** Ultimately, our task is to strengthen the moral and social infrastructure of peace so that differences do not become divisions, and diversity continues to serve as a foundation for unity rather than conflict.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. Malaysia today has a population of more than 34 million people, and our society reflects a remarkable tapestry of faiths. According to the Population Census, **63.5% of Malaysians are Muslims, 18.7% Buddhists, 9.1% Christians, 6.1% Hindus, while the remainder includes Sikhs, Taoists, Bahai and other beliefs.** This demographic composition makes Malaysia one of the most religiously diverse countries in Asia, with virtually every major world religion represented within a single national boundary.
14. For decades, **these diverse communities have lived together with relative peace. This is not by accident, but by design.** Our **Federal Constitution enshrines Islam as the religion of the Federation, while at the same time guaranteeing freedom to practise other religions in peace and harmony.** This dual recognition has been central to Malaysia's success in managing diversity.
15. In addition, our unity is anchored in the **Rukun Negara**, the National Philosophy of Malaysia proclaimed in 1970 after a difficult period in our history. It consists of five guiding principles: **Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rule of Law, and**

Courtesy and Morality. These are not mere slogans, but moral foundations that shape our identity as a nation.

16. In the 21st century, the Rukun Negara remains deeply relevant as more than just a national philosophy, it is a living framework for managing diversity and strengthening peace in society. **In a world where polarization, extremism, and disinformation too often exploit religion and identity, the Rukun Negara offers Malaysians a common moral compass.** It reminds us that unity cannot be built on tolerance alone, but must be guided by shared principles of faith, loyalty, justice, law, and morality.

17. We also have taken this journey a step further with our theme in year 2025 which is “**Harmony in Diversity.**” **Harmony within diverse religions is not simply the absence of conflict; it is the presence of trust, dialogue, and mutual enrichment.** It means that different religions do not merely tolerate each other’s existence, but actively contribute to a shared space where values of compassion, justice, and peace are upheld together.

18. At this juncture, many countries including Malaysia are increasingly focusing on the idea of building a **Negara Bangsa, or nation state** in its fullest sense.

19. Because the challenges we face today are no longer only about building institutions or infrastructure. They are also about strengthening cohesion within a society that is becoming more complex, more diverse, and more interconnected. **In an era shaped by rapid digital transformation, mobility, and global influences, the question of identity, belonging, and shared purpose becomes even more critical.**

20. **A Negara Bangsa is a nation where citizens not only live within the same borders, but also share a sense of belonging, mutual responsibility, and collective destiny.** It is a society where diversity is not erased, but meaningfully anchored within a **common national identity, shared values, and loyalty to the country.**

21. In this regard, the **Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (RMK13)** places strong emphasis on nation-building as a core pillar of national development. This reflects a clear recognition that economic progress and physical development must be matched with social cohesion and national unity.

22. As has often been articulated, if **the first century of our nation was primarily focused on nation-building** by establishing institutions, stability, and development then the **second century must be the era of strengthening the**

Malaysian nationhood. This means nurturing a society that is confident in its own identity, yet even more confident in its shared identity as Malaysians.

23. Ultimately, this is the direction of our collective journey, to ensure that Malaysia continues to evolve not only as a successful nation, but as a deeply united nation-state grounded in shared purpose and enduring cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. Whether we read the Quran, the Bible, the Vedas, the Guru Granth Sahib or the Tipitaka, the core message remains unchanged: a call for absolute justice, deep compassion, and unwavering respect for human dignity.

25. Let us therefore reaffirm our collective responsibility to deepen dialogue, strengthen cooperation, and translate understanding into meaningful action for the common good.

With that, I am pleased to officially declare the **Second International Interfaith Peace and Harmony Forum 2026** open.

Thank You.