

Annex B: Framework on Race and Religion

1. Singapore's approach to race and religion has two critical pillars:
 - a. **A robust legal framework**, which sets out the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and allows the Government to intervene where necessary to prevent or sanction threats to social cohesion; and
 - b. **Policies and programmes** which safeguard and grow common space, build civic capacity to discuss social differences, and strengthen resilience and unity.

Legal Framework

2. The **legal framework** includes the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act.
3. **Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act ("MRHA")**. The MRHA was enacted in 1990, and amended in 2019 to ensure its continued relevance. The MRHA contains four main levers to deal with threats to religious harmony.
 - a. First, **Restraining Orders ("ROs")**. ROs can be issued against **any leader or member of any religious group or institution** who:
 - i. Causes feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious groups;
 - ii. Carries out activities to promote a political cause or party, under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief; or
 - iii. Engages in subversive activities or excites disaffection against the President or Government, under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief.
 - b. Individuals issued with an RO can be prevented from:
 - i. Addressing any congregation, parish or group of worshippers on any subject specified in the order;
 - ii. Printing, publishing, editing or distributing any publication produced by any religious group; or
 - iii. Holding office in the editorial board or committee of publication of any religious group.
 - c. Second, **religion-related offences** which outlaw hate and offensive speech.¹ The offences are tiered such that the severity of the offence depends on:
 - i. The nature of the action (i.e. incitement of violence is a more serious offence than wounding religious feelings); and
 - ii. The status of the offender (i.e. religious leaders are held to a higher standard than laypersons).
 - d. Third, safeguards against **foreign interference** that might undermine our religious harmony.
 - e. Fourth, the **Community Remedial Initiative ("CRI")**. The CRI is a tool for restoration and rehabilitation, where a person who has committed an offence

¹ These offences were originally sited in the Penal Code and were ported over to the MRHA by the Maintenance of Religious Harmony (Amendment) Act 2019, which came into effect on 1 Nov 2022.

under the MRHA may be offered an opportunity to make amends to the affected religious community. An offender who completes the CRI would not be prosecuted thereafter.

4. **Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act (“RHA”)**. The RHA was enacted in 2025 and will be progressively operationalised from 2026. The RHA contains four main levers to deal with threats to racial harmony.
 - a. First, **ROs**, which take reference from the MRHA and can similarly be issued to any person who causes feelings of enmity or hatred between different races in Singapore.
 - b. Second, **race-related offences**,² which similarly outlaw hate and offensive speech.
 - c. Third, safeguards against **foreign interference**.
 - d. Fourth, the **CRI**, which takes reference from the MRHA.
5. These are complemented by laws which provide further safeguards against divisive racial and religious rhetoric:
 - a. **Online Criminal Harms Act (“OCHA”)**. OCHA allows for the **issuance of directions** when there is reasonable suspicion that online content is criminal in nature, including activities that threaten racial and religious harmony. **Directions can be issued to online services** to prevent accounts or such activities from interacting with or reaching Singapore users. **Directions can also be issued to individuals** to cease such activities.
 - b. **Broadcasting Act (“BA”)**. The BA gives the Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) powers to:
 - i. **Direct Online Communication Services** accessible by Singapore users to disable access to egregious content, which includes content likely to cause racial or religious disharmony in Singapore, or which advocates or instructs on violence or terrorism; and
 - ii. **Direct Internet Service Providers** to block websites containing prohibited material that is objectionable on the grounds of public interest, public order or public scrutiny under the Internet Code of Practice.
6. We also make use of other laws and administrative policies in immigration, employment and arts and entertainment, to protect our social cohesion.

Examples	
In 2022, an Indonesian preacher was denied entry into Singapore at Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal.	Entry into Singapore is neither automatic nor a right. Each case is assessed on its own merits. We take a serious view of any persons who advocate violence and / or espouse extremist and segregationist

² These offences currently reside in s298 and 298A of the Penal Code and will be ported over to the RHA when it is brought into force.

He had been known to preach extremist and segregationist teachings. For example, he had preached that suicide bombings were legitimate in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. He had also made inflammatory remarks against other religions, describing the Christian crucifix as the dwelling place of an “infidel jinn (spirit/demon)”. In addition, he had publicly referred to non-Muslims as “kafirs” (infidels).	teachings, and will deny them any opportunity to build up a local following or engage in activities that threaten our security and communal harmony.
In 2017, Miscellaneous Work Pass (MWP) applications for two foreign Christian preachers to speak in Singapore were rejected. One of the preachers had described Allah as “a false god”, asked for prayers for those “held captive in the darkness of Islam”, and referred to Buddhists as “Tohuw people” (a Hebrew word for “lost, lifeless, confused and spiritually barren” individuals). The other preacher had variously referred to “the evils of Islam” and the “malevolent nature of Islam and Mohammed”.	As with entry into Singapore, granting of an MWP is a privilege and not a right. Such teachings are unacceptable in our multi-racial, multi-religious society.
In 2019, a concert by Swedish black metal band Watain was cancelled. Several of the band’s songs contain lyrics which denigrate Christianity. For example, the song “Casus Luciferi” states “For this sunrise shall not wake you by the foul light of Christ/ But by Satan’s fire burning in your eyes.”	The band’s lyrics and past statements constitute hate and offensive speech against Christians. The Government maintains a firm stance against such speech, irrespective of whether it is conveyed through entertainment mediums or in political and religious discourse. Allowing hate speech to become normalised will fuel racial and religious divisions and threaten our social cohesion.

The band's frontman has also stated that he encourages terrorist acts to be committed in the name of Watain. He has endorsed the burning of churches, stating "We've always been encouraging music to take a physical form, and that's what happened in Norway in the early 90's when churches were burned, and it happened many other times as well."	
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Policies and Platforms

7. The Government has implemented policies to foster social cohesion by maximising the common space between different ethnic and religious communities while preserving their unique identities. For example:
 - a. **Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP):** The EIP maintains certain racial proportions in public housing, so that there is mixing across races in every estate. It also allows residents to have the opportunity to interact and make friends with fellow Singaporeans of different races in their daily routines.
 - b. **Universal Education & Schools:** Education is compulsory for every Singaporean child. The Government builds and funds national schools where fees are heavily subsidised. The large majority of children attend these national schools, where they study, grow up and form collective memories with children of all races. To ensure students are able to communicate with one another across races, all students study the English language as a compulsory subject. At the same time, students are given opportunities to celebrate their unique cultures and customs in school. Every student studies their own Mother Tongue language as a compulsory subject. Schools organise activities to celebrate racial and religious festivals, as well as Racial Harmony Day, which allow students to gain an appreciation of the cultures of other races and religions.
8. The Government has also established platforms that serve as important platforms between ethnic and religious communities. For example:
 - a. **People's Association (PA) Events:** Established in 1960, the PA's mission is to connect Singaporeans from all ethnic backgrounds to promote active citizenry and multiracial harmony. In 2024, PA organised about **48,000 community activities** aimed at promoting active citizenry and multiracial harmony, reaching more than **12.4 million participants**. These include:
 - i. Festive celebrations (e.g. Chinese New Year, Christmas, Deepavali, Hari Raya, Racial Harmony Month-related activities);

- ii. Learning journeys to cultural sites and religious organisations (e.g. the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, the Semangat Yang Baru exhibition at the Founders' Memorial); and
 - iii. Cultural workshops and programmes (e.g. Batik painting, Chingay Community Float and Chingay@Heartlands celebrations).
- b. **Racial and Religious Harmony Circles (“Harmony Circles”)**: Harmony Circles are local-level inter-faith platforms that serve as important bridges between religious, ethnic, and community groups. Leaders from these groups come together to form Harmony Circles networks that build friendship and trust. Harmony Circles also aim to deepen people’s understanding of the various religious and ethnic communities through activities such as heritage trails, interfaith talks, and ethnic and religious celebrations. In 2024, Harmony Circles organised about **250 activities**, reaching about **22,000 participants**.