

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COHESIVE SOCIETIES  
KICKS OFF TODAY**

- *Mdm Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore, opened the Conference and called on the world “to come together as a family, to recognise the beauty in our diversity and use that to our advantage in tackling greater challenges to come”;*
- *Findings from the Southeast Asian Cohesion Radar, a regional survey on the nature of social cohesion in the 10 ASEAN member states, was shared for the first time during the event.*

6 September 2022 (Tuesday), Singapore – Singapore welcomed over 800 delegates from more than 40 countries, as the International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) commenced today at the Raffles City Convention Centre.

2. Themed “**Confident Identities, Connected Communities**”, ICCS 2022 seeks to examine the role of identities in shaping how individuals connect with their communities. This comes against the backdrop of the rise of identity politics and social polarisation, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dialogues at the Conference have been grouped to guide conversations among speakers and delegates along three main pillars:

- **Faith** – How faith can bridge divides;
- **Identity** – How diversity can be harnessed for the common good;
- **Cohesion** – How technology can be leveraged to foster mutual trust.

3. In her Opening Address, **Mdm Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore**, said: “We face common challenges globally as we emerge from the pandemic. We must continue to create and build safe and open platforms to discuss sensitive issues and work together to strengthen unity and resilience in our societies.

4. “This is a time to come together as a family, to recognise the beauty in our diversity and use that to our advantage in tackling greater challenges to come, so that we can build brighter and more cohesive societies for all.”



5. The President’s Opening Address was followed by a special presentation featuring expert observations about the state of social cohesion in the current climate. The panel consisted of Professor Lily Kong, President of the Singapore Management University and Professor Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University. It was moderated by Professor Farish Ahmad-Noor, Professor of History at the University of Malaya.

6. **Professor Kong** said: “I would argue that for a society to be creative [...] the ‘we’ is quite important. So, if we are thinking about developing a sense of identity for a country, and people, which I think that precious few places would argue against, then it is as important to cultivate the ‘me’ as well as the ‘we’ to achieve that end.”

7. **Professor Marshall** said: “We need a robust approach on religious engagement that goes well beyond tolerance. To respect and to care. We need to fight tribalism and hate speech on social media, and the human tendency to ‘otherise’.”



8. The first plenary session featured a diverse array of leaders across the academic, political and religious realms discussing the role of faith in bridging tangible divisions between our societies. Moderated by Professor Kumar Ramakrishna, Professor of National Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), the panel featured Lord John Alderdice, the First Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Dr. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, Secretary-General, Global Interfaith Clean Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Alliance; Imam Uzair Akbar from the Holland Park Mosque in Australia; and Venerable Shi You Guang, Abbot and President, Samantabhadra Vihara.

9. This was followed by a Special Address by **Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, Holy See**. He said: “The objective of cohesive societies, on the other hand, is the formation of individuals capable of relationships, of inhabiting societies, and of transcending the individualism of ‘I’ to embrace the diversity of ‘us’ [...] and cohesive societies necessitates rewriting the ‘grammar’ of leadership and are for others.”

10. Citing different faith traditions (Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism), Cardinal Parolin said: “Everyone, without exception, is a promoter of solidarity. To construct fair and cohesive societies, the commitment of all parties is

necessary. It is the responsibility of the Church and all religious groups, in particular, to forge friendships that transcend natural affinities, thus contributing to the civic and moral sense of a community.”

### **Launch of Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar**

11. Findings from the first Southeast Asian Social Cohesion Radar, a regional survey on the nature of social cohesion in the region in the 10 ASEAN member states, were also announced at the Conference today.

12. Aimed at understanding the possible drivers of social cohesion in each ASEAN country, the survey found that the overall level of social cohesion in Southeast Asia was at 69%. However, within both the region and in each country, there was considerable variation across the three domains of social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good.

13. Of the three domains, social relations had the strongest influence on social cohesion in SEA, while the domain of focus on the common good had the least impact on social cohesion in the region. *(Please refer to the Annex for more details on the research.)*

14. The ICCS from 6 to 8 September 2022 is organised by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). More information and updates on ICCS is available on the official website [www.iccs.sg](http://www.iccs.sg) and ICCS’ [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) channels.

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### **About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)**

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a global think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS’ mission is to be a leading

research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. With the core functions of research, graduate education, and networking, it produces research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-traditional Security, Cybersecurity, Maritime Security and Terrorism Studies.

**About the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)**

The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth seeks to inspire Singaporeans through the arts and sports, strengthen community bonds, and promote volunteerism and philanthropy. Since its inception in November 2012, MCCY has been actively engaging the arts, heritage, sports, community, and youth sectors. The Ministry aims to bring into sharper focus the efforts to build a more cohesive and vibrant society, and to deepen a sense of identity and belonging to the nation. MCCY will work with its stakeholders to create an environment where Singaporeans can pursue their aspirations for a better quality of life and together, build a gracious and caring society we are proud to call home.

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