

CONSENSUS DOCUMENT

We, the participants of the Centre for Public Policy Studies (Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute) - National Young Lawyers Committee (Bar Council) 1st Young Malaysians Roundtable Discussion on National Unity & Development in Malaysia “*Challenges & Prospects for Nation Building*” held in Kuala Lumpur on 3 April 2007, having shared experiences and perspectives on the issues relating to the subject-matter and found the same to be empowering and beneficial state as follows:

I. On Sustaining Open and Constructive Dialogue

We recognise:

1. That we have reached a stage in our nation’s development that necessitates a level of honest and critical introspection and self-examination which are crucial elements in understanding ourselves as a nation.
2. The youth as an essential segment of Malaysian society whose views must be included without restrictions in forging an identity for the nation, thereby requiring their greater education and participation with concomitant strategies and mechanisms for enhanced engagement with them in dialogue.
3. The roles of Government, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, business enterprises and in general, civil society as key role-players and leaders in initiating and sustaining continuous dialogue in more open and wider public spheres within the scheme set out above.
4. That constructive dialogue is a very important tool in building bridges between ethnicities, cultures and religions, and is a crucial step towards enhancing inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations towards national unity.
5. That dialogue should be conducted in an open yet safe atmosphere of mutual understanding, acceptance and respect, and that knowledge should be exchanged through a process of sharing and discussion in a non-judgmental and non-discriminatory way. In particular, “enforced solutions” including threats of violence or coercion must be avoided.

II. On Ethno-Religious Politics and Implications on Nation Building

We recognise:

6. That the key to developing a strong and united Malaysia is to be founded on core principles of justice, equality and respect for human rights and fundamental liberties of every person regardless of race or religion, as enshrined in the Federal Constitution.
7. That the interests and needs of the disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable be accorded due recognition.
8. That any level of apprehension experienced by young Malaysians towards ethno-religious policies has a real and tangible effect upon nation building, materialised in the present and experienced in the future.
9. That ethnic-based politics and racist ideologies in any form be rejected.

III. On Education Policies and National Development

We recognise:

10. The importance of Government's education policies within primary, secondary and tertiary level institutes as instruments that should promote national unity.
11. That Government's education policies should however reflect the reality of Malaysians and their ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.

IV. On Forging a Young Malaysian Identity towards National Unity

We recognise:

12. The need to forge a Malaysian identity towards shaping a future founded upon national unity, especially among the younger generation which will form the future of our Malaysian leadership.
13. The time has come for Malaysians to move beyond its "accommodation-ist" approach to interacting with one another in terms of mere tolerance; towards a full appreciation, understanding, acceptance and equal treatment of every person regardless of race or religion and in embracing all diversities and complexities.
14. National unity should move beyond a superficial interpretation based on form (e.g. food, language and traditional festivals) towards one based on essence, substance and shared values (e.g. mutual respect, love, justice and equality).

V. Conclusion

We note the urgent need to ensure sustained and effective implementation of constructive steps towards achieving the above. In particular, we state the following:

15. There is a need to stress common and shared values of every person regardless of race and religion, and to eliminate the misuse of identification by ethnic or religious background.
16. There is a need to de-construct arguments or discussions entrenched along racial or religious paradigms within our nation, moving towards an egalitarian issue-based paradigm.
17. Further, there is a need to foster and implement strategies to better manage ethno-religious politics, in particular those which are in conflict with national unity policies.
18. All educational institutes should incorporate programmes and training modules that seek to improve ethnic and religious relations, bearing in mind historical, anthropological and sociological aspects with the aim of promoting national unity and racial harmony.
19. Malaysian educational institutes in particular its educators should enhance teaching and research standards encouraging critical thinking including allowing greater acceptance and diversity for divergent opinions with the aim of being international leaders in their fields.
20. There should be concerted efforts to determine factors which repel young Malaysians from their home country, with a view to encouraging Government and civil society to seek solutions and strategies towards eliminating these negative features.

We urge the Government to engage, increase its co-operation with, and support the community of young Malaysians through their representation and active participation at youth movements, non-governmental organisations, religious groups and in general, civil society particularly in relation to the nation building process and in the implementation of the above.

We urge the Government to accept and act in accordance with the principles contained in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

We further urge key policy-makers that the views, perspectives and opinions arising from this Roundtable Discussion are taken into serious consideration during the formulation process of Government policies and practices.

Lastly, we encourage all individuals in society, young and old, to collectively share in this vision as we continue to shape a Malaysian identity for the future of our nation.