IPS Forum on Inclusion That Works: Evidence, Practice and Impact
PANEL 3: THE SCIENCE AND PRACTICE OF REDUCING BIAS

Dialogue in Practice:
Perspectives on Navigating Bias, Difference and Social Cohesion in Singapore

by

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Aim of Presentation

- To share a practitioner's perspective, drawing on my experiences and observations from civil society in Singapore, specifically ground-up initiatives and advocacy in Singapore

- Examine how issues concerning race, religious identity, and intergroup relations are identified and discussed and reflected through dialogue interventions

- How such interventions create opportunities to recognise and critically reflect on biases, reduce prejudice, and contribute to social cohesion.



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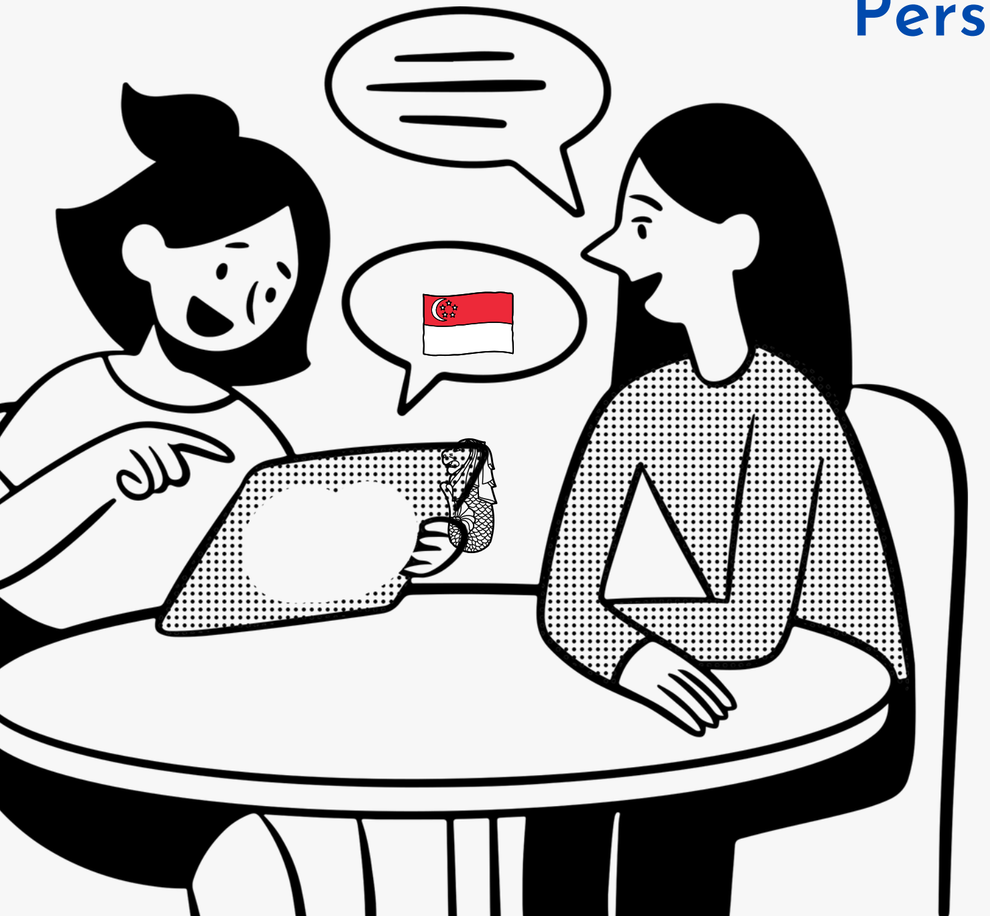

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CONTEXT SETTING

SINGAPORE'S RACIAL & RELIGIOUS HARMONY LANDSCAPE

A Whole-of-Society Ecosystem

1. LEGISLATION & GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Constitutional Foundations

- Article 12 – Equality before the law
- Article 15 – Freedom of religion
- Presidential Council for Minority Rights (PCMR)

Specialised "Harmony" Legislation

- Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA)
- Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act (MRHA 2025)

Penal Code & Consolidated Offences

- Religious & racial offences consolidated under respective Acts

Supporting Laws

- Workplace Fairness Act
- Online Criminal Harms Act (OCHA)
- Public Order Act
- Seditions frameworks

Policy Directions

- Racial and Religious Harmony Policy
- Integration & Multicultural Policies
- Education Policies



2. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)
Leads efforts in community cohesion, multicultural understanding and programmes.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
Safeguards national security and maintains racial & religious harmony through legislation enforcement, outreach and early intervention.

Ministry of Education, Character and Citizen Education Branch
Develops character and citizenship education to nurture respect, empathy and intercultural understanding.

3. GRASSROOTS STRUCTURES

Community Club Management Committees (CCMCs)
Grassroots leadership at the heart of residential communities.

Youth Networks
Youth executive committees and networks that promote interaction, understanding and leadership.

- Malay Activity Executive Committees (MAECs)
- Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs)

Drive programmes and community bonding within Malay/Muslim and Indian communities.

4. CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

Inter-Religious Organisation Singapore (IRO)
Promoting dialogue, understanding and cooperation among faiths.

OnePeople.Sg
Building bonds across races and religions.

Harmony Centre
Empowering communities, strengthening social cohesion.

Roses of Peace
Promoting respect and harmony through initiatives and advocacy.

Interfaith Youth Circle
Creating interfaith friendships and youth-led initiatives.

hash.peace
Facilitating interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding and social action.

Centre of Interfaith Understanding (CIU)
Deepening knowledge and appreciation of faiths and cultures.

5. GOVERNMENT GRANTS & FUNDING SUPPORT

Harmony Fund
Supports initiatives that promote racial and religious harmony and social cohesion.

Our SG Fund
Supports ground-up community projects that bring Singaporeans together.

Multicultural Arts Programme (MAP) Grant
Supports arts and cultural projects that celebrate diversity and strengthen community connections.

Other Government Support
Various agencies provide funding and capability building for programmes that build cohesion.

6. KEY EVENTS & PLATFORMS

Racial and Religious Harmony Month (July)
Nationwide activities, dialogues and programmes that celebrate diversity and promote understanding.

International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS)
Global platform hosted in Singapore to share ideas and build partnerships for cohesive and inclusive societies.

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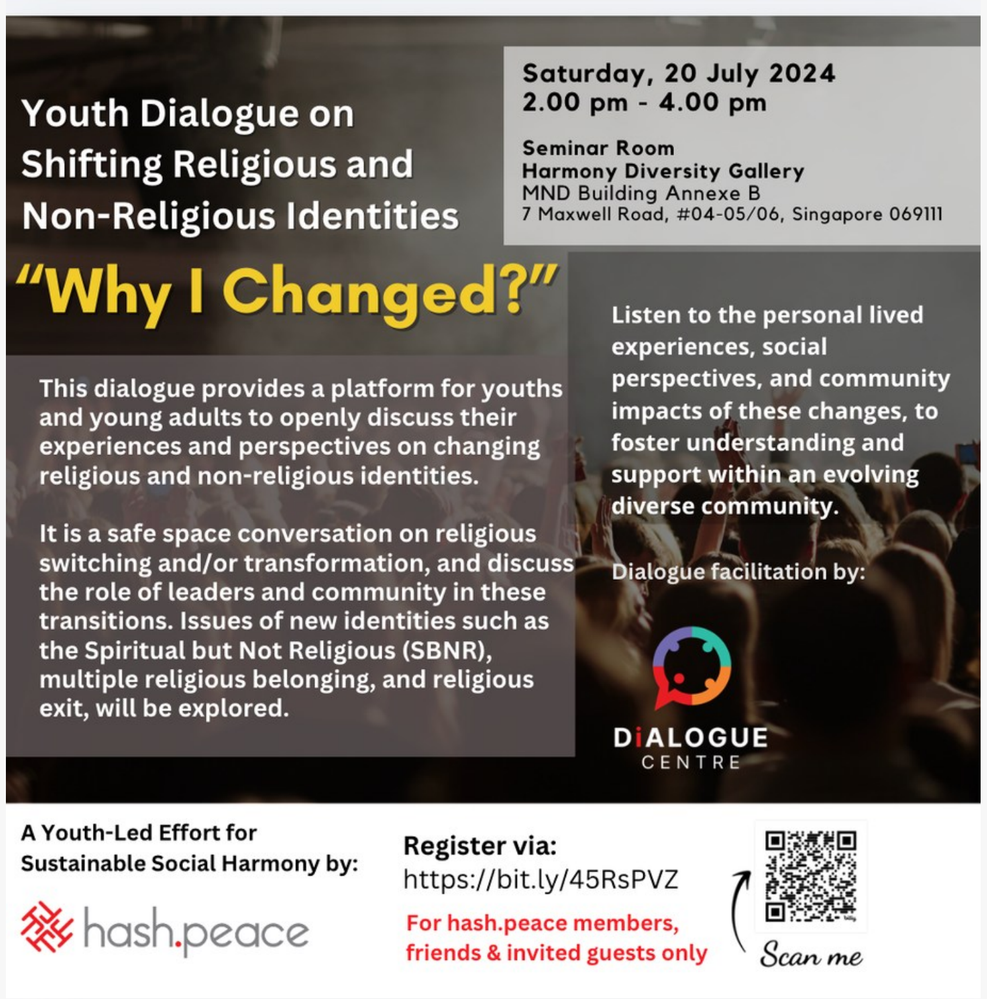
Initiative #1: Reflective Dialogue

Dialogue on Different and Shifting Religious and Non-Religious Identities'





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Initiative #1: Reflective Dialogue

Dialogue on Different and Shifting Religious and Non-Religious Identities'

What prompted the dialogue?
Observations of prejudice, misconceptions, intergroup distance and tensions surrounding religious and non-religious identities.

What did we seek to achieve?
Create a space for youths to share lived experiences, explore differences, question assumptions and reflect on potential biases.

What emerged from the dialogue?
Diverse experiences of religious conversion, leaving religion, finding faith and navigating religious and non-religious identities, including positive and negative encounters.

Reflection and Limitations of Dialogue:
Dialogue can deepen understanding and encourage reflection, but a single encounter has limitations. Participation, facilitation and sustained engagement matter.

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Initiative #2: Exploratory Dialogue

Discourse on Nationality, Localness, Immigration and Cohesion





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Initiative #2: Exploratory Dialogue

Discourse on Nationality, Localness, Immigration and Cohesion

What prompted the dialogue?
Evolving concerns from earlier dialogues and observations of online discourse surrounding immigration, localness, national identity and belonging

What did we seek to achieve?
How youths and young adults experience these tensions in everyday life, and whether sentiments expressed online reflect real-world attitudes and interactions.

What emerged from the dialogue?
Grievances, frustrations and lived experiences shaping perceptions of immigrants and new citizens, including situations where stereotyping, exclusion, racism or xenophobia may manifest.

Reflection and Limitations of Dialogue:
Dialogue can help uncover the underlying grievances, concerns and lived experiences that shape perceptions of other groups, and identify how and when these develop into stereotyping, prejudice, racism or xenophobia.

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Initiative #3: Relational Dialogue

Sowing Care Together Interfaith Dialogue Between Migrant Workers and Young Singaporeans

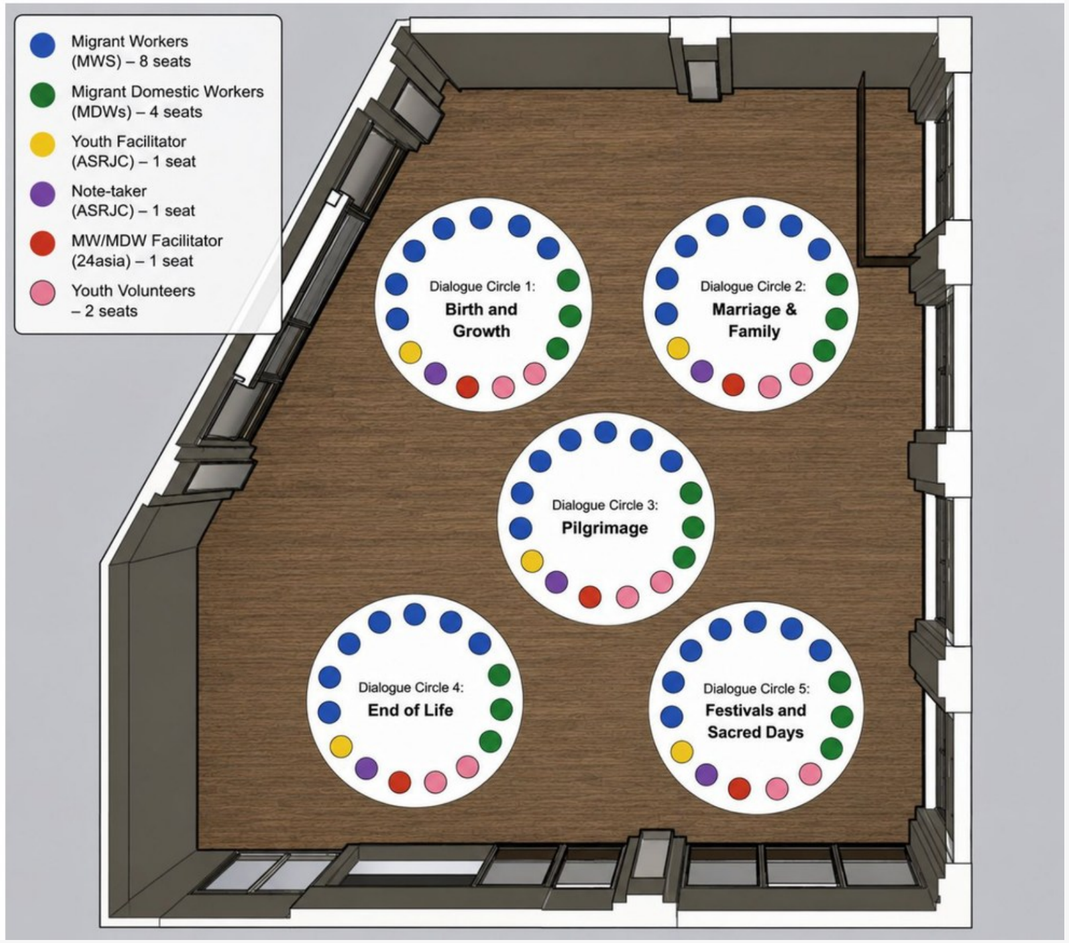





Photo: Hope Initiative Alliance

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Initiative #3: Relational Dialogue

Sowing Care Together Interfaith Dialogue Between Migrant Workers and Young Singaporeans

What prompted the dialogue?
The need to create opportunities for meaningful interaction between migrant workers and young Singaporeans, who may have limited opportunities to engage with one another beyond their usual social environments.

What did we seek to achieve?
Foster inclusion, empathy and mutual understanding through personal encounters, moving beyond perceptions of migrant workers as a separate social group towards recognising shared experiences and individual identities.

What emerged from the dialogue?
Participants shared their beliefs, traditions and lived experiences around family, marriage, festivals and significant life stages. These exchanges revealed the multiple layers of identity beyond nationality or migrant status, allowing participants to recognise one another through shared experiences, cultural differences and individual perspectives.

Reflection and Limitations of Dialogue:
Dialogue can help challenge biases by moving beyond labels such as “migrant worker” and “local Singaporean” to recognise the multiple identities, experiences and commonalities individuals share. This can transform how participants perceive and connect with one another.

Initiative #4: Educational and Relational Dialogue

Religious Literacy and Interfaith Dialogue (Pergas, hash.peace and partners)



MCAS Darul Arqam · cradle · PERGAS · hash.peace · DARUL IHSAN

Religious Literacy Certificate Program

Understanding Funeral Rites in Singapore's Multi-Religious Society

ABOUT THE COURSE:

Singapore is home to people of many religions, cultures, and backgrounds. In everyday life, families, neighbours, and colleagues often come from different faith traditions. This diversity is especially visible at times of loss, when people gather at funerals to grieve, support one another, and show respect to the deceased.

Funeral rites are closely tied to religious beliefs and customs. When these are not well understood, even well-intentioned actions can cause discomfort or offence. This can be more complex in families shaped by mixed marriages, religious conversion, or diverse cultural backgrounds, where different traditions may come together in a single funeral setting.

This programme aims to build religious literacy by offering a basic understanding of funeral rites across major religions in Singapore. It helps participants to know what to expect, how to behave appropriately, and how to offer support with care and sensitivity. The focus is on practical understanding rather than religious teaching, so that individuals can act respectfully while remaining rooted in their own beliefs and values.

At the end of the program, the participants will receive a certificate that would be awarded on 24 May 2026, 2pm - 5pm.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this program, participants will be able to:

- Gain a basic understanding of funeral rites and mourning practices across different religious communities in Singapore
- Recognise similarities and differences in how these religious traditions approach death, grief, and remembrance
- Navigate funeral settings involving different religious communities with respect, sensitivity, and confidence
- Offer appropriate support to families from diverse religious backgrounds, including those shaped by mixed marriages or religious conversion

DATE:
Every Sunday from 5TH April to 3rd May 2026

TIME:
2-4pm (1st Session) & 5-7pm (2nd Session)

VENUE:
PERGAS, 448 Changi Rd, #03-01, Singapore 419975

DAYS	TIME	RELIGION
DAY 1 5 APRIL 2026	2 PM - 3 PM	Course Introduction & Lecture on Topic
	3 PM - 4 PM	Jainism
	5 PM - 7 PM	Baha'i Faith
DAY 2 12 APRIL 2026	2 PM - 4 PM	Buddhism Theravada, Mahayana
	5 PM - 7 PM	Hinduism
DAY 3 19 APRIL 2026	2 PM - 4 PM	Christianity Protestant, Catholic
	5 PM - 7 PM	Judaism
DAY 4 26 APRIL 2026	2 PM - 4 PM	Sikhism
	5 PM - 7 PM	Taoism
DAY 5 3 MAY 2026	2 PM - 4 PM	Islamic Faith (Sunni/Shia)
	4.30 PM - 6 PM	Course Closing & Reflection

https://events.pergas.org.sg/MultiReligiousFuneralRites

Course fees:
SGD200
(Total price included administrative charges is SGD218)

REGISTER NOW

For Enquiries:
PERGAS : info@pergas.org.sg
hash.peace : comms@hashpeace.com



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Initiative #4: Educational and Relational Dialogue

Religious Literacy and Interfaith Dialogue (Pergas, hash.peace and partners)

What prompted the dialogue?
A proactive effort to strengthen religious literacy and understanding of different faith traditions, particularly around sensitive experiences of death, mourning and funeral rites

What did we seek to achieve?
Build knowledge and awareness of ten religious traditions through structured learning and direct engagement with religious leaders, without presuming existing prejudice.

What emerged from the dialogue?
Opportunities to clarify misconceptions, explore different understandings of life, death and the soul, and distinguish religious teachings from cultural practices.

Reflection and Limitations of Dialogue:
Dialogue can complement structured learning and help prevent misunderstandings. However, formal settings and mutually respectful boundaries, while enabling participation, may also limit the depth of engagement and the extent to which underlying biases are surfaced.

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Dialogue as Process and Outcome

- Social distance
- Unawareness
- Differences
- Grievances
- Misconceptions
- Stereotyping
- Bias
- Prejudice



- Connection
- Understanding
- Recognition
- Comfortability
- Empahty
- Inclusion

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Challenges and Limitations

- Limited data on the prevalence and manifestations of prejudice
- Difficulty distinguishing the impact of civil society initiatives in the Singapore context
- Resource constraints in measuring effectiveness
- Preserving the genuineness and safe space promise
- Navigating sensitivities and boundaries
- Engaging groups and issues perceived as sensitive
- Finding new formats of dialogue to appeal to different audience segments and different topics



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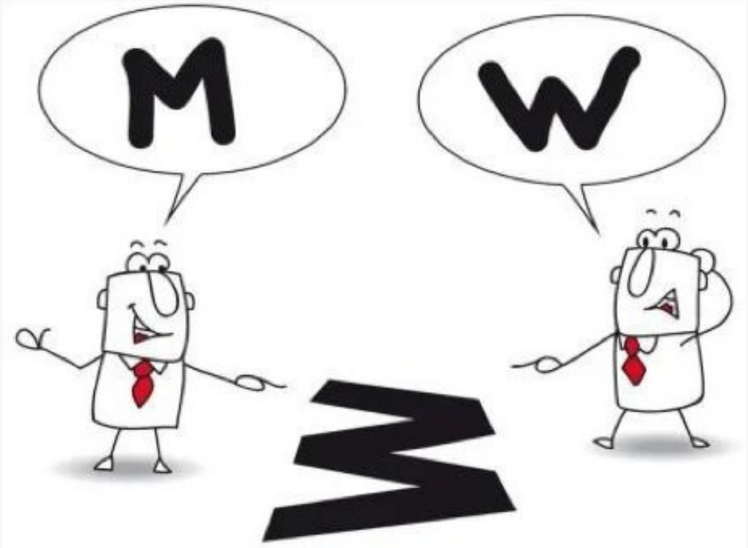
The Practitioner's Perspective

Reducing bias begins with recognising that people's perspectives are shaped by their experiences, and that everyone see the same world differently.



Dialogue creates the space to question, reflect and transform what people think they know about one another

Our mission is to create the space for these dialogues

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