

MUIS Urges Mosques Not To Take Confrontational Stand On LGBT Lifestyles

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SINGAPORE — The Republic's highest Islamic authority has called on mosques "not to adopt a confrontational approach or vilify those who are involved in LGBT lifestyles or in events such as Pink Dot", referring to the annual event that will be held next Saturday at the Speakers' Corner in support of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

In an internal advisory issued to the mosques, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) said it was against the promotion of the LGBT lifestyle, but that "support and help" must be given to those who have been leading the lifestyle or have inclinations towards it.

It said: "We do not agree (or) approve (of) the pervasiveness of the LGBT lifestyle and we cannot agree to the efforts in promoting such a lifestyle. Nevertheless, we have to plan for something which will not only strengthen the resilience of our community to the LGBT lifestyle, but also help those who have been leading this lifestyle abstain from it and, at the same time, help those who have inclinations towards this lifestyle overcome those inclinations by providing support to them."

Programmes conducted in the mosques must also not be seen as a movement to oppose these people, said the advisory which was dated yesterday and signed off by the council's director of religious development, Mr Mohd Murat Aris. The advisory was circulated on social media by Facebook users and MUIS verified its contents when contacted by TODAY.

It also highlighted key points from a pre-Ramadan discussion held by the Office of the Mufti on June 12 for mosque religious officers, social development officers and youth development officers. The session was intended for Mufti Mohamed Fatris Bakaram to provide guidelines on the issue of "building (the Muslim community's) resilience towards the LGBT lifestyle".

For example, the mosques should stress in their Ramadan programmes the pro-family message and the importance of educating family members, so they would not be involved in LGBT-related activities. Nevertheless, the issue should not be the sole focus throughout Ramadan, the Mufti said.

On the non-confrontational approach, MUIS said: "This is first and foremost to avoid them distancing themselves from the religion and the mosque. Secondly, this is to avoid being involved in unnecessary arguments with them, which will impede our long-term efforts (on the issue). At the same time, we also do not want them to get unwanted publicity."

The advisory also asked the mosques “not to be seen as being involved in the crossfire” between the Pink Dot and the Wear White campaign, which was started online by Mr Noor Deros, a 28-year-old Islamic religious teacher.

Mr Noor is calling on Muslims to wear white next Saturday to protest against homosexuality and defend traditional family values. Ramadan begins next Sunday and the first evening prayer to mark the fasting month will be held on the previous day.

Yesterday, Mr Noor reiterated his call for Muslims to wear white to the evening prayer. In a press statement put up on the movement’s website, he said it hopes to continue promoting “family-focused” campaigns throughout the year. He reiterated that the “informal grassroots” movement has “no membership or institutionalised committee”.

The Wear White Facebook page has attracted almost 3,000 likes so far. However, it has also attracted criticism from some social media users for being divisive, especially during Ramadan.

Earlier this week, findings from a survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies showed that Muslims and Protestant Christians feel most strongly about moral issues such as homosexual sex, sex before marriage, adoption of children by gay couples and gambling.

Yesterday, Faith Community Baptist Church (FCBC) senior pastor Lawrence Khong declared his support for the Wear White campaign. He said the FCBC and LoveSingapore network of churches will also encourage their members to wear white next weekend as a show of support. “I’m so happy Singapore’s Muslim community is making a vocal and visual stand for morality and family,” he said.

Last month, the Ministry of Social and Family Development rejected an application by an affiliate of TOUCH Community Services — which was founded by Mr Khong — to hold a pro-family event at the Padang. Participants had been asked to wear red to the event, which was to be held on June 28, the same day as Pink Dot.