

**CLOSING REMARKS BY MR ZAINUDIN NORDIN CHAIRMAN,
ONEPEOPLE.SG AT THE IPS-ONEPEOPLE.SG FORUM ON
INDICATORS OF RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY ON
WEDNESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2013 AT THE GRASSROOTS CLUB**

Good Morning

Mr Janadas Devan, Director, Institute of Policy Studies

Fellow Board Members of OnePeople.sg

Distinguished Panel Members

Mr Zulkifli Baharudin

Mr Viswa Sadasivan

Professor Kwok Kian Woon

Assoc Professor Eugene Tan

Community and Religious Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased that we have so many of you taking time off your busy schedules to participate in today's forum. I found the dialogue thought provoking and I must commend our panel members, moderator and all of you for such an engaging session.

2 In the past, such public engagements would have been rare as race relations is something which not everyone talked about openly. And the rule of thumb was, the lesser you spoke about it; the better. In

contrast today's forum shows a different picture, a measure of how far we have come as a society.

3 When OnePeople.sg was launched in May 2007, I made a call for us to be the loudest voice on racial harmony. I am heartened to see OnePeople.sg making inroads working closely with community and religious groups, government agencies and think tanks like Institute of Policy Studies in championing the cause ground up.

4 Harmonious community relations is not just a measure of how effective the government is in maintaining stability. True harmony resides in the culture of the people. It is about how we treat fellow members of our society with respect and dignity; regardless of skin colour, religion or origins. Government policy can't make you say "hello" to your neighbour. Each one of us has to do that. At the end of the day, racial and religious harmony boils down to individual attitudes. This is why at OnePeople.sg we believe strongly that we need to go beyond the surface in addressing issues of race and religious relations. We should not skirt around things that matter. Be it racism, discrimination or prejudice, let's talk about it with an open and mature mindset and let's understand each other better. We believe that to build harmony; dialogue must be a way of life.

5 Singapore's social landscape is changing considerably. The way we communicate has vastly changed from old to new media and now we have a greater number of new migrants living amongst us who bring their own language, culture and lifestyle. In short, we now live in an era of a new norm. The greatest threat to peace is when we ignore fault lines. Hence, it is important for us to look at race and religious relations deeply from time to time, and ascertain where we stand and what we need to do to move forward. It is with this in mind that OnePeople.sg teamed up with Institute of Policy Studies to conduct the baseline study, "Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony".

6 I would like to take this opportunity to point out three features about the study. Firstly, the study tells us there is more to racial harmony than just tolerance. Racial and Religious Harmony is underpinned by greater ideals such as respect, understanding, friendship and trust essentially between two groups; the majority and the minority. And as you have seen, these can range from intercultural understanding to perceptions of discrimination and exclusion. The key to harmony is often how the minority perceives as being equally treated as compared to the majority on these issues.

7 Second, by creating indicators that gauge racial and religious relations, we have a fresh reference point since the racial riots. We now have a framework in which we can leverage on to build community ties and these indicators can be monitored regularly to assess our efforts. And third, perhaps more significantly, the study identifies strengths and gaps which gives us an opportunity to take a closer look at our attitudes, policies, programmes and initiatives in strengthening community relations.

8 I am heartened by the results of the study. After close to 50 years of nation building, it is encouraging to see that the study brings out rather strong positives. The study clearly demonstrates that Singaporeans value multiracialism. Singaporeans understand that we can learn from different racial and religious groups. It is certainly pleasing to note that our top indicator was absence of minority discrimination in the use of public services. This is not a norm in many other countries. And though we may have witnessed ugly incidents of racism recently, generally, most Singaporeans do not feel inter-racial or inter-religious tension in their daily lives. This is a testament of our pride in being a multi-racial and multi-religious society. It also goes to show the hard work that has been put in by grassroots organisations, community and religious stakeholders and ground up institutions,

working side by side with the government to keep multiracialism alive in Singapore.

9 While the results of the study are encouraging, there are certain gaps which we have to pay close attention to. Significantly, there is a gap between attitude and action. There is certainly more we can do to put racial and religious harmony into practice such as having close friends from a different race or religion, taking an interest in the cultures of others and looking at minority perceptions at workplaces, especially when it comes to perceptions of discrimination in applying for jobs or gaining access to top jobs. While this is a perception, it is worthwhile for employers to take heed of why minorities may feel this way.

10 I would urge all of you to use this study to build on strengths, address concerns and bridge gaps. As employers, policy makers, community stakeholders, and as individuals, we need to look hard at the data and make sense of what we are doing. If we are reinforcing our strengths, it is a good thing. But the more fundamental question we have to ask is - are we addressing gaps and make concerted efforts to do so.

11 OnePeople.sg together with our partners IPS have started engaging stakeholders and educators on the study. We will be using this study as a continued basis of dialogue and wherever possible spur

action. We will also be keen to work with you on any ideas you may have. We are all together in this journey. Let us work together with resolve and as individuals, and as a community, take our race and religious relations beyond tolerance.

12 On this note, I would like to thank once again our distinguished panel members and my fellow Board Member Gerald Singham for moderating the forum. I would also like to thank Janadas Devan and the team at IPS who have worked with us with hand in hand along this entire journey. I would also like to show my appreciation to my fellow Board Members and staff who have made this effort possible. Last but not least, I wish to thank our principal researcher from IPS and Board Member, Dr Mathew Mathews for his tireless efforts.

13 Let this dialogue not be the end but the spark of meaningful conversations and positive actions. I would like to leave you with this quote from Mahatma Gandhi, “be the change you wish to see in this world”.

Thank you.