

**CHRISTIAN FEDERATION OF MALAYSIA
(PERSEKUTUAN KRISTIAN MALAYSIA)**

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(This is the New Year message which was to be delivered by Bishop Datuk Ng Moon Hing, chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, as an expression of CFM's concerns to the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia at a lunch hosted by the Prime Minister on 4 January 2012. However, Bishop Datuk Ng was not given the opportunity to present this formally at the lunch.)

YAB Perdana Menteri Dato' Sri Hj. Mohd. Najib bin Tun Razak, Tan Sri-Tan Sri, Datuk-Datuk and distinguished guests.

Happy New Year! Greetings and Best Wishes to all who are present. We thank you for extending your kind hospitality to us in organising this lunch.

Christians have been experiencing a roller coaster year since 2010 that has been fraught with both blessings and painful encounters. This meeting at your invitation has given us an opportunity to reflect over the past events and especially the Christmas Hi-Tea of 2010 where you graced our function with your presence and the luncheon in May of last year where you played gracious host to us.

We thank you for always encouraging us to be frank with you. We welcome more opportunities for constructive and open dialogue on a regular basis and not just in times of crisis only. Our counterparts from Sabah and Sarawak have also reminded us of the meaningful meetings that they had with you.

There has been a passage of time since our last meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate some of the points which we had raised with you. However, due to the constraints of time today, we will only refer to the relevant memoranda that had been submitted previously and highlight some recent developments in the past year.

The issues that concern all non-Muslims including Christians which have been raised over the years are summarised in the following documents:

1. Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) memorandum entitled "RESPECT THE RIGHT TO PROFESS AND PRACTICE ONE'S RELIGION" dated 25 October 2005 and revised in a document entitled "UNITY THREATENED BY CONTINUING INFRINGEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM" dated 15 June 2007. The issues mentioned here include –
 - 1.1. The refusal of civil courts to adjudicate cases where the Islamic ingredient is present.
 - 1.2. Conversion cases that cause hardships to families.
 - 1.3. Land for places of worship and burial grounds.
 - 1.4. Lack of consultation on issues which affect non-Muslims.
2. Christian Federation of Malaysia's memorandum via a letter dated 21 December 2010 handed to you at the Christmas Hi-Tea in 2010 which include the following issues:
 - 2.1. Standard policy for places of worship, land for worship, cemetery, foreign religious workers, etc.
 - 2.2. Standard policy for schools and education policy. (*In this regard, we want our mission schools to maintain its character and the management and operations should be under our control*).
 - 2.3. Tax exemption status for religious organisations and charities, welfare centres and homes.
 - 2.4. To have a Minister in charge of religious affairs (in particular for religions other than Islam)
 - 2.5. Freedom of publications and usage of religious / Scripture books of each religion.
 - 2.6. The lifting of the ban on the usage of the word 'Allah' in the whole nation. (*In particular, the lack of resolution of the Herald, Jill Ireland and SIB Sabah court cases*).

Whilst some issues have been attended to after decades of having been repeatedly raised, there seems to be an inertia in resolving all remaining issues constructively and expeditiously.

We wish to express the frustration of our churches and all Christians in having to deal with lengthy bureaucratic red tape and ever-changing goal posts. We have exhausted meetings at the highest ministerial level and have made attempts to dialogue at various levels and yet we often find the most effective means for action to be taken is when the issues are raised in the public sphere.

Apart from the above, additional problems have arisen in the past year that have added to the pain and disappointment of Christians. We have witnessed unprecedented incidences where Christians have been made victims of unwarranted and unfounded accusations, vilifications, insults, even police reports and have indeed been made to suffer because of certain actions.

We would have expected our political leaders and the relevant authorities including the police to have contained and refuted the allegations in the interest of national harmony and unity and yet their silence seems to be acquiescence and further condemnation of our Christian community. What more we see the official organs of government including government-controlled media being used for this purpose with impunity.

We also note that many of the past as well as present issues are based on a selective reading of the Federal Constitution that is intentionally used to legitimise discriminatory laws and practices which favours one community over another. We reiterate that the Federal Constitution guarantees equal rights for all Malaysians. In particular, there should not be a denial of public space nor an encroachment of religious freedom.

Given the enormity of the issues facing non-Muslims, together with our partners in MCCBCHST, we reiterate our proposal for the setting up of a Ministry of Non-Islamic Affairs to safeguard and protect the interests and rights of the non-Muslims. This is merely a first step as we are not naïve to assume that all issues can be resolved by this single Ministry. It requires the commitment and collaboration of all other Ministries and organs of government. We hope that there will be maximum consultation in respect of the structure and operations of the Ministry.

The Government should respect the High Court decision in the *Herald* case with regard to the use of the word *Allah* and begin the process of dismantling laws, regulations, policies, guidelines and directives which restrict and prohibit other religions from the use of the word *Allah* and other words.

We thank you for making the time and effort to meet with us. We would, however, like to see substantial breakthroughs achieved during the term of your office in particular in the areas that we have highlighted above and also in the widening of public space for freedom of expression, a fair electoral process and the continuous eradication of corruption.

Our Christian churches have often kept your administration and the Government in our prayers. We always pray that our leaders will be rightly guided by Almighty God to administer and govern with righteousness, fairness, justice and wisdom.

There is a very wide and alarming disconnect between what you intend to happen and what is happening on the ground. The policy of moderation which you uphold does not seem to have filtered down to all levels of government. If left unchecked, it would be murdering and destroying your own vision of moderation and goodwill among Malaysians which you have espoused.

We are pained by those ugly manifestations which trample upon moderation. We Christians would like to work with the Government for the sake of our beloved Malaysia. In the spirit of *Muhibbah* we would like to bring the gift of peace to this country.

May God bless you and the country for the well-being of all Malaysians!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ng Moon Hing", with a small cross symbol to the left.

Bishop Datuk Ng Moon Hing
Chairman and the Executive Committee,
Christian Federation of Malaysia