

## Religious leaders stand in solidarity against extremism



The Mufti of Singapore, Dr Fatris Bakaram (in grey), greeting leaders of Singapore's major faiths at a tea reception, in celebration of Hari Raya Puasa, at the Harmony Centre in Bishan yesterday. PHOTO: BERITA HARIAN

### Muneerah Ab Razak

Singapore's religious leaders, including Muslim leader Mufti Fatris Bakaram, have called for solidarity in countering the propaganda and divisive messages of extremist groups and individuals.

Their call comes amid the latest attack by extremists in France where a Catholic priest was killed in a church by two men whose deeds were reportedly claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Said Dr Fatris: "We must be vigilant, because those who abuse religion for their own violent and supremacist conduct can tear the social fabric of our multi-religious and multicultural society."

He was speaking at an interfaith tea reception yesterday to celebrate Hari Raya Puasa, which took place earlier this month.

Held at the Harmony Centre in An-Nahdhah Mosque in Bishan, it was attended by representatives of Singapore's 10 major faiths.

Urging unity by everyone, he added: "It is a collective responsibility. It is our shared humanity and common universal values of peace and justice that require us to speak up and stand together - as a united front in rejecting violence in all its manifestation."

He also said "we are truly aggrieved" by the murder of 86-year-old Father Jacques Hamel.

Similarly, the Catholic Church said yesterday that cruel acts like Father Jacques' killing "are designed to instil fear and divisiveness in our society".

"It behoves us as governments, organisations and individuals to stand together to do everything we can to protect our unity and our way of life," it added in a statement.

Agreeing, Venerable Shi Chuan Guan, of the Singapore Buddhist Federation, said: "While we have the Harmony Centre, led by the Muslim faith, the fight against extremism is the responsibility of all the 10 faiths."

Dr Fatris, in his speech, noted the increasingly diverse make-up of Singapore: "Our diversity is a source of wealth and richness that can push us forward to build that trust and confidence to face such atrocities."

He also saw the need to educate the young with knowledge beyond their own faith. Hence, the Harmony Centre plans to introduce programmes next year to enable greater interaction among youth of different faiths.

"This will ensure (these youth leaders) will also build their own interfaith network to continue the work started by their senior leaders in promoting goodwill, discussion and engagement on religious values in a modern world," said Dr Fatris.