



KEMENTERIAN PERPADUAN NEGARA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**YB DATUK AARON AGO DAGANG
MINISTER OF NATIONAL UNITY**

IN CONJUNCTION

**THE GREAT PILGRIMAGE OF HOPE
(DIOCESE OF PENANG)**

27 NOVEMBER 2025 (THURSDAY)

4.00 PM

**THE LIGHT HOTEL, SEBERANG JAYA
PULAU PINANG**

Salam Sejahtera and Good Evening

SALUTATIONS

*(*latest salutations will provided seperately)*

OPENING REMARKS

1. To all the distinguished delegates gathered here today, it is a great honour for me to address this esteemed assembly at **The Great Pilgrimage of Hope 2025**. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences for organizing this meaningful event, and to the Catholic Diocese of Penang for graciously hosting this fraternal gathering in Penang, Malaysia.
2. The Ministry of National Unity extends our sincere appreciation to **Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)** for selecting Penang, a city that has long stood as a symbol of coexistence, shared heritage, and mutual respect as the host for this gathering.
3. I am happy to note that after 19 years since the first Asian Mission Congress in Chiangmai, Thailand 2006, the Great Pilgrimage of Hope has chosen Penang as its venue in 2025. Today we are blessed with the **presence of 777 delegates here from all over Asia**. Malaysia welcomes representations from **24**

Asian countries as well as from the **Holy See, Australia, Europe, and beyond.** Your presence here is a testament to the universality of faith and the shared commitment to deepening the spirituality of your collective Catholic journey.

4. This year's theme, **“Journeying together as peoples of Asia... and they went a different way”** (Mt 2:12), resonates profoundly with Malaysia's own path in managing diversity and fostering harmony within a multireligious society. Our nation's journey has been one of constant learning, negotiation, and engagement, rooted in the belief that **diversity is not an obstacle, but a source of strength.** Through sustained dialogue, structured policies, and active community participation, Malaysia nurtures trust, empathy, and shared responsibility within its diverse citizenry.

THE UNIQUENESS OF MALAYSIA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Malaysia stands as one of the **most diverse countries** in the world, a true salad bowl of languages, faiths, and cultures. Our population, **numbering over thirty-five million, represents more than 200 sub-ethnic groups**, each contributing unique traditions, values, and practices. This diversity is not simply a

characteristic of our nation; it is its strength, the wellspring of resilience and creativity. Our national motto, engraved on the Jata Negara (Malaysian Coat of Arms), “**Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu**” (**Unity is Strength**), reminds us that **unity is not an abstract aspiration but the source of collective progress and national pride.**

6. While the phrase Unity in Diversity is often invoked, I have increasingly emphasized the concept of **Harmony in Diversity**. Harmony is the fundamental pillar upon which lasting unity rests. Without harmony, unity remains superficial. Harmony fosters trust, nurtures empathy, and allows people from different backgrounds to see each other not as strangers or competitors, but as partners in the shared endeavour of nation-building.

7. The Ministry of National Unity’s work is guided by the National Unity Policy 2021–2030 focuses on cultivating a national identity that is inclusive, cohesive, and grounded in shared values. Our aim is not merely to maintain peace, but to foster deep, **meaningful harmony between communities, and to translate this harmony into tangible collaboration, empathy, and collective progress.**

8. This is where the philosophy of **Faham (Understand), Hormat (Respect), Terima (Accept), Meraikan (Celebrate)** comes to life. We must **Faham—understand** the lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns of others. We must **Hormat—show respect** not only for their beliefs and practices but for their dignity as human beings. We must **Terima—accept** differences without resentment or fear, allowing diversity to enrich our collective identity. And we must **Meraikan—celebrate** those differences, acknowledging that the vibrancy of Malaysia lies in the diversity of its peoples, traditions, and faiths. These are not abstract ideals; they are guiding principles that shape daily life, inform our policies, and inspire us to act with conscience and courage.

9. Our efforts span multiple dimensions, strengthening social cohesion through initiatives such as Rukun Tetangga (neighbourhood watch), the preservation and celebration of our rich cultural and religious heritage, and promotion of structured interfaith and intercultural dialogues. We continue to empower civil society, NGOs, and faith leaders through Interfaith Dialogues, cultural exchange programmes, Harmony Walk, and various community-based engagements.

10. Malaysia is also emerging as a leading example in Asia by introducing **Community Mediation Programmes supported by 603 trained mediators**, equipped to address tensions before

they escalate and to nurture deeper understanding within communities. In addition, **we have established 10 Community Mediation Centres nationwide to strengthen grassroots conflict-resolution mechanisms.**

11. Through the Ministry's support of Harmony Committees, places of worship become hubs of cooperation rather than isolation, venues where collaborative celebration, shared community service, and mutual respect are woven into daily practice.

A SHARED SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Across all major faiths, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, and others - the universal values of compassion, justice, peace, and mutual respect shine through. Romans 12:18 reminds us that "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." This mirrors Malaysia's own national philosophy. Our faith communities are not passive observers but active nation-builders, advancing peace and understanding through service, youth development, charity, and interfaith collaboration. They create the social trust and moral stability that anchor our society.

13. **Religion and unity are not separate ideals; they are deeply interconnected, and neither can be imposed by force.** Both must be nurtured through education, through example, and through lived experience. Religious institutions therefore carry immense responsibility: they shape moral consciousness, influence behaviour, and cultivate empathy across generations. Through teachings, guidance, community outreach, and interfaith engagement, they help dispel misconceptions, reduce prejudice, and foster a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

14. When religious leaders champion moderation, inclusion, and peaceful coexistence, they uplift the spiritual integrity of the nation. They guide community away from fear and division, and towards courage, compassion, and shared purpose.

CLOSING REMARKS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. I stand inspired by the transformative work of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in fostering interreligious understanding, dialogue, and peace across Asia. Christianity, with its timeless teachings on compassion, justice, and service to others, continues to guide communities toward the common

good, reminding us of the power of faith to shape society and nurture moral responsibility.

16. It is a call to action for all of us to engage in meaningful cooperation with FABC, Malaysia, Asian and the Holy See, to cultivate youth leadership rooted in empathy and solidarity, to advance community service initiatives founded upon humanitarian values, and to share knowledge on dialogue facilitation and the prevention of conflict at every level of society.

17. May this Great Pilgrimage inspire renewed friendships, deeper reflection, and a strengthened commitment to peace throughout Asia.

Terima kasih, Thank you.