



MINISTRY OF NATIONAL UNITY

OFFICIATING ADDRESS BY

**YB DATO SRI AARON AGO DAGANG
MINISTER OF NATIONAL UNITY**

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE

**THE OPENING
THE FIRST MALAYSIA PASTORAL
CONVENTION 2026**

10th SEPTEMBER 2026

**KINGWOOD HOTEL
SIBU SARAWAK**

Good Morning, Salam Perpaduan and Salam Malaysia
MADANI

SALUTATION

**latest salutation will provide separately*

INTRODUCTION

1. It is a great privilege and honour for me to be here in Sibuan for the **Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 (MPC2026)**, a landmark gathering of the Catholic community from across Malaysia.
2. This Convention is especially significant as it represents the **first national Catholic gathering of this scale since the formation of Malaysia in 1963**, while continuing a much longer journey of faith and service that traces its **roots to the arrival of Christian missionaries in Borneo in 1881**.
3. Today, MPC2026 brings together approximately **850 faithful from nine dioceses** across the three regions of Malaysia: **Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak**.
4. I have been informed the **theme** of this convention is **“Celebrate, Listen, Walk Together.”** I believe this theme

carries a message that is highly relevant not only to the life of the Church, but also to the Malaysian journey. **It reminds us of the importance of recognizing and appreciating the diversity that shapes our nation, of creating space for genuine dialogue, and of strengthening the bonds that enable us to move forward together despite our differences.**

5. Therefore, this Convention is not only an opportunity for the Catholic community to strengthen its faith and fellowship, but also an important occasion to reflect on how **religious communities can continue to contribute towards a more harmonious, inclusive and united Malaysia.**

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALL TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. **At the heart of Christianity is a profound teaching: to love our neighbour as ourselves.** This principle extends beyond the practice of faith, it speaks to the way we relate to one another and, ultimately, to the kind of society we seek to build. In a diverse country such as Malaysia, this spirit of

respect, compassion and mutual care is fundamental to the strength of our social fabric.

7. Malaysia today is home to approximately 34.4 million people, while the 2020 Population and Housing Census recorded some 2.9 million Christians, representing 9.1 per cent of the population. Sarawak has the largest Christian population in the country. These figures reflect the significant place of the Christian community within our national landscape.

8. For generations, the Catholic community has contributed meaningfully to the development of Malaysia, particularly through education, healthcare, social welfare, charitable work and service to communities in need. These contributions form an important part of our shared national journey.

9. More fundamentally, they demonstrate that faith has a role to play beyond the walls of places of worship. Religious conviction, at its best, inspires service, compassion, responsibility and concern for the wellbeing of others. When faith communities reach out to the vulnerable, strengthen families, educate the young and serve society without regard to race or religion, they contribute not only to the wellbeing of

their communities, but also to the unity and resilience of the nation.

10. **This spirit of neighbourliness is closely aligned with the work of the Ministry of National Unity in strengthening social cohesion at the grassroots level.**

Through the **Kawasan Rukun Tetangga**, we provide a platform for Malaysians of diverse backgrounds to come together, foster meaningful relationships and cultivate a shared sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities.

11. Its strength lies in the simple yet powerful principle of neighbourliness, **knowing one another, looking out for one another and working together for the common good.**

Over the years, the Rukun Tetangga model has also received international recognition for its contribution to community engagement and social cohesion, reflecting Malaysia's longstanding commitment to building unity from the ground up.

12. This is where the values of faith and the aspirations of national unity meet. Whether through the Church, the Rukun Tetangga or other community institutions, the principle is the same, **unity begins with how we treat the person next to**

us. Before we speak of building a united nation, we must first build trust between neighbours, families and communities.

MALAYSIA'S DIVERSITY, OUR SALAD BOWL AND OUR STRENGTH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. Malaysia's diversity is one of our greatest strengths. **I often describe Malaysia not as a melting pot, but as a salad bowl.** In a salad bowl, every ingredient retains its identity, but together the ingredients create something richer. That is Malaysia.

14. We do not need to become the same to be united. A Malaysian can be Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazan-Dusun, Orang Asli or from any other community and still be fully Malaysian. **We can practise different religions, speak different languages and celebrate different traditions, while sharing one country and one future. As Scripture reminds us in Psalm 133:1, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.”**

15. But diversity alone does not create unity. **Diversity is what we inherit, unity is what we build.**

16. We have already seen what Malaysians can achieve together. During floods and other crises, Malaysians help one another without first asking about race or religion. Communities come together, volunteers serve, and neighbours support neighbours. These moments show us that when Malaysians stand together, **our differences do not weaken us, they strengthen us.**

17. However, **we face three challenges: prejudice, misinformation and distance between communities.** We sometimes judge people we have never met, allow stereotypes to shape our views, or believe information simply because it confirms what we already think. Social media can bring us closer, but it can also create suspicion and division.

18. **The answer is not simply tolerance. We must move from tolerance to understanding, from understanding to respect, from respect to trust, and from trust to cooperation.**

19. This is where religious leaders have a critical role. You shape values, influence families and guide young people. You can build bridges where others build walls. Let our different religious communities not only meet for dialogue, but work together to help the poor, support families, respond to

disasters, care for the environment and guide our young people.

OUR SHARED COMMITMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. **Building a strong Negara Bangsa is a shared national responsibility.** For the Ministry of National Unity, our role is to strengthen the foundations of a Malaysia where every citizen has a sense of belonging, every community is respected, and our diversity contributes to national strength.

21. However, unity cannot be achieved by Government alone. Policies and programmes can provide the framework, but the substance of unity is built through the relationships, trust and shared experiences that connect Malaysians in their everyday lives. This is why the commitment of our religious communities is so important to the nation-building process.

22. As Scripture reminds us in **Ephesians 4:3, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”** This is a powerful reminder that unity does not happen by itself, it requires commitment, patience and a willingness to understand and respect one another.

23. Our shared commitment must now be to deepen the sense of **belonging to one Malaysian family**. This means creating a society in which differences are not merely accommodated, but understood as part of our national character, where disagreements can be managed with maturity and respect, and where every community sees the success and wellbeing of others as part of our own.

24. As we approach Malaysia Day, let us remember that **our founding fathers gave us Malaysia, our responsibility is to strengthen it.**

25. I therefore hope that this Convention will renew our collective commitment to that journey. May the spirit of **“Celebrate, Listen, Walk Together”** extend beyond this gathering and inspire a deeper sense of responsibility towards the country we share. If we can strengthen that common commitment, we will not only strengthen our individual communities, but also build a more cohesive **Negara Bangsa**, one that is confident in its diversity, united in purpose and prepared to face the future together.

With these words, and with great pleasure, **I hereby officially declare the Malaysia Pastoral Convention 2026 open.**

May this Convention be blessed with meaningful deliberations, fruitful exchanges and renewed fellowship, and may it contribute towards a stronger Church, a stronger community and a more united Malaysia.

Selamat menyambut Hari Malaysia, and may God bless us all.

Thank You.