

# **Asma Binti Abu Bakar and the Hadith on Inter-Religious Relations: Perspectives in Contemporary Societies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to analyse a rarely discussed hadith narrated by Asma Binti Abu Bakar on inter-religious relations and the role that Islamic religious leadership play in building social harmony and cohesion in the context of contemporary societies. Comparatively, it analysed the model of inter-religious relations in contemporary societies from the global standpoint and within Muslim-majority Indonesia and Muslim-minority Singapore, with a focus on laws and its social impacts. This library-based study is based on a qualitative approach. Primary data was obtained from hadith and Quranic texts, and national laws and statutes, while secondary data was obtained from current research and reports pertaining to the inter-religious relations. The normative approach is engaged in analysing prevalent laws. A descriptive-comparative-deductive approach was used in discussion of the results. The results of the study indicate that in the context of contemporary and religiously and ethnically diverse societies, the constitution and national laws need to be clear, and all-encompassing for the community, without specific reference to certain groups. For Muslims, this early hadith on inter-religious relations demonstrated the Prophet's (PBUH) stance and the Islamic approach towards inter-religious relations. There are valuable lessons from this hadith that applies to the Muslim leadership and community. Authorities and the Islamic religious leadership need to play active roles in promoting positive inter-religious relations. Corresponding social strategies need to be contextualised to the setting to manage differences and complexities.

**Keywords:** Inter-religious relations, law, social impacts

## Introduction

Inter-religious relations in contemporary societies vary, and range between one that is tumultuous, tolerant, or one that is reflective of peace and harmony. A peaceful and harmonious utopia is not without challenges and corresponding strategies such as governance systems, national laws and regulations to align its people towards the common goal. The concept and demands of freedom of religion and positive inter-religious relations may differ in application, and this is dependent on the geographical structure, political environment, social ideology, and the distribution of communities within its population. Additionally, power imbalance may be present among the majority and minority, if the constitutional or legal framework is lacking or not applied consistently to reflect justice and equality.

Islam placed great emphasis on justice and positive values and virtues, as exemplified through the conduct, character and mannerisms of Muhammad (PBUH) and how he interacts with others that he encountered in his lifetime. In the early days of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had already set an example for governance and leadership in a diverse society comprising of multi-ethnic and multi-faith groups. He had also led the way in raising the social status of women in a male-dominated and patriarchal society by giving women rights to education, economic security, and to be involved in educational and political activities. This was the era of women who became hadith narrators and transmitters, and were active participants in the spread of prophetic traditions and Islamic knowledge. One of these lesser-known but important contributors of hadith is Asma Binti Abu Bakar, daughter of Abu Bakar, one of the Prophet's closest companions. Asma was known to have transmitted and narrated a total of 209 hadiths,<sup>1</sup> and is also recognised as one of the women hadith transmitters among the Shi'ite community.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Nadia, Zunly. 2017. "Women Political Participation in the Era of Prophet Muhammad: Study on the Hadith Transmitters of the Women Companions." *Al-Albab* 6 (1): 55. <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v6i1.608>.

2. Al-Islam.com. n.d. "Asma' Bint Abi Bakr." *Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project 1995-2024*. Accessed April 1, 2024. <https://www.al-islam.org/shiah-women-transmitters-hadith-nahla-gharavi-naeeni/9-asma-bint-abi-bakr>.

Interestingly, one rarely-discussed authentic hadith which was narrated by Asma and reported in Bukhari and Muslim was on the Prophet's (PBUH) approach on relations between a Muslim and non-Muslim. This hadith was one of the earliest hadith on inter-religious relations and it was narrated during a time of turmoil between the Muslims and non-Muslims of Mecca.

This study was conducted as there was very limited research on Asma Binti Abu Bakar with regards to the significance of this hadith on inter-religious relations and its relevance when applied in modern and diverse populations. There is also a lack of comparative studies on inter-religious relations from the perspectives of contemporary societies. Hence the objective of this study is to analyse the hadith on inter-religious relations and, secondly, to review the global and country-based approach towards inter-religious relations, focusing on the prevalent constitution, laws and its sociological impacts and the role that the Islamic religious leadership play in promoting cohesion and harmony. The comparative country-based approach is from the perspective of Muslim-majority Indonesia, and Muslim-minority Singapore.

## **Method**

This library-based, qualitative study was conducted via online and physical libraries. This study uses primary data consisting of the hadith books, the Qur'an, and national law and statutes, and secondary data consisting of relevant studies and research published. Data is sourced from libraries in Singapore and other online libraries and databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar. The normative approach is used in comparing the current landscape of inter-religious relations and corresponding laws in contemporary societies, with a focus on its application in the global context, and in a Muslim-dominant Indonesia and a Muslim-minority Singapore. This study uses the descriptive-comparative-deductive approach for the observation and analysis of data. Emergent patterns were identified with regards to the prevalent laws and its implications as there were applied in these countries.

## **Result and Discussion**

The biography of Asma Binti Abu Bakar highlighted the status of women hadith narrators in the Prophet's (PBUH) time and their significant

contribution to the spread of Islam. Positive inter-religious relations had always been important in building social peace, cohesion, and harmony as demonstrated in the following sections.

## **1. Biography of Asma Binti Abu Bakar**

Asma Binti Abu Bakar played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam. Born approximately 27 years before the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina, Asma's parents were Abu Bakar Ibn Abi Quhafah, one of Prophet Muhammad's closest confidante and companion, and his wife, Qutailah, which he subsequently divorced, as she had remained a non-believer.<sup>3</sup> Asma's affiliation with Islam was early as her family members were closest to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Asma's sister is Aisha, the Prophet's (PBUH) wife.<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, Asma became one of the first to declare herself as a Muslim and experienced the struggles and challenges of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and her father, Abu Bakar, along with the other companions.<sup>5</sup>

Asma was always close to the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions due to familial association. Subsequently, Asma married Zubair, one of Prophet's companions. The couple had seven offspring, who were Abdullah Bin Zubair, who subsequently became a scholar, caliph, leader, warrior and martyr who governed the Muslims from Makkah; Urwah Bin Zubair, a great scholar, and Mundzir, Muhajir, Khadijah, Ummu Hasan and Aisha.<sup>6</sup>

In her lifetime, Asma was known to be resourceful, trustworthy, generous, resilient, pious, and charitable.<sup>7</sup> She was also known to be active in healing and was an educator, often sharing her knowledge with others<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, Asma was central in the development and spread of Islam in Mecca and Medina. She kept the whereabouts of the Prophet (PBUH)

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3. As Suwaidan, Tareq. 2022. "The Lady of the Two Belts: Asma Binti Abu Bakar." In *60 Great Women Enshrined in Islamic History*, Third, 208–14. Malaysia: Dakwah Corners Bookstore (M) Sdn Bhd.

4. Al-Sibai, Amal. 2017. "Legendary Women – Asmaa Bint Abi Bakr." *Saudi Gazette*, March 17, 2017. <https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/174962>.

5. Nadia, Zunly. 2017. "Women Political Participation in the Era of Prophet Muhammad: Study on the Hadith Transmitters of the Women Companions." *Al-Albab* 6 (1): 55.

6. As Suwaidan, Tareq. 2022. "The Lady of the Two Belts: Asma Binti Abu Bakar." In *60 Great Women Enshrined in Islamic History*, Third, 208–14.

7. Munjin, Shidky. 2019. "Women's Activities in the Life of Muhammad ( 570-632 AD )." *IJIK* 9 (2): 41–47.

<sup>8</sup> (Muhammad Rusmin 2021)

and her father secret during their migration despite receiving harsh treatments from her uncle, Abu Jahal and the leaders of Quraisy.<sup>9</sup> continued to provide food and sustenance as they hid in the Tsur cave.<sup>10</sup> Her efforts to deliver food and sustenance were reported in an authentic hadith. She was known as the “*Dzat al-Niqathain*” or one with the two waist shawls, as she had to cut her waist shawl in two to contain the food and sustenance supplies of the Prophet and her father.<sup>11</sup>

Asma was also known to be determined and brave, and participated in many events during the spread of Islam in Madinah. According to history, she hid a sword under her head as a form of defence against threats of robbery and murder from the thieves.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, Asma Binti Abu Bakar had narrated many hadiths which are relevant across time. Based on a review of the collection of hadith narrated by Asma in the *kutubus sittah* (the books of hadith by Sunni scholars), the hadiths can be categorised into two types-one collection is generally focused on acts of worship and faith, while the other, is focused on individual conduct and societal interactions. For the collection of hadiths pertaining to acts of worship and faith, the hadiths were related to prayer, faith, fasting, pilgrimage (hajj and umrah), sacrifice (korban) purification (thaharah), zakat; clothing and *aurat*; property, pertaining to distribution of booty, charity; and others. For the collection of hadiths related to individual conduct and societal interactions, Asma had narrated several hadiths that focused on *tahnik* (the prophetic tradition for rituals for a newborn), etiquette (adab) and excellence in character; practice of visitations and greetings, use of adornments such as hair extensions for beauty; and on human interactions.

Asma went on to live a healthy and long life with sharp intellect. She died at the age of 100 years old, 73 years of the Prophet’s migration to

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9. Munjin, Shidqy, and Ihsan Kamaludin. 2019. “The Role of Prophet Muhammad on Women Emancipation in Mecca Period.” *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic & Social Studies* 5 (2): 173. [https://doi.org/10.30983/islam\\_realitas.v5i2.2104](https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v5i2.2104).

10. Munjin, Shidqy and Ihsan Kamaludin, 2019.

11. As Suwaidan, Tareq. 2022. “The Lady of the Two Belts: Asma Binti Abu Bakar.” In *60 Great Women Enshrined in Islamic History, Third*, 208–14.

12. Hijazi, Abu Tariq. 2015. “Asma Bint Abu Bakr: Role Model for Women.” *Arab News*, 2015. <https://www.arabnews.com/islam-perspective/news/834586>.

Medina, and several days after the martyrdom of her son, Abdullah.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Hadith on Inter-religious Relations

An important and authentic hadith that is less discussed in Islamic scholarship was regarding Asma's interaction with her mother, who was a Pagan, as it demonstrated the Prophet's stance on inter-religious relations. According to the hadith, Asma's mother had visited her in Medina, asking for a gift.<sup>14</sup> This event occurred during the time of the treaty of Hudaibiyah when Pagans and Muslims were still at war and there is still a degree of animosity between polytheists and pagans in Mecca and the Muslims in Medina.<sup>15</sup> At that time, Asma had asked Muhammad (PBUH)'s opinion if she could present her Pagan mother with gift and whether she should maintain good relations with her. The Prophet's response was to continue to maintain good relations even though the relationship between Muslims and Pagans were still volatile then.

The uniqueness of this hadith is that it was one of the earliest examples that exemplified the interactions expected in a diverse and multi-religious society. In terms of relevance, the hadith provides the behaviour and etiquette such as; (i) the interactions between a Muslim and non-Muslim; (ii) the interactions between a Muslim child and a non-Muslim parent; (iii) the etiquette or *adab* in interacting with one's parents; (v) the tradition of presenting and accepting a gift, as a sign of good relations, between parties, and between two parties of different faith; and (iv) the conduct and ethics between two hostile parties.

The Qur'an had provided clear guidelines regarding a Muslim's interaction with non-Muslims. The Qur'an stated that every human has a right to religious freedom,<sup>16</sup> and it is by His will that His human creation

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13. As Suwaidan, Tareq. 2022. "The Lady of the Two Belts: Asma Binti Abu Bakar." In 60 Great Women Enshrined in Islamic History, Third, 208–14. Malaysia: Dakwah Corners Bookstore (M) Sdn Bhd.

14. Shahih Bukhari, no 2620.

15. As-Sayuthi, Jalaluddin. 2013. "Surah Muntahanah." In Asbabul Nuzul Sejarah Turunnya Ayat-Ayat Al Quran.

16. Qur'an, 2:256, Abdullah trans. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali*, ed. The Presidency of Islamic Reseaches and IFTA (Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, n.d.), <https://archive.org/details/quran-english-translation-and-commentary-by-yusuf-ali/page/n1/mode/2up>.

follows different faiths.<sup>17</sup> God has created humans of different tribes so that they can get to know one another, while the most noble of all is the most righteous.<sup>18</sup> Humans are taught to be steadfast on the monotheism and oneness of God and the need for interfaith respect and peaceful coexistence.<sup>19</sup> God loves those who are just and righteous,<sup>20</sup> hence a Muslim must exercise these behaviours when interacting with others, regardless of their race, ethnicity and religion. However, the basis for the hadith narrated by Asma on interactions with her Pagan mother is reflected specifically in the Qur'an<sup>21</sup> where God did not forbid the interactions between believers and non-believers as long as they were treated fairly and not driven out of their homes.<sup>22</sup> The verse called for justice to be practiced and maintained along with respect when dealing with non-believers as long as there was no hostility shown.

In contemporary settings, the hadith on inter-religious relations is relatable as a Muslim may interact with a non-Muslim in various scenarios and environments, such as in multi-cultural, multi-racial societies and in inter-racial marriages that exist in many countries and communities. Divine texts in the Qur'an and this hadith reflected on the need to be fair and to treat others equally and be respectful in all aspects of life, regardless of status, race, culture, religion, and nationalities as it is a basic human right to be able to practice the religion in all conditions and scenarios. The Qur'an and this hadith narrated by Asma further reiterated on the importance of honouring one's parents despite them being of different faiths.

Throughout history, the Prophet (PBUH) had demonstrated patience, tolerance, respect, and acceptance of the differences in religion as what is required by God. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) assumed state leadership in Medina, he instituted the Medina Charter which assured the safety, acceptance, and unity of multi-religious communities within the

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17. Qur'an, 10:99 (Translated by Yusuf Ali, Abdullah)

18. Qur'an, 49:13 (Translated by Yusuf Ali, Abdullah)

19. Qur'an, 109:6 (Translated by Yusuf Ali, Abdullah)

20. Qur'an, 5:8 (Translated by Yusuf Ali, Abdullah)

21. Qur'an, 60:8 (Translated by Yusuf Ali)

22. Hasibullah, Muhammad Umar. 2023. "Pendidikan Multikultural Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Hadits." *Ta'lim Diniyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 3 (2): 103–16. <https://doi.org/10.53515/tjapai.v3i2.61>

state. Freedom to practice religion remained to be one of the fundamentals in the Prophet's (PBUH) approach in a multi-religious society.

### **3. Inter-religious Relations in Contemporary Societies**

Just as how it was in Medina when it was led by the Prophet (PBUH), many countries in the contemporary world have embedded laws within its constitution, along with varied strategies in managing diversity and inter-religious relations. The following section is an analysis of the global stance for inter-religious relations and two examples in the modern world: Muslim-majority Indonesia and Muslim-minority Singapore.

#### **a. Inter-religious Relations-The Global Perspective**

Globally, freedom of religion or belief is classified as a human right. The United Nations's (UN) Office of the High Commission of Human Rights (OHCHR) has an extensive framework and international standards for eliminating intolerance and discrimination based on belief or religion. The UN's Human Rights Council has also established and appointed the Special Rapporteur, an independent designated team of experts, to promote national, regional and national adoption of measures to protect religious freedom and to identify and present recommendations for overcoming obstacles in achieving the universal rights to freedom of belief and religion.<sup>23</sup>

The United Nations' (UN) position and policies were meant to influence positive inter-religious relations within its member states, but these policies are non-binding as it is up to its member states to implement them. However, with the appointment of the Special Rapporteur, it signalled a more assertive approach towards the implementation of the policies. The Special Rapporteur's extensive responsibilities include examining political and gender-related incidences and to provide recommendations for remedial actions if the governmental actions are against the UN's Declaration on the

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23 United Nations. 2023. "Rapporteur's Digest on Freedom of Religion or Belief Excerpts of the Reports from 1986 to 2011 by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Arranged by Topics of the Framework for Communications." Geneva. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf>



## Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.<sup>24</sup>

Other organisations such as the Commonwealth approaches inter-religious relations from the perspective of acceptance of religious pluralism, religious freedom, avoidance of conflicts, religious equality and non-discrimination, recognition of religious minorities, and rejects extremism.<sup>25</sup> However, the success of the approach is also dependent on each of its member states to exercise relevant strategies for positive inter-religious relations.

### **b. Inter-religious Relations in Muslim-majority Indonesia**

Indonesia is a multi-cultural, Muslim-majority country. Its total population is approximately 277.3 million consisting of 87.2% Muslims, which are largely Sunnis with a small minority of Shias and Ahmadis, 7% Protestants, 2.9% Catholics, 1.7% Hindu with remaining 1.2% believing in Buddhism, Confucianism, other Christian denomination and religion and those who did not identify any religion.<sup>26</sup> Indonesia is considered to be a pluralistic country. Religion is a key factor in community life; hence every citizen is to profess their religion by the age six years old and to study their declared religion, which is typically Islamic studies due to the demography of its population.<sup>27</sup>

Indonesia is a large country. It is made up of 17,500 islands spanning 1,800 km north to southwards and 5,100 km east to west, through northern Borneo, and Papua New Guinea with 75% of its land mass in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Western New Guinea.<sup>28</sup> However, due

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24. United Nations, "Rapporteur's Digest on Freedom of Religion or Belief Excerpts of the Reports from 1986 to 2011 by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief." 2023

25. Christian Green, M., and Monica Duffy Toft. 2018. "Freedom of Religion or Belief Across the Commonwealth: Hard Cases, Diverse Approaches." *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16 (4): 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2018.1535043>.

26. US Department of State. 2022. "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Indonesia." US Department of State Reports. 2022. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/indonesia/>.

27. Arman, Laura. 2022. "The Rising Tide of Religious Intolerance." *The Diplomat*, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/in-indonesia-a-rising-tide-of-religious-intolerance/>.

28. Mohamad, G. Susatyo Wolters, Oliver W., John David Legge, and Asvi Warman Leinbach, Thomas R. McDivitt, James F Adam. 2024. "Indonesia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia>,

to the unique geographical landscape and vastness of Indonesia's land, there is uneven but concentrated distribution of religion within its population. Examples are the Christians in North Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and West Papua and the Hindus in,<sup>29</sup> while other large provinces are mainly Muslim-majority.

As part of its constitution, the Pancasila, Indonesia's national philosophy since 1945, consist of five principles based on monotheism (belief in one God), justice and civility, national unity, democracy from wisdom and unanimity of representatives; and social justice.<sup>30</sup> Currently, apart from the Pancasila, there are several laws to promote religious freedom, harmony, and peace, such as (i) Law no 1, 1965 against blasphemy and abuse of religion; (ii) Law No. 8 of 1985 on Social Organizations; (iii) Law No. 7 of 2012 on jurisdiction for Islamic and Civil Law; and iv) Law No 58 of 2023 on Moderation in Religion. Others are Articles 28E, 28J, 29 of the Constitution (1945), Article 22 of Law no 39 (1999) concerning Human Rights,<sup>31</sup> and Article 28E (1) and 28E (2) to include the Human Rights Law.<sup>32</sup> Freedom of religion and faith (*kepercayaan*) is embedded within Article 29.

However, in the past few decades, there were reports of sporadic disagreements and conflicts. Examples of these incidences are the prohibition of building of a church in a village in a north eastern Borneo Island by Muslims the lack of permit approval for building of churches in Kelapa Dua Village in East Jakarta in 2012 which is due to strict regulations pertaining to construction of houses of worship.<sup>33</sup>

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29. US Department of State. 2022. "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Indonesia."

30. Mohamad, G. Susatyo Wolters, Oliver W., John David Legge, and Asvi Warman Leinbach, Thomas R. McDivitt, James F Adam. 2024. "Indonesia." Encyclopedia Britannica. 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia>.

31. Lemeina Institute. 2022. "Minister of Law and Human Rights: Religious Freedom in Indonesia Is Absolute and Cannot Be Violated." The Lemeina Institute. 2022. <https://leimena.org/eng/minister-of-law-and-human-rights-religious-freedom-in-indonesia-is-absolute-and-cannot-be-violated/>.

32. Deta, Krisharyanto Umbu. 2023. "The Constitutionality of Indigenous Religious Freedom in Indonesia." London School of Economics. 2023. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/seac/2023/06/01/the-constitutionality-of-indigenous-religious-freedom-in-indonesia/>.

33. Morning Star News. 2023. "Muslims Block Christians' Construction in Indonesia." Churchleaders.Com. 2023. <https://churchleaders.com/news/446912-muslims-christians-construction-borneo-island-indonesia-msn.html>.

Others were related to closure of houses of worship. An example is the closure of nine churches and six Buddhist temples in Banda Aceh.<sup>34</sup>

Reports of violence and conflicts are also related to the geographical and demographical landscape of the area, or due to acts of extremism. A Catholic church in Makassar were attacked by suicide bombers with 14 people injured,<sup>35</sup> while three churches were burned in Java by a Muslim group.<sup>36</sup> In Sulawesi, a Christian-majority village was attacked by East Indonesia Mujahideen, a member of the Islamic State, which caused four deaths, destruction of a church and six houses, and the homelessness of 750 villagers.<sup>37</sup> This pattern of violence, though linked to extremism, showed that intolerance persist within concentrated communities. In the past decade, this same group has killed more than 20 people consisting of Hindus, Muslims, and Christian.<sup>38</sup> There were also other incidences though not linked to such groups. In Java, Christian churches were burned down by a Muslim group.<sup>39</sup> There were also reports of sectarian discord among Sunnis, and Shi'ites, and other sects such as Ahmadis. One third of reported conflicts are violent while the rest are peaceful in nature.<sup>40</sup>

The trends of religion-related discord or conflicts were mostly related to intolerance, 'over-adherence' to certain laws such as the Blasphemy Law and regulatory approvals, communal or geographical (provincial factors) in nature, or extremists-related. Other factors such as economic disparities, social prejudices, land disputes, coupled with

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34. Hariyadi, Mattias. 2012. "Nine Churches and Six Buddhist Temples Shut down under Islamist Pressure in Banda Aceh." PIME Asia News. Indonesia. 2012. <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nine-churches-and-six-Buddhist-temples-shut-down-under-Islamist-pressure-in-Banda-Aceh-26120.html>.

35. Arman, Laura. 2022. "The Rising Tide of Religious Intolerance." The Diplomat, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/in-indonesia-a-rising-tide-of-religious-intolerance/>.

36. R.C. 2011. "Murder in God's Name." The Economist, 2011. [https://www.economist.com/blogs/asiaview/2011/02/religious\\_persecution\\_indonesia?utm\\_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm\\_source=google&ppccampaignID=21228634515&ppcadID=&utm\\_campaign=a.22brand\\_pmax&utm\\_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&gad\\_source=1&gclid=](https://www.economist.com/blogs/asiaview/2011/02/religious_persecution_indonesia?utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=21228634515&ppcadID=&utm_campaign=a.22brand_pmax&utm_content=conversion.direct-response.anonymous&gad_source=1&gclid=).

37. Arman, Laura. 2022. "The Rising Tide of Religious Intolerance." The Diplomat, 2022.

38. Siruyu, Pian. 2020. "Warga Korban MIT Dan Kegagalan Operasi Keamanan." Institut Mosinwutu. 2020. <https://www.mosintuwu.com/2020/12/01/warga-korban-mit-dan-kegagalan-operasi-keamanan/>.

39. R.C.2011. "Murder in God's Name." The Economist, 2011.

40. PUSAD. 2019. "Patterns of Religious Conflict in Indonesia (1990-2008)." Pusad Pramadina (Pusat Studi Agama Dan Demokrasi Yayasan Wakaf Pramadina). 2019. <https://www.paramadina-pusad.or.id/the-patterns-of-religious-conflict-in-indonesia-1990-2008/>.

the lack of action to punish perpetrators, and the use of religion by certain interest groups to create political gain increased these tensions.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, despite the existence of prevalent laws, conflicts and discords continue to affect inter-religious relations.

Though the existence of laws were intended to promote religious diversity and freedom, there are other sections of the law that may be misconstrued or misused by certain parties. For example, Article 156A of Indonesia's Penal Code or the Blasphemy Law, to justify actions which were perceived to be against the six recognised religions which is Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Hinduism.<sup>42</sup>

However, anti-blasphemy laws can be double-edged when it benefits certain groups as compared to others. The principles of the Blasphemy Law may be perceived to be against the fundamentals of international human rights and democracy as it is contradictive when it is applied in the context of freedom of belief, freedom of expression, and the rights of minority groups.<sup>43</sup> Although the intent of this law is to protect the sanctity of religion and worship, it needs to be inclusive through an all-encompassing approach which includes respect, tolerance and acceptance of all other groups or minority groups. The Joint Ministerial Decree on Houses of Worship, which required approval from the local religious affairs department and endorsements of 60 local residents of different religion, was frequently used as a deterrent to obstruct the construction of houses of worship among the minorities.<sup>44</sup> This law also affects sectarian groups such as Ahmadis and Shi'ite communities as they tend to face discrimination from the majority due to existing contradictive laws on blasphemy.

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41. Hutabarat, Franklin. 2023. "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society." *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3 (6): 6–13. <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2023.3.6.125>.

42. Hutabarat, Franklin. 2023. "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society." *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3 (6): 6–13.

43. Arsil, Dian Rositawati, Muhammad Tanzil Aziezi, Syarifah Nur, and Zainal Abidin. 2018. *Interpretations of Article 156A of the Indonesian Criminal Code on Blasphemy and Religious Defamation (A Legal and Human Rights Analysis)*. Edited by David Cohen. *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952. Vol. 1. Jakarta, Indonesia: Lembaga Kajian dan Advokasi Independensi Peradilan.

44. Hutabarat, Franklin. 2023. "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society."

Fostering a uniform approach for inter-religious relations is complex, and Indonesia's strategy should be contextualized to the geographical and cultural environment. Due to Indonesia's complex geographical and demographic landscape, the approach to maintain inter-religious peace and harmony needs to be multi-faceted and multi-level, at the national level through to the community level, starting from within the religious groups as well as between the different religious groups. The government will also need to analyse the social and political climate within its jurisdictions to effectively promote positive inter-religious relations.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, aside from the constitution, continuous, multi-level proactive efforts need to be implemented to promote inter-faith and inter-religious harmony. At the strategic level, Indonesia actively promotes a culture of religious tolerance through the addition of the Human Rights Law and the amendment of its law to include believers of faith, and not specific religions, which is a step towards positive inter-religious relations. Though monotheism is central to the national ideology, its national motto, 'Unity in Diversity' or '*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*' on the scroll of the Garuda Pancasila should be the main theme to drive all educational and engagement initiatives as it symbolizes a nation of multi-beliefs, race, culture, ethnicity, languages, and religion. As tensions can escalate, one possible avenue for managing inter-religious disputes or tensions is through the development of mediation resources or centres as a platform for engagement and reconciliation of the parties involved.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, Indonesia needs to continuously engage in building positive inter-religious relations especially in the areas or law and education. Firstly, based on the state of inter-religious relations and incidences, there needs to be active participation from the authorities to ensure that existing laws and policies are compatible and in alignment for freedom of religion and faith and to ensure that

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45. Yunazwardi, Muhammad Iqbal, and Aulia Nabila. 2021. "Implementasi Norma Internasional Mengenai Kebebasan Beragama Dan Berkeyakinan Di Indonesia Abstrak Indonesia Telah Meratifikasi International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Serta Telah Menjamin Kebebasan Beragama Dan Berkeyakinan (KBB)." Indonesian Perspective 6 (1): 1–21.

46. Arumbinang, Mohammad Hazyar. 2021. "Rethinking Religious Freedom to Assure Harmonisation of Inter-Religious Life in Indonesia." *Varia Justicia* 17 (2): 216–29. <https://doi.org/10.31603/variajusticia.v17i2.5689>.

violations of the law and policies are investigated, and justice is administered. National acts or law such as the Blasphemy Laws need to be specific on the objectives and all-encompassing and not only for the majority religions. Secondly, in terms of education, there needs to be more collaboration between the authority and its religious leadership to engage people from all walks of life, such as in government ministries, organization, provincial and community level on the significance of religious harmony and peace.

Multi-religious perspectives, including the history of the Medina Charter and the example of Muhammad (PBUH) could be shared in mass media and social media platforms. Educational, research and collaboration centres such as the Centre of Religious Diversity and Interfaith Relations in the Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia<sup>4748</sup> can be established in educational and tertiary institutions across the nation to enhance mutual understanding and promote the vision of inter-religious harmony along with a moderate or *wasatiyyah* approach, in the literal and physical sense. Inter-religious harmony could be part of school curriculum, along with religious education. Lastly but most importantly, a concerted effort by the government and the Islamic religious leadership, tolerance, acceptance, and a sense of unity are critical to ensure inter-religious peace and harmony. As seen in examples in history and the modern world, the absence or lack of these strategies and societal qualities leads to violation of human rights for freedom of religion, which then result in marginalization, and subsequent unrest and conflicts. Hence continuous efforts need to be maintained in promoting positive inter-religious relations, and social cohesion and harmony.

### **c. Inter-religious Relations in Muslim-minority Singapore**

One example of a robust framework for managing inter-religious relations is Singapore, a Muslim-minority country.

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47. Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, “Center on Religious Diversity and Interfaith Relations,” 2024, <https://uiii.ac.id/research/centers/center-on-religious-diversity-and-interfaith-relations>.

48. Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia. 2024. “Center on Religious Diversity and Interfaith Relations.” 2024. <https://uiii.ac.id/research/centers/center-on-religious-diversity-and-interfaith-relations>.

Singapore is a diverse, multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious, secular country made up of 31.1% Buddhist, 8.8% Taoist, 18.9% Christians, 15.6% Muslims, 5.6% other religions, 20.0% with no religion<sup>49, 50</sup> Due the nature of its diverse population, there are national policies and acts to regulate inter-religious relations and to ensure continuous harmony within its communities. Religion is kept separate from politics and its national identity.

Despite being a Muslim-minority country, the island-state has a dual-legal system comprising of the civil legal system and Islamic legal system, which is administered through the Syariah Court. The Syariah Court has limited powers when it comes to management of Muslim's affairs, as it presides only over matters pertaining to betrothal, marriage expenses, marriage and annulments, divorce and consolatory gifts arising from divorce, and division or disposition of property.<sup>51</sup> Singapore has a Minister-in-charge of Muslim affairs, and MUIS (The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) exists as a state entity. Additionally, there is the ROMM or the Registry of Muslim Marriages which is an institution under its Ministry of Social and Family Development.

In addition to a well-structured institutions and offices that oversee Muslim affairs, Singapore has national statutes that facilitate religious freedom and regulate inter-religious activities for the purpose of maintenance of peace and harmony. These are the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (1990), and the establishment of a Presidential Council for religious harmony and all other religion related matters..<sup>52</sup> There is a general anti-discrimination law that guides organisations against discriminatory practices. Under the Constitution on Equal Protection, all persons are treated as equal, and in Article 12 (2) discrimination is prohibited against Singapore citizens on the ground place of birth, race, religion, race, or descent in any law or appointment

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49. Department of Statistics Singapore, "Census of Population 2020 Religion," *Department of Statistics Singapore*, 2020, 2020, [https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/visualising\\_data/infographics/c2020/c2020-religion.pdf](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/visualising_data/infographics/c2020/c2020-religion.pdf).

50. Department of Statistics Singapore. 2020. "Census of Population 2020 Religion." Department of Statistics Singapore, 2020.

51. Syariah Court Singapore. 2023. "Jurisdiction." Syariah Court Singapore. 2023. <https://syariahcourt.gov.sg/Who-We-Are/Jurisdiction>.

52. Attorney-General Chambers Singapore 1990, Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990, Revised 2020. Singapore Statutes Online. <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/MRHA1990>

or employment under a public authority.<sup>53</sup> This researcher opine that the act encompasses the plural values within the society.

In recognition of the freedom to practice religion, Article 15 of the Constitution stated that all person has the right to practice, profess, and propagate his religion, and religious organisations are given the right to manage its own affairs as long as it does not contradict with the general law.<sup>54</sup> There is no specific religion identified in the act hence there were no recorded sectarian or group disputes pertaining to the applicability of this law.

Additionally, the Maintenance of Parents Act provides guidelines for the maintenance of parents by their children, irrespective of their religion or race, and this act is applicable to its citizens and any persons residing in Singapore.<sup>55</sup> In addition to these laws, religious groups are mandated to declare and register their governance bodies within 60 days of appointment.<sup>56</sup>

The Singapore government is active to curb any religion related discord and tensions. In 2017, two Christian preachers were rejected from entry into Singapore due to their derogatory statements on Islam and their stance that is seen to be promoting Islamophobia, and towards other faiths.<sup>57</sup> In the same year, two Muslim preachers were banned from entry. One mentioned that it is sinful to wish other non-Muslims on their days of celebration, while the other preacher mentioned that non-Muslims are deviant.<sup>58</sup> Though these firm actions

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53. Attorney-General Chambers Singapore 1965, Article No. 12, Equal Protection Act. Singapore Statutes Online. 1965. <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963?ProvIds=pr12-#pr12->.

54. Attorney-General Chambers Singapore 1965, Freedom of Religion, The Constitution of Singapore, Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CONS1963?ProvIds=pr15->

55. Attorney-General Chambers Singapore 1995, Maintenance of Parents Act, Revised 2020, Singapore Statutes Online, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/MPA1995>

56. Ministry of Home Affairs Singapore. 2022. "Declaration of Governing Body for a Religious Group." Ministry of Home Affairs Website. 2022. <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mha-e-services/governing-body>.

57. Toh, Elgin. 2017. "Applications by 2 Christian Preachers to Speak in Singapore Rejected, Both Had Denigrated Other Faiths." *The Straits Times*, September 8, <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/applications-by-two-christian-preachers-to-speak-rejected-both-had-denigrated-other-faiths>.

58. Ministry of Home Affairs Singapore. 2017. "Foreign Preachers Ismail Menk and Haslin Bin Baharim Not Allowed to Enter Singapore." Singapore. <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/foreign-preachers-ismail-menk-and-haslin-bin-baharim-not-allowed-to-enter-singapore/>.



can be considered by observers to be a lack of freedom to propagate religion, the fundamental principle is that the government and authorities are against activities that breed disharmony, intolerance and disrespect that can threaten the stability and cohesion of its diverse population.

The government also actively promotes peace and harmony, though inter-ministerial and nation-wide educational and awareness programmes, such as Racial Harmony Day, which is implemented across all segments of society such as the grassroots level, community level, society level, organisations, and schools. Conducted on 21 July every year, its purpose is to teach the society the need for maintenance of racial and religious harmony.<sup>59</sup>

Another government initiative is the Declaration of Religious Harmony statement, a code to profess that religious harmony is importance for progress, peace, and prosperity in diverse Singapore.<sup>60</sup> Singapore's leaders were fast in reinforcing positive actions to build inter-religious trust and understanding. It was an initiative in 2002, following several religion-based tensions following the September 11 (2001) coordinated plane crash into the World Trade Centre in New York, and the discovery of Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist cells in Singapore.<sup>61</sup> Efforts to promote inter-religious cohesion and harmony continued through the years either through government-backed programmes or through the proactivity of the leaders of religious organisations. For example, in 2019, following global religious or ethnic violent incidence such as the Easter shooting in Sri Lanka and mosque massacre in New Zealand, over 250 religious organisations in Singapore vouched to protect Singapore's religious harmony, through an event graced by its then President Halimah Yacob.<sup>62</sup>

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59. Loh, Pei Ying, and Jamie Han. n.d. "Racial Harmony Day." National Library Board, Singapore. Accessed June 1, 2024a. <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuiid=d584f038-2d67-4a3b-b786-7d2116dbec3b>.

60. Loh and Han, n.d "Racial Harmony Day." National Library Board, Singapore.

61. Thio, Li Ann. 2019. "Irreducible Plurality, Indivisible Unity: Singapore Relational Constitutionalism and Cultivating Harmony through Constructing a Constitutional Civil Religion." *German Law Journal* 20 (7): 1007–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2019.75>

62. Zaccheus, Melody. 2019. "More than 250 Religious Organisations Commit to Safeguard Religious Harmony." *The Straits Times*, 2019. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/250-religious-groups-make-commitment-with-practical-suggestions-to-safeguard-religious>.

Maintenance of peaceful interracial and inter-religious relations need a more informal persuasion in addition to regulation.<sup>63</sup> Other than regulation and formal initiatives by MUIS and local Muslim organisations to promote inter-religious relations, the local ulama and the *asatizah* (religious teachers) community is active in countering potential extremism. The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a voluntary group and resource centre consisting of *ulama* (religious scholar) and *asatizah*, was formed in April 2003 to rehabilitate detainees, self-radicalised individuals or those that support ISIS, and to dissipate misconceptions of Islamic concepts while countering extremist interpretations and ideologies.<sup>64</sup> Apart from its main role, the organization is also active in producing research and educational works pertaining to Islamic teachings to educate the public on possible misinterpretations.

An example of another informal approach is the formation of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), an independent group, founded in 1949 by religious leaders from different beliefs (Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhism, Hindus, Sikhs, Taoists, Bahai's and Zoroastrians), with the objective of nurturing inter-religious relations for the purpose of harmony and peace.<sup>65</sup>

Conflicting perspectives negatively affect inter-religious relations.<sup>66</sup> However, neutralizing beliefs and faiths and having an exclusive stance of one's religion or group can also be detrimental to inter-religious cohesion. In its capacity as the highest Islamic body in Singapore, MUIS and the Mufti of Singapore continuously engage in multi-faceted initiatives to foster positive inter-religious relations with other non-Muslim organisations and religious leadership.

The Harmony Centre, an integrated hub for engagement of people of different faiths was officially opened by the Prime Minister of

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63. Thio, Li-Ann. 2012. "Relational Constitutionalism and the Management of Religious Disputes: The Singapore "Secularism with a Soul" Model." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1 (2): 446–49.

64. Religious Rehabilitation Group. 2016. "About Us." Religious Rehabilitation Group. 2016. <https://www.rrg.sg/#>.

65. Inter Religious Organisation Singapore. n.d. "Inter-Religious Organisation." Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://iro.sg/>.

66. Ramlan, Siti Raudhah. 2024. "Navigating Inclusivity and Exclusivity in Inter - Religious Relations Navigating Inclusivity and Exclusivity in Inter-Religious Relations." *RSIS Commentaries*, no. 008.

Singapore, on 7 October 2006 as part of MUIS's objectives to promote transparency and inter-faith harmony and engagement on Muslim life and culture.<sup>67</sup> There are various programmes in support of this objective. The programmes include training for interfaith engagement, learning to facilitate understanding of different faiths and building bridges and networks with different faith groups.<sup>68</sup> The level of commitment and transparency among Singapore's religious leaders is commendable thus far.

The proactivity of religious leaders, in particular Muslim religious leaders, in managing radical ideology is punctuated with the constant message of the need to contextualise Islam to the local setting. Islam can continue to propagate as it is dynamic and adaptable in any scenario, time, or space. Though contextualization can be challenging due to differing opinions even within its own community,<sup>69</sup> Muslim leaders in Singapore have shown the direction in balancing this process by engaging in enriching debate in different platforms such as in international conferences and inter-religious dialogues, building trust and demonstrating transparencies in its activities. Overall, the government and religious leaders are invested in promoting positive inter-religious relations. This can be seen in the combined efforts to build cohesion and harmony as demonstrated in the inter-faith collaborations and common objectives to grow closer together as a community.<sup>70</sup>

Regulation is important to guide social cohesion and harmony. The freedom to practice, profess and propagate religion is exceptional in Singapore. Its government, ministries and religious leadership protect and encourage positive inter-religious relations with a concerted effort in all levels of its society. The Islamic religious authorities had put tremendous effort to build trust and social cohesion among different communities in the diverse society. In the past decade, there has been

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67. Harmony Centre. 2021. "Harmony Centre." An-Nadhah Mosque, Singapore. 2021. <https://annahdhah.org/harmony-centre>.

68. Harmony Centre. 2021.

69. Abdullah, Walid Jumblatt, and Muhammad Haniff Hassan. 2021. "The Contextualisation of Islam in a Secular State: A Study of Singapore." *ICR Journal* 12 (1): 133–55. <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v12i1.821>.

70. Communities. Edited by Elaine Tan and Stewart Tan. Singapore: CLC Publications. <https://www.clc.gov.sg/research->

no recorded conflict or violence pertaining to inter-religious relations. In this aspect, the country has gone beyond promoting tolerance and acceptance. In addition to the existing constitution and law, its strategies are designed to align the objectives of law and influence its social impacts, and to promote harmony, social cohesion, and inter-religious integration.

## **Conclusion**

The hadith on inter-religious relations which was based on Asma Binti Abu Bakar's experience and interaction with her non-Muslim mother is an important demonstration of Muhammad's (PBUH) approach on inter-religious relations in a pluralistic society. If the behaviour expected of a Muslim is to show grace in turbulent times, the same approach must be extended towards others in peaceful times.

The constitution and relevant regulation and laws are critical to provide guidelines for multi-religious tolerance, acceptance, and harmony. The social impacts of law need to be studied and addressed to ensure long-standing positive inter-religious relations. There needs to be continuous efforts among the religious leadership to engage the general community to positively influence social cohesion and harmony. The Islamic leadership, scholars, and *asatizah* should continue to collaborate with the government and authority on educating and engaging the masses.

The author also recommends that more research is conducted on the works of women hadith narrators and their applications in societies, and the social impacts of law from the contemporary and Islamic standpoint.

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