



SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR BARRY DESKER, DEAN OF THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY, RSIS WORKSHOP ON COUNTERING EXTREMISM ON MONDAY, 18TH AUGUST 2008, 0930HRS.

Good morning everyone. Let me warmly welcome you to the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), and the RSIS Workshop on Countering Extremism.

It gives me great pleasure to see such distinguished participants from the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG); the asatizah and representatives from Muslim Organisations present. I am delighted that RSIS, and in particular ICPVTR is able to pave the way for this inaugural workshop to be conducted. This is indeed another important milestone ICPVTR has reached as one of the centres under RSIS.

During the workshop, you will hear from a group of distinguished scholars, each of whom will share with you findings in their area of expertise and specialization. I trust you will find them stimulating, and will incorporate the knowledge gained from this workshop into the outstanding work which all of you are doing for Singapore.

The workshop is also a useful platform for asatizahs and leaders in the Muslim community like yourselves to interact and exchange views on a broad range of issues pertaining to countering extremism with our scholars. Such exchanges no doubt, will be mutually beneficial for both parties. It will be an avenue where the relationship that has been fostered could be translated into better and more effective counter extremism initiatives.

As all of you are aware, ideological extremism is one of the most active ingredients that have contributed to terrorism. It begins with the extremist narratives that distort the reality of the real world using the veil of religion to win sympathizers, supporters and recruits. In many instances



these narratives have also inspired the unleashing of violent “jihad” tendencies among youth who read these narratives on the Internet.

It is most unfortunate that the groups engaged in violence in the name of Islam, although a minority, create the loudest noise and attract the most attention by virtue of their acts and extreme ideology being amplified by reports about them in mainstream media. This unwitting media campaign enables extremists and terrorists to constantly shape the debate about the legitimacy of their motivations and actions.

It is our belief that religious elites like the RRG and Muslim organizations have an important role to play in immunizing the general public from such extremist interpretations of Islam. Here the RRG and Muslim organizations as respected members of the Muslim community, are the best suited entities with the necessary credentials to talk about Islam. For instance, the RRG with such an excellent track record will surely go a long way in ensuring that the Muslim community will not be easily taken by the extremist narratives. In view of the role of Muslim leaders as vanguard of the Muslim community against extremism, enhancing and refining your capabilities are foremost in our minds. This workshop is a testament to that.

Currently, there have been many similar initiatives undertaken by concerned Muslims like the ones RRG is doing to counter extremism. Countries like Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Indonesia, like Singapore are well-known for their de-radicalization and rehabilitation efforts of extremists who are detained or imprisoned for terrorism-related crimes. The RRG and the Muslim organizations represented here in this regard are different, as it is the only group thus far provided with the unique opportunity to participate in a workshop of this nature.

This proves one point, that the RRG’s and the Muslim organizations’ willingness to adopt the best practices in countering extremism by exploring new areas and ideas is indeed encouraging, and will be an example for others to emulate. With such enthusiasm shown it will



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not be a surprise if one day the RRG and the Muslim organizations in Singapore will be another source of reference in countering extremism.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a fruitful and enriching workshop.

Thank you.