



**PERGAS**

جمعيت العلماء و مدرسي الدين الاسلامي سنغافورة

**PERSATUAN ULAMA DAN GURU-GURU AGAMA ISLAM (SINGAPURA)  
SINGAPORE ISLAMIC SCHOLARS & RELIGIOUS TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **RESPONSE FROM PERGAS REGARDING CALLS TO MAKE THE ASATIZAH RECOGNITION SCHEME (ARS) MANDATORY**

Pergas, which oversees the Asatizah Recognition Scheme (ARS) as its Secretariat, welcomes any initiatives to strengthen the scheme to enable more asatizah (religious teachers) to join the scheme and benefit from it, especially in terms of building their capacity as religious teachers. This is crucial in ensuring that the Muslim community receives religious guidance from asatizah who are qualified, and are able to give appropriate advice within the context of Singapore's multi-religious and multi-racial society.

2 Pergas has been informed of the recent calls by Muslim leaders to make the ARS compulsory for all asatizah, and thus welcomes the announcement made by Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, at the National Day Rally, regarding the move to make ARS mandatory. This is a fitting development that is positive and pertinent for the asatizah fraternity.

#### **Background on ARS**

3 The idea to introduce a scheme recognising asatizah was initiated in 1994 by the late Ustaz Abu Bakar Hashim, who was then the President of Pergas. (Ustaz Abu Bakar was the Registrar of Muslim Marriages from 1966 to 1984, and helmed the Syariah Court as its President for ten years from 1984.) The aim was to ensure that asatizah development was carried out in a structured manner, and that the religious knowledge taught to the community took into consideration the context that Singaporeans live in. The scheme hopes to prevent incidents whereby individuals

who claim to be an “ustaz” would be involved in activities that are against the norms and ethics of the religion.

4 The need for such a scheme became more pressing after the arrests of Jemaah Islamiah (JI) members in December 2001. The suggestion for the scheme was resurfaced, and was supported by Pergas members. A draft proposal was presented, and was accepted as one of the resolutions agreed upon at the Ulama Convention organised by Pergas. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis), as the religious authority in Singapore, agreed to the proposal, and in 2005, Pergas worked closely with Muis to launch the scheme.

5 Now, after a decade, the ARS does not only continue to expand and being well received by the asatizah fraternity as well as the Singapore Muslim community, but also at national level to the extent to make it mandatory. In 2006, only 400 asatizah were registered with ARS. Today, more than 1,800 asatizah are registered with ARS.

### **Moving Forward**

6 Therefore, Pergas sees this latest development to make the ARS mandatory as a realisation of the initial motivation behind the scheme. It recognizes individuals who are qualified to teach and preach religious knowledge. Through the training and courses held under ARS, asatizah will be empowered to provide quality religious guidance, and respond effectively to challenging religious concerns raised by the public according to Singapore’s context.

7 In today’s rapidly developing world, the Singapore Muslim community will continue to face various complex challenges and issues, and the asatizah fraternity are at the forefront in providing religious guidance to the community.

8 Pergas hopes that through the various training courses to be held under the scheme, asatizah would be better able to provide religious guidance to new issues, for example, the challenges brought by the use of social media in preaching religious knowledge, the advancement of medical research and so on.

9 Moving forward, Pergas will continue to work closely with Muis to make this scheme mandatory. This is important in improving the current scheme, and to provide good quality training programmes that are in order to further enhance the capacity of the asatizah as well as attract more asatizah to join the scheme. Pergas also hopes that the community will welcome this move, and will support the scheme, as well as ensure that their family members and friends seek religious guidance and Islamic education from asatizah who are qualified and accredited.

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