## Merdeka Unity Devotional Organised by the Bahá'í Community of Malaysia Sunday, 31 August 2014

Simply but aptly called the *Merdeka Unity Devotional*, 700 people from various ethnicities and religious backgrounds came together to participate in the unity devotional organised by the Bahá'í Community of Malaysia on Sunday, 31 August. Held at the Dewan Sivik MBPJ, the hall was filled with a spirit of love, joy and unity with guests warmly greeting each other to celebrate our nation's independence.

The *Merdeka Unity Devotional* is a response of the Malaysian Bahá'í Community to the government's call for religious communities to organise devotionals in conjunction with Merdeka Day. The event was supported by the Department of National Unity and Integration, headed by YB Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Kurup, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department who was also the Guest of Honour. Earlier this year, the Bahá'í community received further recognition from the government of Malaysia when it was appointed onto the National Cabinet Committee for Inter-Religious Understanding and Harmony. The Bahá'í community of Malaysia has been an active participant in contributing to discourses on various issues in the country over the years. Our recent participation in the nationwide government unity dialogues across Malaysia highlighted the principle of the oneness of humanity as the pivot around which unity can be built.

Organised in a spirit of unity in diversity, the event commenced with an energetic drum circle to welcome the guests. The Guest of Honour; Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Kurup was also accompanied by senior officials of the Department of National Unity and Integration, also present were the First Secretary of the Singapore High Commission, the Deputy Chairman and Council Member of the Cabinet appointed National Unity Consultative Council, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye



and Ms Audrey Goh. In the audience also were representatives of several NGOs and members of the interfaith community.



The audience observed a minute of silence to remember those effected by the recent tragedies befallen to our nation.

Welcoming the audience to the *Merdeka Unity Devotional* was Datuk Dr M. Singaraveloo, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia.

He warmly welcomed the guests saying that "the participation of people from all walks of life who attended the event is a good reflection of the diversity and unity

that exists in the country," besides mentioning that smaller-scale devotional events for Merdeka had been organised in the past.



YB Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Kurup then addressed the audience and shared many insightful observations on Malaysia today. He spoke on respect amongst the people, deep consideration to all races and ethnicity and particularly on the importance of unity in our country.

He described the *Merdeka Unity Devotional* as "an act of national unity and indeed demonstrates gratitude and respect of those who continue to serve for the betterment of our nation" while expressing his "deepest gratitude to the Bahá'í community of

Malaysia for working hard to promote and preserve our unity for generations to come."

Tan Sri Joseph Kurup also in his speech said, "We cannot be satisfied by prayer meetings of this kind once a year, rather we urge people of diverse backgrounds and faiths in our neighbourhood to come together in prayer in home settings, as often as possible. I would encourage you to promote such

initiatives."

The devotional then gently began with the choir chanting a prayer in Iban and English. The choir comprising youth and adults melodiously took the hall to a state of peaceful tranquillity. Throughout the devotional, prayers and songs were chanted and sung in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, Tamil and Iban.



The *Merdeka Unity Devotional* ended with the audience invigorated with a sense of peace and unity. Many friends complimented on the simple yet meaningful event because not only was it to celebrate our nation's independence but it was a gathering of family and friends alike who whole-heartedly agreed to the theme of Merdeka, "Malaysia Where Love Grows".

In notes of thanks immediately following the devotional, Ms Audrey Goh, member of the National Unity Consultative Council said, "That was such a divine *Merdeka Unity Devotional*. Congratulations to the community and my deepest appreciation and thanks for the kind invitation. It was such a pleasure and privilege to have been a part of it! WE ARE ONE!"

In another note of thanks after the event, Ms. Sarojini Pasupathy, member of the Federation of Malaysian Sri Lankan Organisations (FOMSO) said in an email, "Thank you for inviting me. For the first time after some time of feeling divided, I felt the Oneness of us Malaysians. It was so so beautiful and touching. With more functions like yours we will definitely overcome this negative trend and make Malaysia a harmonious country again"