

ANNEX A - INTER – RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFIDENCE CIRCLES (IRCCS)

The Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCCs) were formed in 2002 by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong against the backdrop of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Re-positioned in 2006 to include religious organisations, the IRCCs serve as the local-level inter-faith platforms under the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) to respond quickly to incidents with racial and religious dimensions. Friendships and networks of trust are built during peace time to ensure that we can withstand challenges and strains on our social cohesion.

The IRCCs were officially renamed as "Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles" on 7 Sep 2007. The acronym, IRCC, however, remained the same. The renaming signifies the IRCCs' active promotion of inter-religious understanding and harmony.

The IRCCs serve as important bridges between religious, ethnic and community groups at the local level. Leaders from various religious, ethnic and other community organisations have come together to join the IRCC networks to build friendships and trust. The IRCCs also aim to deepen people's understanding of the various faiths, beliefs and practices through inter-faith and inter-ethnic themed activities such as inter-faith heritage trails, inter-faith talks and dialogues and various ethnic and religious celebrations. The IRCCs are also primed to respond quickly to incidents with racial and religious tensions and to project solidarity on the ground during crises.

Through the IRCC, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) encourages leaders and their followers from religious organisations to join in the efforts to build networks of trust during peace time. MCCY is also actively involving the other ethnic and community organisations such as clan associations to participate in the IRCCs. In the aftermath of a crisis, they will be the key links to disseminate information, soothe and minimise communal tension, and maintain confidence in the community.

The IRCCs are also actively building up their capabilities to deal with crisis, through participation in scenario-based exercises, preparation of their own Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) and participation in relevant courses such as mediation and media appreciation.