

Models of Religious Solidarity among Various Beliefs in Sabah, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the current question that reflects the Sabahan communities who love peace and hate hostility in inter-community relations of different religions. The essence of religious solidarity reflected through the togetherness of different religious communities is one of the manifestations of Malaysian society's attitude that loves peace and hates enmity. The focus of this discussion was explained through the mixed-faith families and integrated relationship between the local communities of other faiths found around Sabah. The research was based on interviews, text content analysis, and field observations. The results show the function of religion as a strong catalyst of social integration which triggers the spirit of solidarity. This is clearly described through the attitude of togetherness within the inter-community relations in Sabah that comfortably opt for peace and reject hatred and enmity. As this attitude is rooted in the values of patriotism,



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nationalism, and sense of belonging which are included in al-tadamun and al-takaful, the Sabahan society is often described as tolerant, easy to accommodate, and open in facing situations and challenges among believers of different religions. This study concludes that religious solidarity needs to be nurtured to ensure continued harmony in the Malaysian community.

Keyword: Religious solidarity models, various beliefs, social integration, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence

INTRODUCTION

Social survival in inter-community relations requires accuracy of the solidarity spirit because of its role in uniting society. Solidarity is needed because naturally, individuals cannot live on their own without the support of other social workers. In order to build solidarity among multiple communities, there is a need for integration of good relations with each other. Islam introduces several concepts in *ta'amul* (interacting), namely *ta'aruf* (knowing each other), *ta'awun* (helping each other), and *takaful* (cooperating or protecting each other) which emphasise on the attitude of reciprocity to cultivate the spirit of belonging and togetherness among human beings (Khadijah M. Khambari, 2020). Solidarity needs to be widely promoted so that this value is not considered only for adherents of specific religions. This is because solidarity includes aspects related to human and religious solidarity, either involving inter-religious or intra-religious relations.

Solidarity displayed through the seriousness of the attitude of rejecting hatred and fostering peace can guarantee the survival of joint life in inter-community relations of different religions. The black event in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15th of March 2019 had sparked the spirit of various religious groups in Malaysia to hold a Peaceful Solidarity Peace Assembly on the 20th of March 2019 in Kuala Lumpur. The nature of spiritual solidarity reflected through such togetherness of different religious communities is one of the manifestations of Malaysians' attitude towards favouring peace over enmity. This paper described the current questions based on the perspective of Sabahans who love peace but hate hostility in inter-community relations of different religions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative one that explained the cooperation between communities of different religions in Sabah. This study was conducted on 14th of February 2020 at Kota Marudu, 7th to 8th of July 2020 at Penampang and Putatan, 14th of July 2020 at Kota Kinabalu, and 5th of September 2020 in Keningau, Sabah. Survey and observation methods were conducted to obtain information about the reality of religious solidarity in Sabah. According to Mokhtar (2011), studies that use such design can explain pictures, information, perceptions, and deep understanding to unravel the research questions that have been formed. To ensure that the present researcher understood the real situation, observations were directly carried out while the researchers immersed into the life of different religious communities around Sabah, focusing on Keningau, Kota Marudu, Penampang, Putatan, and Kota Kinabalu. The justification for location selection was based on the population of both Muslim-majority areas such as Kota Kinabalu and Putatan, and non-Muslim majority areas such as Kota Marudu, Keningau, and Penampang.

This study also used in-depth interviews and face-to-face encounters based on selected informants such as mixed-faith families represented by a new Muslim and a non-Muslim family. This was to obtain a balanced data based on information from both parties. To establish a good relationship with the informants, the researcher conducted interviews based on semi-structured questions. Semi-structured with focused interviews can create sharing of experiences between researchers and respondents (Ahmad S., 2006). The sample used in this study was described above, that is, the group representing the mixed-faith families and the authority such as the district administrator officer were selected based on the criteria set. Meanwhile, the findings of inter-religious group of worship were obtained through fieldwork observations in selected areas of Sabah. These areas were chosen via searches through websites, such as online newspapers stating nearby locations of places of worship among religions. They were also chosen based on the researcher's observation when visiting the study location during the field study. Live photography was challenging to obtain because most of the locations are far-sighted, unclear, and obstructed by buildings and forests. According to Ahmad (2009), sampling is a process to select the appropriate subjects used as a study sample. Therefore, the sample selection must be

accurate because it will be the study's data source. Hence, this qualitative case study with a small sample size did not intend to generalise its results to any population.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Society is a group of individuals with unique characteristics and inhabits a particular place with various races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. In fact, its value system is different from one site to another. As viewed by Summers-Effler (2010), solidarity becomes symbolic as it drives towards achieving common objectives, whether motivated by goodness or otherwise. Besides, solidarity also leads to problems and challenges for some parties (Effler, 2010). David Barkin and Blanca Lemus (2014) stated that developing a spirit of solidarity among communities leads to several difficulties because it is seen as complicated and risky. Tricky because it involves various social and biological existences. The need for consideration and attention at different social levels either takes the whole family and the outside community or prioritises certain groups. The risk is due to a party's involvement in challenging the de facto power and questioning the validity of their rule of law. A society can hold protests and threats to others due to their high sectarian attitude (David Barkin & Blanca Lemus, 2014).

Therefore, the challenge for Malaysia to face a united nation is not as easy as expected. This is because the country's experience in managing interfaith affairs often poses a daunting challenge. It can be said that the religious diversity that exists is one of the factors that can trigger conflict in the country. As an example of the case that occurred, the Sri Maha Mariamman Temple riot in Subang Jaya, Selangor in 2018 is very worrying if not managed properly and effectively. The Hindu community at that time showed their agreement in opposing the relocation of the temple, leading to massive riots (The Straits Time, November 28th, 2020). Similarly, in Surau Austin Perdana, Taman Austin Perdana, Johor Bahru in 2017, a car horn was sounded by a non-Muslim while the Muslim was performing Friday prayers (New Straits Times, May 05th, 2017). Such actions have provoked the anger of the Muslim so that the driver was beaten en masse.

In this regard, how can the atmosphere of peace be highlighted among the religious communities in Sabah so that it becomes one of the attractions or benchmarks of religious harmony and, simultaneously, be an example to other states in Malaysia? Is the concept of solidarity sung in the values of *al-tadamun* and *al-takaful* understood and appreciated by the entire communities of Sabah or is it the religious elements and values that colour the atmosphere of peace? How does each community deal with the solidarity of nearby cities? These subject areas were explored in research of selected districts in Sabah.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Religious Solidarity

Solidarity means group unity that produces or is based on the objectives and interests (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This concept of solidarity was first introduced by a French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (The Division of Labour in Society 1893), who explained that solidarity is the basis of learning the community's values and norms. They form a common union through an agreement to combat malpractice and promote social order (Scott Drapper, 2014). According to Ibn Khaldun, '*ashabiyyah*' is the feeling of a mutual love for fellow members in a group leading to loyalty, helping each other, cooperating, respecting, living modestly, and obeying society's norms. Thus, they dare to uphold the truth and willing to fight and sacrifice in order to defend their members and homeland, and able to overcome selfishness and individualistic traits (Muh. Ilham, 2016). Etymologically, solidarity carries the meaning of unity and cooperation. Islam sees solidarity as "*al-tadamun*"¹ and "*al-takaful*"². It means that this term is one of the Islamic values that emphasises the importance of the relationship between human beings (*habl min-al-nas*), which is based on the relationship with Allah (*habl min-Allah*). Ultimately, the relationship of an individual is not only sufficient with God alone, but also with other individuals in order to live a religious and patriotic life.

The definition of religious solidarity has not been explicitly discussed by past researchers as the terms solidarity and religion already refer to central of cohesion, which is the impetus for cooperation between different parties.

However, several previous theoretical researchers such as Mark S. Cladis (2017) and Rabia Karakaya Polat (2018) discussed the role of religion in shaping the spirit of solidarity among communities which is exhibited through a symbolic unity. Several other discussions also explained the theoretical framework of religious solidarity, such as Celucien L Joseph (2016) who promoted religious tolerance and social solidarity, which can also contribute to the preservation of coexistence and foster care in maintaining peaceful relations together. This situation was concluded by Steinbach and Silverstein (2020) too. Through the spirit of religion and solidarity, religion has revealed a positive effect on intergenerational relations in Germany (Anja Steinbach & Merril Silverstien, 2020). Kenchana Mahadevan (2020) also stated belief as the basis of spirituality to the formation of solidarity (Pradeep P. Gokhale & Kanchana Mahadevan, 2020).

Thus, it can be concluded that solidarity and religion are critical fundamental factors that can strengthen society's social cohesion. Through the spirit of solidarity, it is influential in achieving the desired objectives together. On the other hand, religion is seen as a purifier of solidarity that encourages noble values to dispel fanatical and extreme attitudes. Religion can develop social bonds and have an integrative function to strengthen social integration and evoke solidarity. Thus, it can be concluded that the primary key in maintaining stability, continuity, and sustainability of a society lies in the strength and attachment of solidarity between members of the community.

Models of Religious Solidarity among Various Beliefs in Sabah

The reality of social life becomes possible because it accommodates the differences and diversities among human beings. One of these diversities is related to beliefs in religion, whether one chooses to associate with religious groups or with groups of different religions. In this case, solidarity is necessary to ensure social stability based on religious understanding and form peaceful cooperation between different religions. Social and religious life should not be separated from each other, but united. This is because religious beliefs have a significant role in influencing the people who profess them. Ultimately, they affect the ethnic and religious relations and tolerance of a society of different beliefs and cultures.

Examining the model of religious solidarity among various beliefs in Sabah can be specified in several forms of relationship.

Mixed-faith family

Mixed-faith family is a mixed relationship between two parties of different religions in a family and is commonly known as an interfaith family (Toni Morgan et al., 2020). In other words, it is a family of different religions due to both parents having different religious backgrounds and still wanting to maintain relationship through both religions. Some writers describe a mixed-faith family as a mixed or religious family (Elisabeth Arweck, 2019). The phenomenon of religiously differentiated families is not new and has become a trend of globalisation and trans-nationality. In fact, an increase of mixed-faith families can be witnessed (Rosalind Birtwistle, 2006). Thus, this phenomenon has also become normal globally because it is no longer an oddity, according to the local community (Sandler E. R., 2017).

This phenomenon also occurs in Sabah, i.e., mixed relationships that show the diversity of religions in a family. The mixed-faith families in Sabah are seen in two different situations. First is the relationship between non-Muslims, such as Christianity and Buddhism, which is without conversion to any religion in the family. Second is the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, whereby the mixed family experiences a religious change in family members. This writing focused on the second situation: the relationship between new Muslims and their non-Muslim family. Findings were obtained through Sabah's Islamic state registration by the Sabah Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAINS).

Mixed-faith families in Sabah are growing due to the high conversion to Islam in the state. It can be said that every district has such groups and it is seen to have become typical among the locals. In an interview with Informant A³, it was mentioned that these mixed-faith families have become the locals' custom, i.e., when one of their family members converts to Islam due to marriage or other factors. New Muslims who have registered to convert to Islam usually still have their non-Muslim families. Sometimes, the converts manage to obtain permission and consent from their original non-Muslim families to convert to Islam. Even so, there are also a few who embrace Islam without the knowledge of their families. Such cases usually present challenges to various parties, such as the religious department, leading to lawsuits.

In the early conversion of religion, it was found that family ties are tense. Family ties are the cause of resilience of the strained relationship. This finding was also explained in several case studies by Suraya et al. (2013) and Khadijah et al. (2017). However, the tense nature of the relationship between the new Muslims and their original non-Muslim families does not last long. In fact, it recovers after some period of adjustment. Such a situation was clearly addressed by one of the converts interviewed, i.e., Informant B⁴ who revealed significant challenges in the early stages of his conversion to Islam. The attitude of his family displayed discomfort at all times, especially during meals and celebrations. Even so, he explained that the tension gradually recovered due to his efforts to present the right attitude. Besides, he convinced his family that the changes he experienced is not a factor to break the family bond. Even Islam explains the importance of respecting both parents despite different beliefs. Below is his sharing of his conversion to Islam:

“My original plan was to convert to Islam before marriage, once with my wife at that time. But my brother’s advice told me to get married first before converting to Islam, because he said it was easy to organise non-Muslim families. Also, one more thing I was afraid they would be disappointed while I wanted to get married. So, I agree with my brother’s opinion, I got married before we converted to Islam with my wife. After all that was done, I just converted to Islam with my wife. At first my family, especially my mother did not know, my father had died a long time ago. My brother and sister had converted to Islam for a long time. So, after people who are not Muslims know me and my wife converted to Islam, the situation changed a little. People did not notice but it seems from the way, take time to correct the situation. But, because this is the path I want to take, I also try my best. Like myself, the most important thing is that I take care of parents. Then, if there are any sarcasm, I will be silent, forgive them”.

This situation was also shared by the non-Muslim families. In this case Informant B’s wife’s sister cum sister-in-law to him, namely Informant C⁵:

“In the beginning, my sister converted to Islam with her husband, I was a bit surprised too. But because there are also other siblings who have converted to Islam. So, I’m okay, but my mom doesn’t seem to agree, but I persuade her it’s okay. Any religion is the same. Now, seem her just fine with all happened. As we here, there is no problem. The important thing is to understand each other. If there is anything you can talk about. Like me, if I cook it, I separate the cooking, just as the cooking items are like a pan, I separate them during cooking. I understand that too. As long as there is no problem, I am okay.”

It is apparent in the family example above that the family members worked together and understood each other. These two main factors form the basis of the solidarity of relationships in families of different religions. Thus, the main thing that is clearly emphasised is the family factor that binds the unity of this relationship. It is undeniable that the relationship is initially slightly disturbed due to conversion. However, the changes that take place right after are not a factor for the shortcomings and collapses of a family. Such situations have been widely written based on the experiences of new Muslims in the post-conversion of Islam. Indeed, most relationships experience opposition on the part of non-Muslim families (MN Sahad, SAC Abdullah & S Abdullah, 2013). Nevertheless, they recover due to the integration of solidarity-based relationships in family life.

Examining inter-community phenomenon based on mixed-faith families in Sabah revealed that relationships are guided by the values of solidarity, such as cooperation and mutual understanding. Some other case studies also highlighted the value of solidarity portrayed by mixed-faith families to the outside community in different situations, such as living together, eating together, and celebrating joint celebrations such as Hari Raya and Christmas (Suraya et al., 2019). Preliminary studies by Azarudin and Khadijah (2014) and Suraya et al. (2013) also explained how such situations displayed the sharing of peace together in multi-religious families. Such values were embedded in *al-tadamun* and *al-takaful*, which are the foundation of solidarity that further strengthens family ties. Therefore, it is a link to a peaceful cooperation with the outside world that religious differences are not a factor in disputes.

Multi-religious gathering in Sabah

The diversity of the community in Sabah gets the attention of the outside community because it can generate social cohesion between the various communities and is still be able to maintain a peaceful atmosphere together. Several academic studies have discussed the harmonious relationship between religious communities in Sabah, such as Suraya (2014), A. Tarmizi Talib et al. (2014), and Suraya et al. (2019). In general, integrated relationships driven by the spirit of cooperation and tolerance have led to social cohesion between communities. They are thus making it a common phenomenon in Sabah community, which is a culture of interacting with each other. According to Jacqueline (2015), the society of Sabah often shows a complementary relationship compared to arguing with each other due to the loyalty of a long-established friendship.

Based on an interview with Informant D⁶, he explained that the usual atmosphere experienced between communities of different religions in this district is like eating together, attending invitations to non-Muslim gatherings, as well as non-Muslims at the Muslim community council. This cooperation can maintain a peaceful atmosphere as it is not driven by prejudice and biasness. Strictly speaking, this reciprocal atmosphere is one of the factors of peace. Informant A emphasised the excellent cooperation from the non-Muslim community in a *mahabbah*⁷ pilgrimage programme for new-Muslim families organised by JHEAINS in rural villages, such as Sook and Keningau, Sabah. The excitement of the non-Muslim community was felt through their warm welcome of the JHEAINS' arrival even though they were aware that the purpose of JHEAINS' appearance was to visit the group of new Muslims only. The non-Muslim community showed willingness in helping to guide and provide good cooperation throughout the programme.

Apart from that, the value of solidarity between communities of different religions can be seen more clearly when there are cooperation programmes involving parties of other religions in Sabah. One of such examples are programmes organised by NGOs, such as Hidayah Centre Foundation in Sabah. Usually, the organised programmes aim to create peaceful cooperation between different parties represented by the religious community, such as the churches, temples, and mosques. They also enlighten the public on the role of religion in an effort towards preserving a peaceful coexistence. They further maintain the momentum of the cooperation so

that the privileges the community has been granted with for decades remain guaranteed. As a result of an interview with Informant E⁸, he explained a harmonious dialogue programme represented by various religions organised by Hidayah Centre Foundation of Keningau branch in Sabah. The purpose of the dialogue is to create cooperation between parties of different religions, especially in discussing the questions of community relations.



Picture 1: Forum Harmoni 1 Malaysia, 10 December 2017

Source: Hidayah Centre Foundation, 2017



Picture 2: A Mahabbah Visit to the Tai Pak Kung Temple, October 30th, 2017

Source: Hidayah Centre Foundation, 2018



Picture 3: A Visit to the St. Peter Claver Church, January 12th, 2018

Source: Hidayah Centre Foundation, 2018



**Picture 4: A *Mahabbah* Visit to the Sri Pasupathinath Alayam Temple,
October 30th, 2017.**

Source: Hidayah Centre Foundation, 2017

Besides, there are several other programmes that have been organised by the Hidayah Centre Foundation in Sabah involving the participation from Muslims and non-Muslims (such as in the figures above). Among the examples is Forum Harmoni 1 Malaysia, which was jointly organised by the Islamic Centre of Universiti Malaysia Sabah in 2017. It was held at the Auditorium of Universiti Malaysia Sabah Library. This programme had created an understanding among Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity on the concept of harmony according to the opinions of their respective religions⁹. Next, a pilgrimage to the religious houses of worship was also carried out by them, such as a visit to the Church of St. Peter Claver Ranau in 2018¹⁰ and a *Mahabbah* Visit to Sri Pasupathinath Alayam Penampang Temple in 2017¹¹. These visiting programmes aimed to strengthen the relationship of *mahabbah* as well as understand the concepts of other religions. There are also forums organised, such as the Momogun¹² Muslim Forum Kota Marudu. This programme aimed to provide converts and non-Muslims an understanding toward the teachings of Islam and further established a brotherhood relationship between the

Muslim Momogun community and non-Muslims¹³. The programme raised the value of confidence and guaranteed a harmonious life with the spirit of nationalism, mutual respect, and sense of belonging among the inter-communities of different religions, cultures, and ethnicities in Sabah. These situations were in line with the values of *al-tadamun* and *al-takaful*, which are emphasised in Islamic solidarity.

Such harmonious programmes were also organised by the Sabah Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) in 2018, or better known as Harmony Visit with the theme of *Keharmonian Agama Asas Perpaduan* (religious harmony is the basis of unity). The content of the programme included a visit to selected houses of worship around Bukit Padang, such as Tzer Ying Temple, Mary Immaculate Church, Sri Pasupathinath Alayam Temple, and ended at Nurul Hikmah Mosque Bukit Padang. The objective of organising this programme was to cultivate the spirit of acceptance and love among fellow Malaysians. Regardless of religious and racial background, the spirit of unity among believers of various religions in facing future challenges and creating a progressive and cooperative society was to be nurtured¹⁴. Besides that, the programme was also intended to exhibit the understanding and appreciation of JPNIN Sabah on the importance of cultivating solidarity among the multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious communities in Sabah. This was through instilling the values of patriotism, nationalism, and sense of belonging to ensure that unity and harmony continue to flourish.

The sitting of houses of worship side-by-side

Meanwhile, mixing communities of different religions is seen not just through inter-community relations only. It becomes an added value of cooperation between organisations where houses of worship of other religions are built next to each other. This phenomenon is one of the indicators of harmony being established among communities of different faiths in Sabah. According to Suraya (2012), such an atmosphere is an unusual one that can only be found in the state of Sabah. This is one of the endeavours to realise pure values such as mutual respect and understanding among believers of different religions. Through a fieldwork observation, this unusual atmosphere is displayed through the different religions' houses of worship that are being built side-by-side.



Picture 5: Nurul Hikmah Mosque (yellow), Sri Pasupathinath Alayam Temple (blue), and Church of Mary Immaculate (red)

Location: Bukit Padang, Kota Kinabalu.

Source: Depicted in fieldwork on May 29th, 2021



Picture 6: Cahaya Iman Mosque (yellow), and St. Patrick Church (red)

Location: Membakut Town, Membakut

Source: Depicted in fieldwork on July 19th, 2021



Picture 7: Baufort District Mosque (yellow), and St. Paul Church (red)

Location: Beaufort Town, Beaufort

Source: Depicted in fieldwork on July 19th, 2021

Such an atmosphere is not only available in certain areas, as shown in Figures 5 until 8 above. There are even some other areas that exhibit close vicinity of different religions' houses of worship such as in Matunggong, Tambunan, and around the rural villages in Sabah. It can be said that there are still many areas that have not been explored around the state of Sabah. Thus, the close position of the houses of worship guarantees its adherents that religion is accepted as the creed of other communities in a multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious society. It radiates the bond of cooperation sown through tolerance and open-mindedness without the need to trigger polemics and sensitive issues that lead to disputes. Muh Saerozi (2017) also explained this view by acknowledging that the existence of the close interfaith houses of worship symbolises the unity of the society. This is because unity is not only manifested through the relationship within the community, but when the houses of worship are built near to each other, it becomes familiar to the community. Next, it presents to the outside community the value of solidarity based on the practice of cooperation and tolerance which can generate harmony within the society (Muh. Saerozi, 2017).

Thus, such atmosphere shows that the relationship of the Muslim-non-Muslim community in Sabah is a peaceful cooperation despite the diversity of religions. The society can be interpreted as one that cultivates

a spirit of belonging or solidarity in various aspects of life, thus giving birth to a form of experience-sharing through daily association. This situation was also explained by Suraya et al. (2019) who concluded that the starting point of harmony in inter-religious relations in Sabah was driven by the daily interactions involving associations, meetings, acquaintances, and living togetherness to create a culture of peaceful cooperation. This bond of solidarity should be highlighted at various levels, even to all Malaysians on how a united relationship should be emphasised.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion explains that religious solidarity built through peaceful cooperation is essential in strengthening the bond between communities. Thus, figure 9 below shows the framework of solidarity based on religious principles such as *al-tadamun* dan *al-takaful* by the experienced of Sabahans' people, which can instil a harmonious attitude in every soul the society.

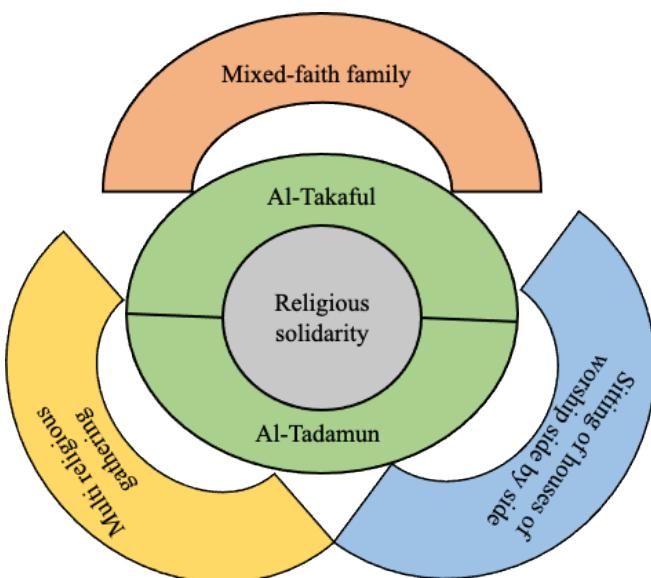


Figure 1: Framework of religious solidarity experienced by the Sabahans' people

The phenomenon of religious solidarity in Sabah is an example that should be highlighted as a result of the social cohesion applied at the grassroot level in preserving a peaceful life together. A high level of acceptance plays a role in triggering cooperation to create a mutual harmony. This form of relationship is also an important indicator of tolerance that generates peace in the state of Sabah aside from the high value of patriotism, nationalism, and sense of belonging among the multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious communities. This peaceful atmosphere can be felt on its own based on the absence of published rumours or reports related to issues that can disrupt the relations among the Sabahan communities. The framework of religious solidarity is being practised to further strengthen social cohesion in the state of Sabah. It should be a guide in maintaining continuous harmony in Malaysia. Besides, it is also worthwhile to avoid issues that contain elements of provocation, prejudice, and lousy perception, let alone individuals or parties who become “fire in the chaff” to further aggravate situations.

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NOTES

1. An effort towards creating a mutually responsible society to help other members of the community to face life problems. It is a social security to every member of society regardless of ethnicity. In other words, it is a human right propagated by Islam, such as giving alimony, zakat, and paying taxes. See Al-Ma‘any, entry: “*damān*”, <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar>. Accessed on October 18th, 2020.
2. *Takāful* is synonymous with the word *damān*, which means protection. Derived from the term *takāfala* which means to agree. See Al-Ma‘any,

entry: “*takāfala*”, <https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar>. Accessed on October 18th, 2020.

3. A Religious Administration Officer of JHEAINS Putatan and Penampang who is also experienced in handling new Muslim affairs for more than 13 years at the headquarter of JHEAINS Kota Kinabalu Sabah. Interviewed on July 7th, 2020.
4. Represented as a new Muslim who still lives with his non-Muslim family. Interviewed on July 8th, 2020, at Penampang, Sabah.
5. Represented as a non-Muslim family. Interviewed on July 8th, 2020, at Penampang, Sabah.
6. An Assistant Administrative Officer at the Kota Marudu District Office. Interviewed on February 14th, 2020, in Kota Marudu, Sabah.
7. *Mahabbah* means love or affection (see al-Ma’any, entry *Mahabbah*, <https://www.almaany.com/en/dict/ar-en/mahabbah-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9/>, accessed on November 2nd, 2020). *Mahabbah* pilgrimage is a programme in the form of face-to-face meetings or gatherings that aim to strengthen relationship.
8. Coordinating Officer of the Keningau District Mosque. Interviewed on September 5th, 2020.
9. Momogun is among the ethnic groups found in Sabah. They are usually found in the interior of the state of Sabah, such as Kota Marudu, Kudat, and Matunggong.

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INTERVIEWS

Informant A, Religious Administration Officer JHEAINS Putatan and Penampang, and experienced handling new Muslim affairs for more than 13 years at Headquaters of JHEAINS Kota Kinabalu Sabah. Interviewed her on July 7th, 2020.

Informant B, represented as new Muslim who still live with his non-Muslim families. Interviewed on July 8th 2020 at Penampang, Sabah.

Informant C, represented as non-Muslim family. Interviewed on July 8th, 2020, at Penampang, Sabah. Informant D, Assistant Administrative Officer at the Kota Marudu District Office. Interviewed on February 14th, 2020, at Kota Marudu, Sabah.

Informant E, Coordinating Officer of the Keningau District Mosque. Interviewed on September 5th, 2020.