



## MEDIA RELEASE

15 May 2020

### DEFERMENT OF HAJ 2020 FOR SINGAPOREAN PILGRIMS

*Early decision by Muis supported by the Fatwa Committee to safeguard the health and well-being of pilgrims*

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#### Current Situation

1. The World Health Organisation has recognised the outbreak of the COVID-19 as a global pandemic. To date, more than 4.2 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported worldwide, resulting in more than 290,000 deaths. Even with many countries putting in place measures to curb the disease, the numbers of infection and deaths on a daily basis remains high and the possibility of further waves of transmission remain, as countries ease their measures.
2. The nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has severely curtailed our mobility to travel, and this will remain so for some time. There remain many uncertainties regarding the spread and impact of COVID-19 on infected patients. The government has issued a Travel Advisory against travel abroad which remains in force.
3. The annual Haj pilgrimage involves the gathering of about 2.5 million people from all over the world, in the city of Makkah. This is a large scale gathering, involving pilgrims from across the world. As with the case of overseas travel, there are inherent risks for Singaporean pilgrims to participate in the Haj and contract the virus.
4. The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) has been monitoring the developments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) since the announcement of the suspension of Umrah pilgrimage to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus to Makkah and Madinah.
5. In its earlier media statement on 27 February 2020, Singapore expressed its full support for KSA's quick response in implementing precautionary measures against the deadly virus to ensure the health and safety of pilgrims and the global community. Singapore noted that the decision to suspend Umrah was an exemplary measure that highlighted the KSA's leadership in managing a global pandemic.
6. In March 2020, the Ministry of Haj and Umrah of KSA issued an advisory to Haj agencies around the world to stop taking on new reservations or payments with respect to Haj pilgrimage in 2020. Saudia Airlines also announced the suspension of all international flights until further notice.
7. As of today, KSA has not made an official announcement on the status of Haj pilgrimage for 2020.

## Decision to Defer Haj 2020 to Next Year

8. Muis, in consultation with MOH, has decided that, as a responsible stakeholder, it is only prudent for Singapore to defer its Haj 2020 plans for all our 900 pilgrims to the following year (2021).

9. **The Fatwa Committee has convened to discuss the matter and supports the decision for the deferment of Haj for Singaporean pilgrims to the following year for reasons of their health and safety.** The Committee is of the opinion that in the current context, not all the pre-conditions for a safe Haj are met, and therefore, they recommend that the Singapore delegation defer its Haj plans in order to avoid potential harm. The text of the Fatwa is appended at [Annex A](#).

10. Muis has also consulted the Association of Muslim Travel Agents (AMTAS) Taskforce on the welfare, health and safety of our pilgrims in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Given Singapore's circumstances, the AMTAS Taskforce fully supports Muis' decision to defer the Singapore delegation to Haj 2021.**

11. With the deferment, the 900 pilgrims who have registered to perform their Haj this year will be automatically rescheduled to perform Haj in 2021 instead.

12. Muis hopes that this early decision will help ease the anxieties of pilgrims and their families.

## Considerations for Singapore

13. We have full confidence in KSA's management of the pandemic, and that appropriate measures will be put in place should Haj proceed. However, Singapore has its own considerations to safeguard the health and wellbeing of Singaporean pilgrims.

14. **More than 80% of Singaporeans who are scheduled to perform Haj this year are above the age of 50. The Ministry of Health (MOH) advised that this category of individuals face a greater risk of complications and mortality if they contract the COVID-19 virus.**

15. In addition, younger pilgrims who are working have expressed challenges in obtaining leave to perform the Haj and concerns over their job security, given the challenging economic situation. This is compounded by the fact that Singaporean travellers must serve a 14-day Stay-Home-Notice upon their return to Singapore.

16. Many pilgrims have approached our Haj General Service Agents (GSA), given the need to make personal, family and work arrangements in the coming months. In past years, pilgrims would usually have made payment and secured their travel arrangements and accommodation before the month of Ramadan. However, with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly challenging to adequately prepare logistical and administrative requirements for the pilgrimage.

17. Moreover, with Singapore's healthcare resources fully committed to managing COVID-19 and other pressing hospital requirements, we are unable to assemble a team of doctors and nurses to support this year's Haj delegation. The absence of such a medical team will compromise the health and well-being of our pilgrims.

18. **While we want to help our Muslim community to fulfil their pilgrimage, we also have a responsibility to protect the pilgrims and their families, as well as the wider community in Singapore, from the risk of infection.**

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

19. Muis will continue to work together with AMTAS and its members on ways to minimise the impact of a deferment on AMTAS members as well as our pilgrims.

20. Muis will send letters to the affected pilgrims on the details on the deferment of Haj 2020, and the next steps they should take. **Should pilgrims have any clarifications, they can contact their respective GSAs or the Muis hotline at 6350 5369.**

### **Conclusion**

21. **Muis, with the concurrence of the Fatwa Committee, and in consultation with MOH and AMTAS, has decided to defer the Singapore delegation's Haj 2020 to the following year.**

22. **This deferment will safeguard the well-being of our pilgrims, many of who are elderly and more susceptible to COVID-19. This early decision will also allay Singaporean pilgrims' concerns on the uncertainty and the risks involved in performing the Haj this year.**

23. Singapore has full confidence that KSA will take all the necessary steps to curb the spread of the virus amid the global pandemic.

**MAJLIS UGAMA ISLAM SINGAPURA**

**ADMINISTRATION OF MUSLIM LAW ACT  
(CHAPTER 3, PART 32)**

**FATWA ISSUED**

BY

**FATWA COMMITTEE, ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE**

*The Fatwa Committee convened on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020 in a special meeting to discuss a query it received from Muis' Haj unit regarding the deferment of Haj for the year 2020 to next year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**FATWA**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين ، والصلاة والسلام على سيد المرسلين وإمام المتقين نبينا محمد وعلى آله وأصحابه أجمعين. اللهم أرنا الحق حقا وارزقنا اتباعه، وأرنا الباطل باطلا وارزقنا اجتنابه، وبعد.

**BACKGROUND**

1 The Covid-19 pandemic has affected religious activities in the Holy Land, such as the temporary ban on Umrah pilgrims<sup>1</sup> as well as congregational prayers in mosques situated within the Holy Land – including Masjidil Haram and Masjid An-Nabawi.<sup>2</sup> Saudi Arabia's Hajj and Umrah Ministry have also recently reminded Haj operators to not sign any financial contracts for Haj services due to the unpredictability of the Covid-19 situation.<sup>3</sup>

2 It is still unclear if the Haj pilgrimage will take place this year. Notwithstanding the possibility of the Saudi government allowing the pilgrimage to take place at short notice with precautionary measures in place, pilgrims from Singapore would face various challenges and risks due to the limited time for preparation and the continued spread of Covid-19. In view of this, Muis' Haj unit has posed the following question to the Fatwa Committee:

- Can the haj pilgrimage for this year (2020) for Singaporeans be deferred to next year even if the Saudi government allow it to take place at short notice?

**RELIGIOUS BASES FOR DEFERRING THE HAJ PILGRIMAGE**

<sup>1</sup> Arab News, "Saudi Ban on Umrah pilgrims backed by OIC, Arab Health Ministers", <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1634211/saudi-arabia>, published on 27 February 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Arab News, "Coronavirus Forces Closure of Courtyards at Grand Mosque and Prophet's Mosque", <https://www.arabnews.com/node/16344051/saudi-arabia>, published on 19 March 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Arab News, "Saudi Arabia's Hajj and Umrah Minister tells Muslims to Wait for Coronavirus Clarity on Pilgrimage", <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1650736/saudi-arabia>, published on 31 March 2020.

3 The obligation of haj is dependent upon a few key conditions. Among these are (a) *Istiṭā'ah* (possessing the means) and (b) safety of travel.

### A. Possessing the Means

4 Possessing the means to go for haj is one of the key conditions upon which haj is made obligatory. Allah s.w.t. says in surah Al-Imran verse 97:

وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا

Meaning: “And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House – for whoever is able to find thereto a way.”

5 The word *Istiṭā'ah* (ability) in the above verse is one of the conditions for the fulfilment of haj. Muslim jurists explain that *Istiṭā'ah* comprises several categories. Among them are the physical ability to perform haj and the financial ability to bear the costs of the pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup>

6 Haj can only be performed if all the necessary preparations can be made. This includes one’s medical needs, alongside all other basic necessities required to make the journey. Without such adequate preparations, the condition of *Istiṭā'ah* cannot be fulfilled. Allah s.w.t. does not wish hardship upon His servant in carrying out religious duties. Allah s.w.t. says in surah al-Hajj, verse 78:

وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ

Meaning: “And He has not placed upon you any difficulty in the religion.”

### B. Safety of travel

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Sharbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, vol 2, pp. 210-218; See also, Al-Kasānī, *Badā'i al-Ṣanā'i*, vol 2, pp. 121 – 125; Al-Dasūqī, *al-Syarḥ al-Kabīr*, vol 2, pp. 5-10; Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, vol 3, pp. 216-222.

7 Besides possessing the means to perform haj, the guaranteed safety of the pilgrims is also required. In this regard, the Fatwa Committee has taken into consideration several facts:

- I. A large number of Singaporean pilgrims who applied for haj this year are aged 50 and above. They are senior citizens who are at a higher risk of becoming critically ill if they contract Covid-19.
- II. Human congestion is a common occurrence during haj season. Even if the Saudi government limits the number of pilgrims (if they decide to proceed with haj this year), this does not mean there will be no congestion. In such a situation, it is highly likely that pilgrims may contract the virus from one another. This may occur even if those who are allowed to perform haj have been tested for Covid-19 prior to the travel, as there is a chance that some pilgrims are asymptomatic. In general, most countries (including Singapore) are still banning large scale activities to avoid any Covid-19 outbreak.
- III. It is also possible that the haj pilgrims may become infected within 14 days of their arrival to the Holy Land or upon their return to Singapore. Should this be the case, they would require medical assistance in the Holy Land. However, healthcare professionals in Singapore are currently preoccupied with curbing the local spread of Covid-19 and are unable to join the Haj Mission to take care of pilgrim's medical needs. At the same time, the medical situation and level of expertise in providing healthcare for Covid-19 patients in the Holy Land remains to be verified.
- IV. Allowing the haj to proceed at short notice would also present various difficulties to would-be haj pilgrims. This includes testing for Covid-19 prior to departure. Should a person be tested positive just before departure, they would not be allowed to perform haj – and this will cause other problems such as the issue of refunds, leave application from employers, as well as flight and accommodation costs. All these would aggravate the emotional impact on affected parties.

8 Where there is a conflict between avoiding harm and gaining benefits, Islam instructs its followers to prioritise the avoiding of *mafsadah* (harm), as stipulated by the juristic maxim:

درء المفساد مقدم على جلب المصالح

Meaning: “Avoiding harm is prioritised over gaining benefits.”<sup>5</sup>

9 It is the responsibility of religious authorities in every country to take the necessary steps and make the right decisions to preserve and ensure the welfare and interests of the individual and the community. This aligns with the juristic maxim:

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<sup>5</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir fī Qawā'id wa Furū' Fiqh al-Shāfi'iyyah*, p. 82.

## تصرف الإمام على الرعية منوط بالمصلحة

Meaning: “*The actions of an Imam (leader) is driven by the interest of the community.*”<sup>6</sup>

10 All possible avenues of exposing the community and haj pilgrims to danger and harm must be avoided, including its impact on their emotional and physical well-being, financial status, as well as the risk of transmission among the Singaporean community. This is based on the maxim of *Sadd al-Zara’i*.<sup>7</sup>

### FATWA DECISION

11 Based on the above considerations, the Fatwa Committee has decided that because the conditions which make haj obligatory cannot be fulfilled due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee concurs with the decision to defer haj for this year (2020) to next year (2021). This deferment may also help Singaporean pilgrims to be better prepared for haj when the situation improves considerably.

والله أعلم

والله ولي التوفيق، وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم.

DR NAZIRUDIN MOHD NASIR  
CHAIRMAN, (LEGAL) FATWA COMMITTEE  
MUFTI OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

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<sup>6</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā’ir fī Qawā’id wa Furū’ Fiqh al-Shāfi’iyyah*, p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of *Sadd al-Zarā’i* refers to the closure of an opening. It is a method of early prevention from that which may lead to things which are prohibited by the *Syariah*. Al-Qarāfī, *al-Furūq*, vol 2, pp. 32-33.