

# **National Culture Policy**

## Background

Culture is mankind's way of life. It plays an important role in the national development process of Malaysia in which the Malaysian identity is upheld in efforts undertaken to improve socio-economic and political development. It definitely requires the mobilization and involvement of all levels of the Malaysian society in an ongoing process.

For a country with multi-racial society like Malaysia, the process of national culture development requires careful and detailed planning in cultivating the Malaysian way of life. This cultural planning outlines the good and noble values vital in strengthening the national identity as the Malaysian race.

## Rationale

The formulation of the National Culture Policy is important to a developing country with multi-racial society like Malaysia. This policy

will be used as guidelines in designing, formulating and sustaining the national identity of Malaysia in the world.

The National Culture Policy has been formulated after taking into consideration of the historical facts of this region as well as Malaysia's position as a meeting point and centre of trade and civilization some two thousand years ago. Malaysia's role as a meeting point has resulted in interaction, introduction, assimilation and acceptance of various elements suitable to be adopted as basic culture of this region.

Thus, as an ongoing process, the formulation of the National Culture Policy is based on several elements and three principles determined by the government as the National Culture Policy as follows:

**1) The national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region:**

The region involved covers Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand and Cambodia, as well as the South Pacific islands (Polynesia, Melanesia and Oceania) and Malagasy. This whole region has been an important part of Malay civilization and culture. During the height of the Malay civilization era based in Malacca, the Malay language has been used as an international

language in trade relations (lingua franca). The culture of this region showed several similarities, in the language used, which was basically the Malay language – Austronesia, the geographical location, historical experience, natural resources, arts and moral values. The Malay culture today is a way of life and symbol of identity of more than 200 million people who speak the same language. As such, the culture of the indigenous people from this region, which, in a wider or narrower sense, refers to the Malay culture, forms the basis of the National Culture Policy.

**2) Suitable elements from the other culture may be accepted as part of the national culture:**

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon, always changing through the on-going process of adaptation and assimilation. This principle takes into consideration the multi-cultural aspects in a multi-racial society. Hence, cultural elements of the Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Westerners and others which are considered suitable and acceptable are included in the national culture. Such acceptance must be in accordance with the provisions in the Constitution and the principles of Rukun Negara, as well as national interest, moral values and the position of Islam as the official religion of the country.

### **3) Islam is an important component in the formulation of the national culture:**

Religion or the belief in God is important in the development process of a country and also in the personal development of her people. Islam provides guidance to mankind and fulfills the physical and emotional needs. Hence Islam should be an important element in formulating the National Culture Policy based on its position as the official religion of the country.

These three principles have been accepted by the National Culture Congress in 1971.

## **The Objectives**

The development of national culture for newly independent countries is extremely important to create a stable and united nation. As such, efforts in formulating the national culture of Malaysia are undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To strengthen national unity through culture.
- ii. To foster and preserve national identity created through national culture.

- iii. To enrich and enhance the quality of human life in equilibrium with socio-economic development.

The strategy and implementation of this Policy can be achieved through the following:

- i. Restore, preserve and develop culture towards strengthening national culture through joint research, development, education and cultural expansion and connections.
- ii. Increase and strengthen cultural leadership through training and guidance to interested individuals. Support and mobilize culture as an effective engine of growth.
- iii. Establish effective communication to instill national awareness and Malaysian nationalism.
- iv. Fulfill socio-cultural needs.
- v. Improve the standard and quality of arts.

Besides the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the role of other agencies are also important in implementing the National Culture Policy. These include Ministries and Departments at the federal and state levels, statutory bodies, private sector and non-government organizations for culture.

The role of the Ministry Tourism and Culture in implementing the National Culture Policy is very important. Amongst others, this Ministry manages research and development, education and expansion of the arts. Efforts have been achieved through development programs, arts performance at National Culture Complex that acts as organizer and secretariat for international cultural connections, State Culture Councils, advisory services for cultural organizations and co-operation with international bodies.

The role of other Ministries and Departments, state governments and statutory bodies is equally important in implementing the National Culture Policy through their daily management and implementation of current policies. The role of the private sector and cultural organizations are much needed as they can assist in implementing efforts to create and develop culture in their own organizations and sponsor cultural programs or projects.

The formulation and implementation of the National Culture Policy is needed in Malaysia as a developing country with multi-racial and multi-cultural society. This Policy is used as guidelines to create a united Malaysian race and to sustain national identity at international level. However, the implementation of this Policy is a complex process

that cannot be accomplished within a short time. Arousing general awareness and understanding of the national culture will help towards the achievement of this Policy. Only with awareness can the national culture be differentiated from ethnic culture. The national culture that is nurtured will transcend racial boundaries towards the creation of a united and dignified Malaysian race.

However, this implementation is a complex process. Arousing awareness and understanding will help towards the achievement of this Policy. The national culture that is nurtured will transcend the boundaries of race and religion in creating a dignified Malaysian race.