

ICTR Conference

Highlights of the Opening Day- 24 February, 2009

Mr. K. Shanmugam, the Singapore Minister of Law and Second Minister of Home Affairs successfully launched the International Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation. More than 160 participants from 20 countries turned up for the conference that seeks to bring together, experiences of various countries on terrorist and extremist deradicalisation programme. According to Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, the Head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, the large turn out of international participants has made this conference the largest conference held by the centre till date.

The conference brought together academics, members of frontline agencies, volunteers and community leaders involved in the field with the objective of sharing experiences, recollecting lessons learned, and relating recent research findings and developments on work related to rehabilitation and deradicalisation.

In the opening ceremony, the conference also witnessed the launched of new platform in the virtual world titled, p4peace (www.p4peace.com). This portal was launched to promote peace and combat extremism as well as facilitate the sharing of materials between like-minded people. For more details of this initiative and platform, please visit www.p4peace.com and join as a member.

In his opening speech, Mr. K Shanmugam shared a part of his conversation with an invited speaker, namely, Major General Doug Stone, on the rehabilitation program in Iraq and the question of the necessity of rehabilitation programme. According to Major General Stone, before the rehabilitation programme was introduced for all suspected militants who were detained in Iraq, approximately 15 percent would join armed groups to fight the international and Iraqi forces upon their release. This figure was brought down to approximate 1-2 percent after the introduction of the programme, testifying for the need and importance of a well-designed rehabilitation work.

Major General Stone, subsequently, in his presentation, complimented the Singapore rehabilitation experience calling it a successful model that contributes to inspire his work in Iraq.

Yesterday the conferees heard about Egyptian and Saudi Arabian rehabilitation initiatives. In the case of Egypt, two academic researchers based outside of Egypt provided an analysis on the programme. In the case Saudi Arabia, the presentation was carried out by an academic researcher, and a senior government official who was directly involved in the implementation of the program. All presenters based on their independent research and experiences gave a positive affirmation to rehabilitation work and testified that extremists can be rehabilitated, contrary to the views of the skeptics. The fact that three of the presenters were academic researchers, independent from the government body involved in the rehabilitation programme is significant because it gave greater credibility to the positives of rehabilitation work.

Looking at the programme itinerary, it is clear that many more interesting findings will emerge from the conference in the coming days and this conference is all set to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and the establishment of a network of like-minded individuals in the field of Counter-terrorism.