



Hidayah Amin <hidayah.amin@gmail.com>

Our artefacts with the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) & Mamanda Restaurant

Hidayah Amin <hidayah.amin@gmail.com>

Sun, Dec 28, 2014 at 11:29 AM

To: lawrence_wong@mccy.gov.sg

Cc: "Whee Jim YEO (MCCY)" <YEO_Whee_Jim@mccy.gov.sg>, "Shaun PHUA (NHB)" <Shaun_PHUA@nhb.gov.sg>, "Gayle GOH (MCCY)" <Gayle_GOH@mccy.gov.sg>, "ZURAI DAH ABDULLAH (SPF)" <zuraidah_abdullah@spf.gov.sg>, Julina Khusaini <julina@mhf.org.sg>, "MCI Yaacob IBRAHIM (MCI)" <yaacob_ibrahim@mci.gov.sg>, Khir Johari <khir19@gmail.com>

Dear Minister Lawrence Wong,

I read the article written by you and published in The Straits Times on 10 December 2014 (Page A22 Opinion), entitled "WP town council and the sound of silence", which intrigued me.

You wrote in the context of the WP town council saga, "... One thing I have learnt about charities is that wanting to do good is not enough. When you are responsible for public monies, whether donations or fees, good intentions are not enough to prevent bad outcomes. From time to time, some charities get into trouble because of the mismanagement of funds and poor governance. The dishonest ones would choose to stay silent, hoping that it would go unnoticed. But, eventually, questions grow too loud, and the issues burst into the open, as they rightly should... Perhaps, the WP hopes that by lying low and keeping its head down, the matter will go away. The public may forget, or even better, not notice. But it will not, and the public will not. Instead, the WP's credibility and integrity are slowly but surely draining away... I was expecting the WP to issue a prompt and full reply, and end its long and damaging silence. Sadly, nothing of the sort has happened. Instead, there is a silence -- one that is growing more deafening by the day."

I concur with the principles enunciated by you above. In particular, the principles can be applied pretty squarely with the attitude of the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF) in (mis)handling of the matter concerning my family's artefacts loaned to the MHF and their lack of accountability and response to our queries on outstanding matters (the details of which you would be familiar or have been duly briefed. You may refer to our past correspondences and the chronology of events posted on my website --<http://gedungkuning.com/contributions/>

If I may apply the principles asserted by you, onto the case in question:

1. The MHF is responsible for the state, condition and accountability to the public of artefacts donated to and handed over by families and members of the public.
2. Their actions displayed poor governance and their inefficient and irresponsible handling of our family's artefacts has, unfortunately, resulted in a bad outcome in our case.
3. No or little response or satisfactory response has been given by the MHF to our repeated queries, including a request for a face-to-face meeting with them to set matters and record straight.
4. By keeping quiet, the MHF is hoping our family will forget and the matter will go away -- we won't.
5. Their silence is deafening, disturbing and damaging to the role they play as a national agency to protect and preserve heritage and culture.
6. Like how you are saddened and disturbed by WP's silence, on the same token, our family, too, is greatly saddened and disturbed by the MHF's silence and non-action.
7. Keeping silent will not solve the outstanding issue, which has been hanging over our heads for an unnecessarily long time.

I am thus taking the liberty to write to you again, to seek intervention from your Ministry to help resolve the outstanding issue and problems our family has been facing with the MHF over the loan of our precious family artefacts, for the general benefit of the public.

I would like to also reiterate that this is not a "private matter" for which your Ministry is not in a position to intervene. On the contrary, as stated in my response dated October 8th to your email of October 7th, it is very much a matter of public interest; and the extended silence, non-response and lack of accountability by the MHF to our family is as damaging as the "sound of silence" as so aptly described in your article.

I look forward to an amicable resolution, with assistance and efforts from representatives of your Ministry. Thank you for your attention in this matter, which is deeply appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

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On Wed, Oct 8, 2014 at 2:53 PM, Hidayah Amin <hidayah.amin@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Minister Lawrence Wong,

I received the email from Mr Yeo Whee Jim, Director (Arts & Heritage), Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth, dated 7 October 2014, in response to my email of 30 August 2014.

I am rather perplexed as to why you consider that the "the dispute is of a private nature". It is not. However, it appears that the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF), unfortunately, has sought to make this matter personal, when it ought not to be the case.

The dispute is not of a private nature for the simple reason that our family is the donor of the artefacts now "on loan" to MHF and Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). The donation was made for the benefit of the public and for future generations of Malays (and non-Malays alike) to learn and understand more about Malay heritage and culture. Our donation seeks to preserve and enhance Malay heritage and culture – which is for public (not private) interest.

As you would have been apprised of the facts of this matter and the chronology events (refer to link <http://gedungkuning.com/contributions/>), sometime in 2011, MHF met our family and wanted to return the donated items, including those that were broken during the time the items were in MHF's custody and possession.

The trustee of our family's estate, Mr Abdullah Joffri, was present at the meeting in 2011 with MHF. All he wanted then (and now) was:

- a) to have a list of the inventory stating all the items that are in MHF's custody and possession (whether broken or otherwise);
- b) the acknowledgement plaques to be put up to reflect the contributions of the family;
- c) a letter of transfer to effect the return, since MHF had wanted to return the items back to the family; and
- d) to have a face-to-face meeting to facilitate the resolution of the above.

These are but four simple requests directly related and relevant to a situation where a private citizen/family donates valuable artefacts to a public body or foundation whose very mission is to promote and preserve heritage and culture. It does not take rocket-science to resolve the outstanding requests above. It just takes common sense, sensibility and sincerity.

I find it very ironic that the four simple requests are not being met as of to date -- more than one and a half years after the issue has surfaced warranting attention.

As stated in the chronology of events, if MHC could have responded almost immediately to the same requests, we do not see why MHF cannot accede to the same requests. Their non-response is long overdue, and their lack of transparency and accountability for the donated artefacts, unacceptable. In our view, such delay and inability to resolve a simple issue reflects the inefficient, incompetent and irresponsible way the MHF is conducting and managing its affairs.

If this is the attitude and treatment philosophy of agencies that deal with the public in relation to their donation of precious family artefacts, then it is utterly disappointing. Their conduct would irk families and individuals like my family and I, to an extent that nobody would ever consider donating artefacts to such institutions. That, in our view, is MHF's disservice to Singapore and a loss to our country's role in preserving heritage and culture for the sake of the younger generation.

One must walk the talk. Basic courtesy and decency must always be promptly accorded.

If this continues, and MHF is so reluctant to even accord the basic courtesy of a request from Mr Abdullah as trustee of the family's estate, to meet face-to-face to resolve this long outstanding matter, then we would not hesitate to make public our dissatisfaction with the way and manner of treatment of donors and management of donated artefacts, and to write to the necessary public forum to discourage others from similarly donating artefacts, lest they be subject to the same unfair and unreasonable treatment.

We reiterate that our requests are reasonable and justifiable. With due respect, just imagine if you Minister were to have generously donated or loaned your family's precious heirlooms or artefacts to a public body whose mission is to preserve the same, for the cultural and educational benefit of future generations, I believe that you, too, would feel slighted, disappointed and disrespected.

Hence, this dispute is anything but private. What has happened in effect, is that, MHF has chosen to make things personal, without viewing the situation objectively.

My uncle Abdullah is already 81 years old, and he hopes that you and NHB will do the right thing by assisting to intervene to resolve this matter vis-à-vis MHF.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Hidayah

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***NOTE: The dates in the previous email were mixed up (in the first paragraph). This is the same email but with the correct dates.**

On Tue, Oct 7, 2014 at 2:34 PM, Whee Jim YEO (MCCY) <YEO_Whee_Jim@mccy.gov.sg> wrote:

Message Classification: Restricted

Dear Ms Hidayah,

I hope this email finds you well? I'm Whee Jim from the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

Thank you for your e-mail to Minister Lawrence Wong dated 30 August 2014. My apologies for not being able to get back to you earlier. We have considered the case carefully. We have found that as the dispute is of a private nature, we are not in a position to intervene, unless there is new information for us to revisit the issue.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the generous support that you have been offering to the National Heritage Board and the Malay Heritage Centre. We wish you the very best for your endeavours ahead.


With best wishes,



YEO Whee Jim
Director (Arts & Heritage Division)

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