

*REPORT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE “ASIA IN MALAYSIA FORUM”

Rationale

The term “Asia” has been used so frequently since World War II such that it is assumed that it denotes a society that is homogeneous. In reality, “Asia” is only a geographical location which constitutes many nation states with an ethnic population that is nearly uncountable in number.

Compared to the various countries that the Asian Continent represents, Malaysia encompasses all of Asia’s diversities-it outstandingly displays civilisations of the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia, including all the major religions of the world.

Compared to Asian countries, in the West, there are many Asian Studies institutions or centres. Unfortunately, no such organisation exists in Malaysia. Although there exist the Academy of Malay Studies, Academy of Islamic Studies, Department of Chinese Studies, Department of Indian Studies as well as the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Malaya, thus far, no concerted effort has been made to establish a unit that gives emphasis on the Asian continent itself.

As such it is timely that a forum should be established to provide opportunities to academics to view the Asian continent in a holistic

* The Asia in Malaysia Forum is a project started by the Centre for the purpose of starting research and dialogues that would give special attention to civilisational issues in Asia. The launch took place on the 25th of September 2004 at the University of Malaya.

manner through research that is based on the theme of “compare and contrast”. It is undeniable that in politics or economics, ethnic culture has an impact on the approach as well as behaviour of mankind. Therefore, the approach practiced by any one group is not identical with another.