#### MALAYSIAN SOCIETY OF GASTROENTEROLOGY & HEPATOLOGY

VOL 3 - DECEMBER 2024

**MSGH**BULLETIN

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



First of all, I would like to congratulate and thank the editorial board headed by Dr Nik Razima and Dr Lau Su Yin for having taken up this immense task and responsibility to come up with yet another fabulous bulletin, sharing with all members the latest happenings and update

*involving the gastroenterology and hepatology fraternity and MSGH itself.* 

The second half of 2024 was a busy one for the Society. GUT 2024, our annual meeting this year was held in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024. The venue was the Sabah International Convention Centre. The scientific programme incorporated a GIA Symposium.

For this, I would like to extend my utmost and appreciation gratitude to Professor Raja Affendi, the Scientific Chair, and the MSGH Executive Committee for the success of GUT 2024. MSGH with the conjoint GI Training Committee also organised other events namely GI and Hepatology Course (17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024), IBD Preceptorship Programme (14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024), followed by Gastroenterology Subspecialty Training Live Forum on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

All these were targeted at our GI fellows in training. The Society has always been committed in training and advancing career development of the future generations of gastroenterologists and hepatologists in this country. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2025 to all. Welcome once again to our final issue of MSGH Bulletin for the year 2024.

For this I would like to commend and thank Professor Ida Hilmi and the GI Conjoint Board members for coming up with the programmes and dedicating their time and energy to ensure our trainees benefit from these important activities.

Again, MSGH is truly committed and supportive of educational and training programmes involving all members and fellows in training.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Dr Lau Su Yin and team for having taken the daunting task of setting up an endoscopy training workgroup and looking into endoscopy training curriculum involving both gastroenterologists and surgeons in this country.

My sincere hope is to be able to set up endoscopy credentialing ultimately in the near future for everyone's benefit. I would like to end by wishing all the members happy holidays and Happy New Year 2025.

Thank you

Datuk Dr Raman Muthukaruppan



# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



As 2024 comes to a close, it is time to reflect on a year full of great memories. We have had a string of successful conferences, and our collaborations brought us amazing educational talks and meetings. It has been a year of growth, learning, and connection.

Looking ahead, let us hope 2025 brings more opportunities to learn and new adventures to explore. This is my last bulletin as the editor, and I am excited to pass the baton to the wonderful Dr Lau Su Yin, who will be taking over as the next editor.

I would like to take a moment to apologise for any shortcomings during my time as editor. A sincere appreciation to Ms Molly Kong for helping with the reviews and ensure the bulletin gets done in time.

And I am deeply grateful for the support and contributions of all those who have submitted articles, shared their expertise, and helped make this Bulletin a success. Your dedication has truly made this publication what it is.

As we step into the New Year, our team's hope is simple: to keep inspiring each other, face new challenges, and continue striving for excellence.

Here's to a fantastic 2025!

Dr Nik Razima

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## **A FELLOW'S JOURNEY**

#### by Dr Shahreedhan Shahrani

Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist Universiti Malaya Medical Centre, Kuala Lumpur

When I reflect on my fellowship journey, I am often reminded of this quote "Two roads diverged into wood – and I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference". I can definitely and definitively agree that this fellowship has been life-changing for me.

I am incredibly fortunate to have been given this opportunity to do a fellowship at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM) in Melbourne, Australia. I am happy to report that it has enhanced and enriched my knowledge, skills and real-world experience. My fellowship at SVHM was a great experience in both advanced IBD and functional GI.

I was extremely fortunate to be under the mentorship and guidance of Associate Professor Emily Wright, Head of IBD at SVHM, as my primary supervisor, and Professor Alexander Thompson, Director of Gastroenterology Department of SVHM, as my co-supervisor. While I was on this journey, I was deeply humbled and honoured to be awarded



With Associate Professor Emily Wright, Head of IBD and Deputy Director of Gastroenterology Department, SVHM

the Asian Pacific Association of Gastroenterology Clinical-Scientist Fellowship Training Award of 2023, sponsored by the Asian Pacific Association of Gastroenterology (APAGE), and supported by the JGH Foundation (JGHF). The award presentation was held at APDW 2023, Bangkok, Thailand which I attended together with Professor Thompson.

One of the greatest dreams I have always had was to learn IUS. IUS is currently more available and widely used in Europe, Australia, and North America. Unfortunately, there were no endorsed IUS trainers or IUS training centres in Southeast Asia prior to this. SVHM is a large IUS training centre; with 4 IUS clinic lists per week. I am very much grateful that I finally had the opportunity to realise this dream, under the supervision of Associate Professor Emily Wright, Drs Emma Flanagan, Sasha Fehily, Michael De Gregorio and Ralley Prentice as my IUS trainers. I am happy to report that I am now certified in IUS; in both Gastroenterology Network of Intestinal Ultrasound (GENIUS) and International Bowel Ultrasound (IBUS) certifications, and have been endorsed as an IUS trainer for both.

During my time at SVHM, I attended and participated in the weekly IBD clinic and gained experience in using both first-line and second-line advance medical therapy for treatment in IBD, and managing IBD patients with



APAGE-JGHF Clinical Scientist Training Fellowship Award presentation at APDW 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand

varying complexities. I also played an active role in inpatient management; in which indications for admission include acute severe IBD, complex active IBD and patients with treatment related complications. I was involved with the weekly multidisciplinary meetings, journal club meetings and virtual therapeutic drug monitoring meetings. I had additionally participated in their weekly pregnancy IBD clinic, under the supervision of Dr Emma Flanagan and Associate Professor Wright, in which they monitored pregnant IBD patients throughout their pregnancies via clinically, biochemically and via IUS. They also provide preconception counselling for patients and reassess patients postpartum.

In terms of endoscopy, I performed both elective and emergency endoscopic procedures. I was fortunate to be given the opportunity of having regular endoscopy lists, where I performed endoscopic procedures independently.

In addition to that, I also joined the weekly IBD endoscopy list where I gained valuable experience on colonic dysplasia surveillance and colonic stricture dilatations which I was then able to perform independently. I was also taught on how to perform haemorrhoid banding and subsequently had regular endoscopic lists to perform this independently. I had done approximately 800 endoscopic procedures during my time at SVHM. In addition, I also performed emergency endoscopic procedures; be it at either



Gastroenterology Department, SVHM

the endoscopy daycare, operation theatre or in ICU, and was a part of the endoscopy team on the call roster.

SVHM has a large IBD research programme lead by Professor Michael Kamm, Associate Professor Nik Ding and Associate Professor Emily Wright. I was involved in their various active research projects, including studies in IBD pathogenesis, Crohn's disease stricture management, the management of fistulizing Crohn's disease, fecal transplantation in IBD, IBD management in pregnancy, the IBD microbiome, dietary treatment in IBD and therapeutic drug monitoring.

Specifically, an analysis on their centre's early experience with selective JAK inhibitors in IBD was a topic I was looking into. I had also conducted a prospective quality assurance study under the guidance of my supervisor, with the aims of developing an algorithm in the treatment of acute severe ulcerative colitis, including



With the St Vincent's Hospital On the Park staff





With the Functional GI Clinic team

the role of salvage therapies, using different types of biologics and small molecule therapies. Several of these projects were presented at both local and international conferences such as SVHM Research Week, Australasian Gastroenterology Week and Digestive Disease Week.

In addition to advanced IBD, during my fellowship I had also learned and gained valuable experience with the functional GI expertise provided by St Vincent's, led by Dr Chamara Basnayake. SVHM has extensive functional GI services which include weekly functional GI clinic, that is a multidisciplinary, comprehensive clinic consisting of gastroenterologists with the special interest in functional GI, nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists and psychiatrists, followed by a functional GI multidisciplinary meeting at the end of the clinic session to discuss the cases.

I am very thankful that I was given my own weekly Functional GI clinic session during the last 8 months of my fellowship and managed 8 to 10 patients per clinic session. Pelvic floor physiotherapy and rectal biofeedback therapy are among the many services provided at this clinic, which I had also trained in. They also have a fortnightly functional GI psychology meeting where they discuss complex and diverse functional cases, that I was, and still am, actively involved in. I also additionally learned the role and utility of esophageal manometry and pH impedance studies and was trained in performing and interpreting the analyses of these studies, under the guidance of Dr Chamara Basnayake. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Associate Professor Emily Wright, Professor Alex Thompson, Dr Chamara Basnayake, the IBD Unit and Gastroenterology Department of SVHM; for their role in guiding me, inspiring me and welcoming me into their unit during my time with them.

This journey not only enabled me to gain much valuable knowledge, skills and experience; it also helped build deep-rooted connections and friendships. I would also like to express my gratitude to APAGE for helping me to embark on this journey, and a thank you to the Gastroenterology Unit, UMMC for the support.

Lastly, but certainly not least, to my family and friends, thank you for being there for me and believing in me.



With Professor Alexander Thompson, Director of Gastroenterology Department SVHM, at APDW 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand





### TIPS IN SABAH: A MILESTONE IN Portal hypertension care in Malaysia

**by Dr Senamjit Kaur** Consultant Gastrohepatologist Hospital Queen Elizabeth, Sabah, Malaysia

On 20<sup>th</sup> October 2024, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Sabah, successfully performed Malaysia's first two transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt (TIPS) procedures. This landmark achievement, spearheaded by the Departments of Radiology and Gastrohepatology, marks a significant advancement in managing portal hypertension in the country. The success resulted from the collaborative efforts of interventional radiologists Dr Aida Shazlin and Dr Zakhirathi Zainol, alongside myself, a recently recruited hepatologist to an already exceptional gastroenterology department. Together, as a team of foreign-trained professionals, we are committed to advancing portal hypertension care in a region with limited access to liver transplantation. TIPSS, a wellestablished percutaneous procedure, aims to lower portal hypertension. The technique involves creating a shunt between the portal vein and the hepatic vein via a stent, diverting portal venous flow into the systemic circulation.

This reduces the portosystemic gradient and mitigates complications such as variceal bleeding and ascites without altering the extrahepatic anatomy. Indications for TIPS include refractory or recurrent variceal haemorrhage, refractory ascites, hepatic hydrothorax, and Budd-Chiari syndrome - all conditions that are curable with liver transplantation. However, Malaysia's limited availability of grafts, coupled with the fact that many patients do not meet transplant criteria, has resulted in dependence on repeated endoscopic interventions, large-volume paracentesis, and pleural drainage.

These approaches often lead to complications and reduced quality of life. TIPS, therefore, provides a vital alternative or bridge for patients ineligible for transplantation. Even though TIPSS has been in use since the 1980s and is a common protocol-driven choice in many nations worldwide. Malaysia has yet to fully embrace it; hindered by cost, regulations, and lack of experience by both departments, barriers that we still encounter today but have slowly overcome.

Oxford University Hospital (OUH), where I received my training, is a high-volume TIPS centre, made possible by the close collaboration between the IR and hepatology teams; one that I made a priority to cultivate upon my return home. In OUH, we conduct salvage, pre-emptive, rescue, and elective TIPSS for a variety of indications, and we are one of nine centres in the NHS that are conducting the REACT-AVB study. Here we aim to investigate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of early trans-jugular intrahepatic portosystemic stent-shunt (TIPS) within 4 days of diagnostic endoscopy versus endoscopic plus pharmacological therapy in patients with cirrhosis and acute variceal bleeding.

The role of a hepatologist is key, from choosing the ideal patient who will benefit from TIPPS to establishing multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) between cardiology, neurology, and IR for corresponding clearances; establishing HVPG targets; and, most importantly, providing post-TIPS management care, which includes immediate complication therapy and identification as well as short- and long-term complication care and monitoring.

This exposure provided me with the best education possible on all things TIPS-related. More crucially, our IR team, led by Dr Zakhirathi Zainol was trained under Dr Antonio Rampoldi in Milan, Italy, who also graced us with his presence during our first two procedures. The initial steps toward this milestone began in May 2024 when I joined Queen Elizabeth Hospital with a vision to advance Hepatology care, including making TIPS a routine therapeutic option. Securing departmental



approval and leadership support was essential. I am particularly grateful to Datuk Dr Raman Muthukarupan whose steadfast leadership and advocacy facilitated the realisation of this project. His commitment to supporting our team through administrative and pharmaceutical hurdles was invaluable.

For this inaugural effort, I meticulously identified four potential candidates over three months, ultimately selecting two who would benefit most from TIPSS. Both were young male patients with decompensated liver cirrhosis and recurrent variceal bleeding despite optimal medical therapy. The first, a 37-year-old with MASLD cirrhosis, and the second, a 40-year-old with Budd-Chiari syndrome, both have each experienced over five episodes of variceal bleeding in 2024 alone. Following extensive multidisciplinary team (MDT) discussions with our foreign consultants, patient optimisation, and consent processes, we successfully performed elective TIPS under general anaesthesia on both patients.

The procedures met the target hepatic venous pressure gradients (HVPG) set by myself, and both patients were discharged within 72 hours without shortterm complications. A strict pre- and post-TIPS protocol, developed and validated with input from my mentors at Oxford and Birmingham, was adhered to. Both patients remained symptom-free with patent stents and have resumed their professional lives without further hospitalisations. Although this achievement is not a novel medical breakthrough, it represents a transformative step in the Malaysian hepatology care. TIPS offers a new frontier in managing portal hypertension, significantly reducing morbidity and mortality associated with its complications. Moving forward, our goal is to integrate TIPS into routine clinical practice and expand access to many. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the collective efforts of many. I extend my gratitude to my colleagues, Dr Aida Shazlin, Dr Zakhirathi Zainol, and Dr Mildred Sim; my mentors, Dr Emma Culver, Dr Francesca Saffioti, Dr Michael Pavlides, Dr Jeremy Cobbold, and Dr Sanchit Sharma; and, most importantly, Dr Antonio Rampoldi, who quided us through our initial procedures.

Finally, I thank Datuk Dr Raman Muthukarupan for his unwavering leadership and especially our wonderful patients for placing their trust in us.



Dr Senamjit Kaur (far left) with Dr Aida Shazlin (far right) with the first two patients who have undergone TIPS



(Top right to left) Dr Senamjit Kaur, Dr Aida Shazlin, Dr Mildred Sim, Dr Antonio Rampoldi and Dr Zakhirati Zainol



The winning team!



### FOSTERING TOWARDS UNITY AND EXCELLENCE IN TACKLING DIGESTIVE DISORDERS - GUT 2024

**Dr Lau Su Yin** Consultant of Gastroenterology & Hepatology Hospital Universiti Putra Malaysia

It was that time of the year again!

An annual event that we as a fraternity look forward to each year. This year's GUT meeting was held at the grand Sabah International Convention Centre, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Under the leadership of Datuk Dr Raman Muthukaruppan, Professor Ida Hilmi, Professor Raja Affendi as Chair, Deputy Chair and Scientific Chair; this year's GUT featured an impressive lineup of both local and international speakers.

With GUT returning to Sabah after 17 years, the opening ceremony was honoured by the attendance of Deputy Chief Minister II, Datuk Seri Dr Joachim Gunsalam, and State Deputy Health Director, Datuk Dr Abd Kahar Abd Asis. The ceremony commenced with a cultural performance that showcased the rich diversity of Sabah and Malaysia's ethnic communities.

Key sessions at GUT included the prestigious 24th MSGH Oration, delivered by Dr D Nageshwar Reddy, on 'How AI is Revolutionizing the Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Industries', and the 21st Panir Chelvam Lecture by Professor Rajvinder Singh titled 'Detection and Treatment of Early Colorectal Cancer Using Novel Endoscopic Imaging Modalities".

There were new additions to this year's meeting too. Having celebrated MSGH's Silver Jubilee with a commemorative book and still a few years shy of our Ruby Jubilee, we marked this year's milestone as a Pearl Jubilee (sure, it is usually reserved for 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversaries, but a celebration no less!).

We introduced the MSGH Presidential Recognition Service Award, acknowledging past MSGH presidents for their hard work and contributions to the Gastroenterology and Hepatology fraternity since our establishment in 1994. We also presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Professor Dato' Dr ST Kew, who paved the way for Gastroenterology fellowship training back in 1990.

Another unique session was the Presidential Round Table Discussion which again highlighted the theme of this year's meeting - fostering unity between gastroenterologists both locally and internationally as well as surgeons. Presidents or representatives from MSGH, MUGIS (Malaysian Upper GI Society), MSCRS (Malaysian Society of Colorectal Surgeons), GESS (Gastroenterological Society of Singapore) and GAT (Gastroenterological Association of Thailand) discussed current issues pertaining to credentialing in GI endoscopy and gender balance in training.

The GIAs and nurses too had a fruitful symposium held concurrently during GUT, led by Ms Jernih Majalu and Mr Philip Gisan as Chair and Vice-Chair. Topics highlighted during the symposium included infection prevention, patient management and quality assurance in endoscopy.

Lectures and awards aside, there were two memorable social events during GUT. The Presidential Dinner was held on a sunset boat cruise. As the boat drifted along the tranquil South China Sea, the sky began its vibrant transformation. Hues of orange, pink and gold blended across the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the water. The evening was filled with laughter, shared stories, and photo-taking among the Organizing Committee and guests - a truly perfect close to a rewarding day.

Last but not least, the graduation ceremony for Gastroenterology and Hepatology fellows took place on the final day. This year, we celebrated six candidates who successfully completed their journey, and we wish them all the best in their future endeavors!





GUT meeting held at the Sabah International Convention Centre, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah



Past Presidents with the MSGH Executive Committee



Attendees at GUT 2024



Lifetime Achievement Award presented to Professor Dato' Dr ST Kew



Datuk Dr Raman visiting booth exhibition

## ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR AWARENESS OF GASTROENTEROLOGY / HEPATOLOGY SUBSPECIALTY TRAINING

#### - The Gastroenterology Trainee Recruitment Committee (Dr Nik Razima, Dr Lau Su Yin, Dr Syuhada Dan Adnan, Dr Victoria Kok)

As the demand for subspecialists intensifies amidst internal and external brain drain, the competition to attract and retain trainees has become critical across all fields. Gastroenterology and Hepatology is of no exception. Recognising the urgency of this challenge, our Committee is proud to pioneer efforts to revitalise interest in this essential subspecialty and safeguard its future.

A survey conducted among internal medicine specialists and medical officers highlighted a significant gap in awareness regarding the nature and benefits of gastroenterology/hepatology training. This insight led MSGH to take the initiative in promoting our subspecialty and increasing interest in our training programme.

To kickstart our efforts, we produced a marketing video designed to be shown during MMED exam masterclasses and other events. Featuring the uplifting tune A Sky Full of Stars by Coldplay, the video provided an engaging introduction to gastroenterology and hepatology training.

It showcased our current training committee, the locations of our training centres, and included a heartfelt commentary by Dr Joash Tan, our second-year trainee, who shared his personal experiences of being a gastroenterology trainee.



Video showcased at USM MMED masterclass



Video showcased at USM MMED masterclass

In summary, 2024 marked a successful year for this initiative, and we are optimistic about its continued impact.

Following the success of the video, we organised an online forum in November 2024. The event was aimed at internal medicine specialists and medical officers interested in learning more about the training programme.

The forum featured key speakers, including Dr Kiew Kuang Kiat, Professor Ida Hilmi, Dr Norasiah Abu Bakar, Dr Haniza Omar and Dr Praveenna Nagaratnam, who provided first-hand insights into the training process.

We were pleased to see around 40 participants, and the forum generated significant interest, with at least seven attendees expressing their intent to join the programme in the near future. In summary, 2024 marked a successful year for this initiative, and we are optimistic about its continued impact.

We look forward to further growing our subspecialty training programme and ensuring that our fraternity continues to thrive and prosper in the years to come.



Online forum participants

Article

### 2024 REFLECTIONS & ASPIRATIONS IN 2025 by the MSGH Executive Committee 2023-2025



"2024 has been a good year with the holding of the Endoscopy Workshop at Universiti Malaya in May and the return of the GUT conference to Kota Kinabalu, Sabah in August after 17 years. The second half of the year was spiked with activities for the gastro trainees as the Society takes on the training and nurturing of future gastroenterologists earnestly. I aim to take the Society to a higher level in 2025 with the support of the Executive Committee and members."

Datuk Dr Raman Muthukaruppan President



"I am proud that the Society has progressed leaps and bounds over the years including 2024. I do hope more younger colleagues can join us in 2025 and help us in organising activities for your and others' benefit."





Professor Lee Yeong Yeh Immediate Past President

> "To paraphrase John Lennon 'Another year over and what have we done?' As we move into 2025, my wish is that we, as a fraternity, are united in looking at the big picture i.e. to ensure the best care not only for individual patients but also for the community and nation despite the challenges and our differences. Wishing everyone a wonderful New Year!"

Professor Ida Hilmi President-Elect



"As 2024 comes to an end, we reflect on a year of growth, collaboration, and progress in advancing gastroenterology and hepatology. Thank you to every member for your dedication and contributions. We look forward to 2025 with optimism, ready to embrace new opportunities and continue making an impact together in this field. Wishing you all a wonderful year ahead!"



Dr Sattian Kollanthavelu Honorary Treasurer





"Looking back, we have built a strong team through collaboration and embracing different opinions. In 2025, let's 'defy gravity' - push our limit, push egos aside and strive to improve outcomes. Together, we will take on new challenges and keep raising the bar in Gastroenterology and Hepatology!"





Dr Nik Razima Honorary Secretary



"May Gastroenterology grow from strength to strength in Malaysia as we usher in 2025"

Datuk Dr Jayaram Menon Executive Committee Member



"2024: Collaboration, empowerment and leadership; 2025: Go global and towards excellence in education, research and services".

> Professor Raja Affendi Raja Ali Executive Committee Member





"2024 brought into sharp focus two issues that we don't normally prioritise. Firstly, our responsibility to practise 'green endoscopy' and play our role in protecting the environment and secondly our responsibility to manage escalating health care costs particularly with respect to the utilisation of endoscopic services. 2025 presents an opportunity to address both these sustainability issues with greater conviction and vigor".



Dato' Dr Mahendra Raj Executive Committee Member



"As we bid farewell to 2024, let's welcome the promise and possibilities of a brighter future in 2025!"

Associate Professor Nazri Mustaffa Executive Committee Member





"Sawah lebar ditebar benih Ikan sepat berenang di rawa Melangkah ke depan menjunjung harapan Mengibarkan semangat harapan bersama

Langkah kaki menapi jalan Memanjat gunung memacak bendera Teruslah mara gastroenterologi dan hepatologi Majulah endoskopi untuk negara"

> Dr Deborah Chew Co-opted Executive Committee Member







"2024 has been a year of strengthening bonds within MSGH. Our conferences, workshops and outreach efforts have fostered a sense of unity among gastrohepatologists nationwide. I look forward to MSGH creating more opportunities for younger members to take on leadership roles and bring fresh perspectives to our initiatives".

Dr Syuhada Dan Adnan Co-opted Executive Committee Member





"Very grateful for opportunities and growth I have experienced this past year in MSGH. Looking forward to many more collaborative efforts with respected members of our small gastro/liver fraternity to come together and deliver the best possible care for our patients".

> Dr Lau Su Yin Co-opted Executive Committee Member





"The year 2024 has been eventful as the Secretariat of the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia which also serves as the MSGH Secretariat moved into the dynamic Medical Academies Building in Putrajaya at the end of June 2024. This new environment has infused us with fresh energy and vibrant vibe which we will bring to 2025".

Molly Kong and Nur Hanisah MSGH Secretariat



### **PENANG 2025**

### 6<sup>th</sup> APAGE Clinical Forum on Inflammatory Bowel Disease

16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> May 2025 Marriott Penang, Penang, Malaysia





Asian Pacific Association of Gastroenterology

Deadline for Submission of Abstracts: 15™ JANUARY 2025

#### SECRETARIAT

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December 2024