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SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHON, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT AND

MP FOR EAST COAST GRC, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MORAL HOME FOR THE DISABLED
ADULTS AT 2 CHAI CHEE LANE ON SUN, 17 JAN 99 AT 6.30 PM

Mr Ho Kah Leong, Chairman, Moral Home for Disabled Adults

Mr Lee Kim Siang, Chairman, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

It is with much pride and pleasure this evening that I address you on this auspicious occasion to mark the official opening of the Moral Home For Disabled Adults.

2 It is very satisfying for me to see that Singapore continues to evolve to become an increasingly caring society. This speaks well of the hard work put in by our citizens and their representatives in Parliament, jointly and

untiringly over the years to make Singapore a better home for all of us.

3 The setting up of this Home reflects that we have many kind and caring citizens amongst us. The Government's 'Many Helping Hands' approach to deliver social services is also working well. Singaporeans have in the past given much support both directly and through the Government to provide opportunities to disadvantaged Singaporeans with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities but with adequate functioning abilities to upgrade themselves and lead a more useful and meaningful life. For example, 17 special schools operated by Voluntary Welfare Organisations under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, now have a total enrolment of more than 3,000 students. About 90% of these students have varying degrees of intellectual disability. Many of our adult, disabled fellow citizens, after being educated with special assistance, work alongside able-bodied Singaporeans in open employment. Some of them have achieved good success in their chosen line of work. Many other less capable disabled persons work in closed, subsidised workshops to contribute to Singapore's progress in a more modest way.

4 As Singapore becomes economically more affluent and our citizens enjoy a higher standard of living, there has been a delightful increase in public support to enable our lower functioning disabled citizens to live a more dignified life. The relatives of these disadvantaged citizens benefit from this trend as well, as it lightens their very heavy burden.

5 This Home is the first home established in Singapore to care solely for adults who are severely intellectually disabled and cannot care for themselves. Thee Hua Kwan Moral Society is to be commended for undertaking this most challenging project. With its experience of operating two other charity homes for people with disabilities, the Society knew the significant magnitude of this task. It also knew that the majority of the families of the targeted beneficiaries could not afford to pay enough fees that would enable the Home to come close to break even financially, even with 90% funding from the Government for approved capital expenditure.

6 In this regard, I was very happy to learn from Mr Ho Kah Leong, the Chairman of this Home, that this Home received total donations of about \$190,000 from the public last year of which more than half of the amount came unsolicited. This was in spite of the difficult economic downturn of 1998. This proves that as a country, we are doing relatively well in sparing a thought and caring for the less fortunate amongst us even during difficult times.

7 Speaking as the Member of Parliament for this area, I was at first worried that this neighbourhood might not welcome the establishment of this Home, nor accept the presence of many intellectually disabled in their midst. However, it turns out that not only did the residents of this neighbourhood make no complaint, I was touched by the assistance given to this Home by many of my constituents of all races, religions and ages. Some made cash donations. Others walked in and offered all varieties of donations-in-kind, from food items to clothing, and from wheelchairs to usable furniture items. Still others, especially school children, knocked on the door and volunteered their service to help the Home's residents. They made me very proud as their representative in Parliament. Such kind acts add to the warmth and cohesiveness of our society, and I sincerely wish that these benefactors of the Home, some of whom are here with us tonight, found their actions worthwhile and spiritually rewarding.

8 As the Patron of the Home, I take pride in sharing the achievements of Mr Ho Kah Leong, his Management Committee members and all his staff. Between them they have done a good job in building this Home and then admitting more than 70 needy, intellectually disabled persons over the last 12 months. I further understand that with the kind financial and other assistance from many benefactors, the efficient deployment of resources and a lot of hard work, the Home has achieved financial breakeven in the first year of operations. I congratulate Mr Ho and his colleagues. No doubt you, your fellow volunteers and your staff will have to continue working very hard to provide quality service to the Home's residents, and to appeal to the public and your supporters for financial assistance to make such service possible. Please keep up the good work.

9 Finally, I must share with all the guests here tonight some experience gained by the Home's Admission Panel and which was related to me. There were many elderly parents who applied for their adult son or daughter to be granted in-principal admission only. These parents, many with the help of their other children, prefer to continue to care for their loved ones for as long as they are still able to do so. In some cases, it was the siblings, after the parents have passed away, who sought such in-principal admission in case they themselves could no longer continue with their care. They made no complaint, bore no grudge and showed only unconditional love.

10 Such and other traditional and treasured family values justify Singapore's choice to make the family, not the individual, the basic building block of society. These people's selfless behaviour, along with the altruistic work of all the volunteers and many of the staff of this Home, reaffirm our faith in humanity.

11 I now declare Moral Home For Disabled Adults opened.

Thank you.

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