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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Prof Ho Peng Kee, 2 Mar 99, 9.15am.

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME  
AFFAIRS AT THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE COUNSELLORS' (APSAC)  
SYMPOSIUM ON "PROMOTING PROFESSIONALISM & COMPETENCE THROUGH CERTIFICATION" ON  
TUESDAY, 2 MARCH 1999 AT THE SIR AUDITORIUM AT 9.15 A.M

# National Archives of Singapore

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

The drug situation has improved in Singapore. The number of drug addicts  
arrested has continued to decline - 4,502 last year, down from 5,744 in 1996 and  
6,165 in 1994.

The relapse rate among drug addicts has also been falling steadily. Last  
year the rate dropped to 54.2 per cent, down from 72.7 per cent in 1996, and 81.2  
per cent in 1994. We thank the Central Narcotics Bureau, our counsellors, halfway  
houses, agencies, and sponsors involved in managing the drug situation in Singapore  
for these gratifying results. But there is still much more we can do to rid our  
society of the drug menace.

Since 1994, the Government spearheaded multi-pronged measures to curb the number of drug addicts. The successful rehabilitation of drug addicts is one of the key measures outlined by the Government's 1994 review committee to arrest the increasing number of drug addicts in the drug rehabilitation centres. Rehabilitation is as important as prevention and enforcement. Last year, the government clamped down on repeat drug offenders by meting out tougher punishment. Counsellors can help in the battle by rehabilitating more drug offenders, thereby continuing to bring down the relapse rate among these offenders.

For rehabilitation to be successful we need an adequate pool of professional counsellors. Raising standards and levels of competency among the substance abuse counsellors who perform a valuable service not only to the reforming addict but also to his family, friends and society at large, is critical and timely. APSAC helps set the standards to raise the professional capabilities of substance abuse counsellors and provide them a professional network. Individuals and organisations working in the drug counselling field should support APSAC's projects.

Last year, the first batch of 24 local counsellors was certified. These pioneers are now ready to help the other 200 or so professional and volunteer counsellors in Singapore to achieve international standards and the professional endorsement which certification brings. In a world where quality standards and certification are already the norm, employers here will soon be hiring only counsellors who are professionally trained and certified.

To help candidates prepare for certification, APSAC will launch the first of 10 workshops under its Addictions Training Institute this Saturday. I understand that scholarships are available for halfway house counsellors to attend the workshop through a grant from Singapore Pools. Hence, I want to encourage all substance abuse counsellors, especially halfway house counsellors, to seize this training opportunity to sign up for the workshop and be certified. Let me also thank ISCOS and Singapore Pools for offering the scholarships and making possible our keynote speaker's presence here today.

A drug-free Singapore is a goal we all vigorously pursue. If we continue to press on and improve the way we manage drug offenders, it will be an attainable goal.

I wish all counsellors present here a fruitful symposium. Thank you.

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