

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

=====

EMBARGO INSTRUCTIONS

The attached press release/speech is EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY.

Please check against delivery.

For assistance call 3757795

=====

SPRINTER 4.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet, is located at:

<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

=====

EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE

SINGAPORE RED CROSS SOCIETY'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION DINNER ON
FRIDAY,

12 NOVEMBER 1999 AT MANDARIN SINGAPORE

Ladies and Gentlemen

National Archives of Singapore

1. Thank you for having my wife and me to join you tonight to celebrate the
50th Anniversary of the Singapore Red Cross Society.

2. Fifty years is a long time and few are the organisations that have the
tenacity of purpose and the stamina to survive 50 years and come out the stronger
for it. The Singapore Red Cross Society is one of these few admirable
organisations. My heartiest congratulations to the Chairman and Members of the
Society.

3. Ever since the Red Cross movement started in 1863, its work and ideals have
inspired generations of people to serve the movement as volunteers in one area of
its endeavour or another. It is a fact that every human organisation hopes to
inculcate a spirit of some kind or another to motivate its members. The Red Cross

is no exception. The spirit in which the organisation world wide, its members and supporters dedicate themselves to its cause is now well known.

4. How the Red Cross movement came into being is itself inspiration in that sense. Its beginning can be traced to a man, named Henry Dunant, and his book about his experiences caring for soldiers wounded in a battle near Solferino, a small town in Northern Italy. It is in his book, he mooted the idea of mobilising and training volunteers during peace time, to provide assistance and relief to the suffering and wounded in times of war. Gustave Moynier, a Swiss citizen and chairman of a local charity, read the book and presented its conclusions to his society. The society then established a five-member committee to further study Dunant's proposals. Thus the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was born. But its focus now extends far beyond ministering to the victims of war.

5. Since the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have sprung up across the globe. In peacetime, these National Societies provide a range of services, including disaster relief, Rescue and Ambulance work, as well as health and social programmes to help fellow human beings in distress. During times of hostilities, they have the wherewithal to provide voluntary aid to the sick and wounded, and to civilian sufferers and prisoners of war. Beyond seeking to do all this and more, the Movement and its Societies now seek to alleviate suffering beyond the battlefield, and to do so without discrimination, and wherever it is found. They stress impartiality in their efforts and make no discrimination as to the nationality, race, religious belief or class of those whom they seek to serve.

6. The Singapore Red Cross Society, which is one of the 176 National Societies, adheres to these aims, both in the work it does within Singapore and beyond. I gather, its range of services covers:

- (a) Long term and respite residential care for the severely intellectually and physically disabled.
- (b) Accommodation and transportation for physically handicapped working adults.
- (c) Non-emergency ambulance service for the elderly and needy.
- (d) Blood Collection.
- (e) Bringing first aid into every home.
- (f) Youth programmes and activities.
- (g) Provision of relief assistance and development.

7. The Society's activities have also included the provision of swift and speedy assistance to victims of local strife, natural disasters and other calamities in the region. In recent times it successfully launched a Humanitarian Food and Medical Relief Appeal to relieve distress in Indonesia and sent a mission to Indonesia. Working in association with the Indonesian Red Cross, its efforts helped many needy Indonesian families in various parts of Indonesia. Its mission and distribution efforts would not have been possible without the strong support and involvement of the Red Cross Chapters of Indonesia, Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI),

village leaders, and community organisations. Together some relief reached the people who were in urgent need of food and medical treatment, not only in Jakarta and Jogjakarta, East and West Java; but also beyond in Bali, Kupang, Riau Islands and Ambon.

8. The Society's humanitarian appeals on behalf of victims of floods in China, the recent earthquakes in Taiwan and Turkey and the distressed people of Indonesia are some of the Society's successful efforts to provide succour to those in need, outside Singapore. It must be said that these appeals by the Society could not have succeeded, if not for the spontaneous response of Singaporeans from all walks of life.

9. For these and other of its activities, the Society has depended very much on its army of volunteers. They have been and are the heart and lifeblood of the Society. Without volunteers, the Society would not have been able to sustain many of its activities and programmes. It is they who have made possible the Society's many contributions in Singapore and in our neighbouring countries. There are many among you present here tonight and many others who form part of this effort. You have offered time and services. You form the foundation on which the Society's work is built. That you continue to give your time, effort and energy to the Society, and its work, despite the many other demands on your time, is indeed commendable. We therefore owe a special debt to all who are volunteers and active supporters of the Singapore Red Cross Society. I join many others here in saying a big thank you to all of you who have contributed so much towards the work of the Singapore Red Cross Society.

10. We must all take heart that there are so many Singaporeans, other than the Society's active volunteers, willing to give generous support in different ways to make a positive difference to the lives of others who are less fortunate than themselves, here and elsewhere.

11. It is a fact that, if one is willing to help, there are many channels in Singapore where one can volunteer one's services. The only ingredients needed are willingness, enthusiasm and commitment. The Singapore Red Cross Society has opportunities for people of all ages and walks of life to volunteer. Those who start in primary, or secondary school, do carry on during working life, and even after retirement. There is always something someone can do to help - for instance, the simple but precious gift of blood; spending time with residents of the home for the disabled; training others in first aid techniques; and, for those inclined to venture overseas, the Society's humanitarian aid efforts.

12. Someone once said, "If you want something done, get a busy person to do it." Busy people are always looking for things to do, to see what else they can do to change the world around them. So while much has been asked of you as volunteers, let me ask a little more from you tonight. Please help the Society recruit new volunteers. As a volunteer yourself, you are best equipped to promote voluntarism. What I ask of you is this - let your friends and colleagues know about the satisfaction you get out of being a Red Cross volunteer. Let them know what it feels like to see loneliness and isolation melt away in the warmth of your companionship. Let them know how good it is to see hunger and pain eased through your efforts. Let them know that the act of giving has its own reward. And, ask them to join you in your activities.

13. The task that lies before the Society cannot be under rated. It needs you to come forward with your own ideas and suggestions on what new areas need attention. Through your work as volunteers, you are actually best placed to see what humanitarian needs are still not met. Be in the forefront of putting your ideas into concrete, tangible action. Those who know best what the problems are, are the ones best placed to address them.

14. I therefore call upon all the volunteers - individuals and organisations alike - to let the blaze of your own enthusiasm and energy ignite the spark of voluntarism in the hearts of others, and kindle in them to serve others.

15. The work of the Red Cross has inspired many to participate in building a better society and world for all. The little candle, which Henry Dunant first lit, has become a fire, which has swept across the world. Let us all who are present, make a commitment tonight - to ensure that it is a flame which never dies; that we will go on to make a difference to the people around us and in the rest of the world.

National Archives of Singapore