

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR PETER CHEN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, AT THE CAMP TEEN
2000 OPENING CEREMONY ON FRIDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 1999 AT 3.00PM AT SEMBAWANG BB/GB
CAMPSITE

Good afternoon

Distinguished Guests

Camp Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 It is my pleasure to be here today for the Opening Ceremony of Camp Teen 2000. Let me begin by telling you about a letter which a father wrote to his son who was then studying in Australia. The son, a Chinese boy, shared a room with a fellow scholar who was a Malay throughout the entire 4 years of their course of study. The letter said,

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"When you live among people from a different ethnic community, we must thoroughly understand and respect their religion, customs, traditions and practices because they are different from ours, only then can mankind peacefully co-exist."

That letter was written more than 40 years ago; the writer of that letter was my father and I was the addressee of that letter. It is a piece of advice which I shall never forget. The advice is just as valid today as it was 40 years ago when the letter was written.

2 We live in a multi-racial and multi-religious society. Singapore has no natural resources of any description. We have to rely solely on our people's talents and resourcefulness to build a nation which our people – mainly of immigrant stock – can proudly call home. I would liken Singapore to a potpourri of varied spices blended together. Each spice has its own distinct flavour, but when put

together, they exude an aroma that is rich, unique and intriguing. Yet each spice continues to retain its own distinct characteristics.

3 It is important that we recognise this in order to maintain the racial harmony and social stability that prevail. Rather than being an impediment, our diversity allows us to learn and appreciate more about one another's traditions and cultural heritage. Through this harmonious co-existence of people from different races, our lives have become enriched and our sensitivities are heightened to the need to forge a unity. Therein lies our strength.

4 The various self-help groups must continue to play an active role in bringing students and youths together, and help nurture and develop their potential to the fullest. We must inculcate in our young, the values of mutual respect for the various ethnic communities in which they live. Through joint programmes and activities organised for the various ethnic communities, the self-help groups help to ensure that the harmonious multi-racial social fabric of Singapore remains intact and even strengthened.

5 I note that the self-help groups, together with the Singapore Central Community Development Council (CDC), have jointly set up a Social Services Centre in Toa Payoh to further promote activities that enhance greater participation amongst the various ethnic communities. Besides this, they also have plans to organise activities aimed at promoting the use of IT amongst students, particularly those who are in less fortunate circumstances and in need of assistance.

6 Since 1994, the four community self-help groups, namely MENDAKI, CDAC, SINDA and EA have been pooling their resources to jointly organise camp activities aimed at fostering cross-cultural learning and interaction amongst the various ethnic communities. Over the last five years, each of the four self-help groups took turns to organise Camp activities, which had benefited a total of about 360 students.

7 Aptly, the theme for Camp Teen 2000 is "Unity in Diversity". In another 35 days, we will be welcoming the new millennium. The world that we live in is rapidly changing and we can expect to face more new challenges. Change with concomitant challenges is inevitable. We must remain steadfast and committed, for we are all stakeholders in our nation's future.

8 I would like to encourage these self-help groups to continue in their efforts to build bridges of friendship across the various ethnic communities, and to extend a helping hand to those in need.

9 To all the camp participants, I wish you an enjoyable and meaningful time together.

10 Thank you.

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