

Hi,

Please note the following amendment in Para 14: " Ms Lim Soon Hoon" should be spelt as "Ms Lim Soo Hoon".

For your necessary actions!

MITA Duty Officer

Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE LAUNCH OF
PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2000 AND OPENING OF THE SOCIAL
SERVICE EXHIBITION "HELPING HANDS: SINGAPORE'S PAST,
PRESENT AND FUTURE" ON SATURDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2000 AT 9.40
AM AT THE YOUTH PARK**

Distinguished Guests

Friends and Fellow Singaporeans

I am happy to be here this morning to launch the President's Challenge 2000, and to open the Social Service Exhibition organised by the National Council of Social Service and the National Heritage Board. On a personal note, I am especially pleased to lend my personal support to the President's Challenge, as my

own experience in social and voluntary work has strengthened my conviction that our lives will be that much more enriched and fulfilled when we make it a habit to perform acts of kindness and charity to help a fellow human being in need. The NCSS and its affiliates have helped mobilise the community to have a caring heart in a coordinated way since the days of our nationhood. I am indeed glad that this Exhibition on the history of social service also marks the launch of President's Challenge 2000.

2 The President's Challenge is my personal call to Singaporeans of all ages, and all walks of life to strengthen our philanthropic tradition and the spirit of community caring and volunteerism. The President's Challenge is my call to individuals, corporations and people sector organisations such as VWOs and religious organisations, working in partnership with the Government, to foster a more cohesive and caring society – one where we can truly say “Every Singaporean Matters”, and where the less well-off will always have a sense of hope and feel that someone does care for them.

3 Singapore is now a highly urbanised and fast-paced society. Interaction with the extended family, friends and neighbours is slowly diminishing, and the quality of such interactions is increasingly de-personalised. It is therefore quite possible for someone faced with difficulties to feel a sense of loss and helplessness, and for others to be quite unaware of such needs and problems in their midst.

4 The President's Challenge is therefore not merely a fund-raising exercise. Its main focus is to be a platform to help raise awareness of the needs around us, and to challenge you to make the effort to reach out. Therefore, for those of you yet to be actively involved in any form of social or community service, I urge you to take that step forward to support the many deserving causes that await your involvement. The giving and sharing of your time, resources, talent and energy will not only make a difference to such causes, but also serve as an encouragement to other fellow Singaporeans to come forward.

5 One measure of how far we have progressed and matured as a nation will be the level of our sense of social responsibility. How sensitive are we to the needs of the less fortunate? How prepared are we to reach out to those in need? These are

questions we need to ask ourselves as we reflect on our past, and as we look to build our future together.

6 As we look back, we can find many exemplary pioneers of philanthropy and community service in our history – their strong sense of moral and social obligation is well known. In the early days of Singapore, many individuals came to the fore to safeguard and promote the well-being of their respective communities. They empathised with the hardship of their people. They strove, through personal sacrifice of time, effort and money, to improve the lives of their fellow beings. These early benefactors established schools, hospitals and places of worship, built roads and provided running water and sanitation, besides providing financial support for families in need.

7 This was the hallmark of social responsibility in the Singapore of days gone by. Many of these early philanthropists are featured in the exhibition on the history of social service being launched today. I hope this exhibition, which will subsequently travel to reach out to the HDB estates and schools, will encourage and challenge us to live lives for such greater causes.

8 Let me just mention one prominent individual featured in the exhibition – the Straits-born trader and philanthropist, Tan Tock Seng. He was moved by the plight of the sick, dying from a lack of medical care. With his donation in the 1840s, the first hospital in Singapore for the poor was built. The “Pauper Hospital”, as it was then called, is of course the Tan Tock Seng Hospital of today. It all started because one man cared enough to make the effort to help the unfortunate in society.

9 And we have many more of such men who cared enough to want to make a difference in the lives of others – Tan Kim Seng, the Aw Brothers, the Aljunied, Alkaff and Alsagoff families, Mohammed Eunus Abdullah, Govindasamy Pillai, Dato Lee Kong Chian, Dr Lim Boon Keng, the Shaw Brothers, and many others. They have all done much to improve the lot of the needy in our community. Some of them have set up Foundations, such as the Lee, Shaw, Khoo and Lien Foundations, to name a few. They sought to ensure the continuation of the tradition of charitable giving, even after their death. More recently, we have the example set by the late Dr Ee Peng Liang, for whom no cause was too small to

deserve his active involvement and support.

10 In the New Economy, opportunities for wealth creation will certainly come our way. With it will come new and complex social issues. Key social institutions, such as the family, will come under new pressures and challenges from the globalised economy and technology's impact on society. We will see the emergence of alternative value systems which would challenge our traditional social values and norms. That apart, new social challenges arising from a rapidly ageing population will have to be tackled.

11 To meet these new challenges, we will need a new breed of modern-day philanthropists to emerge from those who are most successful in the New Economy. We will also need corporations to consider contributing to philanthropic causes as one way of demonstrating their social responsibility and good corporate citizenship to the community. Corporate philanthropy can take on a variety of forms, such as donating funds, encouraging and mobilising staff to participate in community activities, and pursuing targeted programmes to equip people with the skills to level up. Philanthropic programmes that have synergy with the corporation's core business and its corporate culture and values can prove to be a win-win situation for all – both the corporation and the community. It will help foster employee satisfaction, and generate goodwill and wider support from the community.

12 I am heartened to hear of corporations who are making such meaningful contributions. One example is Scient. It recently launched the Scient CyberTeens Programme which seeks to equip underprivileged youths with internet and web building skills, to give them a headstart in the digital economy. Similarly, companies such as Hewlett Packard has emphasized contributing to schools and non-profit organisations that serve the disadvantaged in its community involvement.

13 Yet, the responsibility of caring for the less fortunate cannot rest just with individuals or corporate philanthropists alone. All of us have a role and a contribution to make for the betterment of society. Contributions or involvement in the community can be in kind or in terms of donations and effort. No matter how big or small, your contribution does make a difference.

14 The President's Challenge itself epitomises active community participation. The Challenge would not have been possible without the contributions and support of the participating organisations from the private, people and public sectors. Administrative costs have been kept to a minimum, and are fully covered by the many sponsors, for which I am appreciative. As such, every dollar of donation from the public to the President's Challenge will go to the beneficiaries. Here, I would like to extend my personal appreciation and thanks to Ms Lim Soo Hoon, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, and her Organising Committee, for the months of hard work and preparation for this President's Challenge.

15 I urge all Singaporeans to make the President's Challenge a platform to show that they have a big heart. This is my call to all in our society – give of your time and resources; reach out and do the best you can to build a caring and compassionate society.

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