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SPEECH BY MR MATTHIAS YAO CHIH, MINISTER OF STATE WITHOUT PORTFOLIO, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AT FRIEND OF SINGA AWARD CEREMONY ON WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2000, 10AM AT ITE HQ AUDITORIUM, DOVER DRIVE

Mr Noel Hon, Chairman, Singapore Courtesy Council

Distinguished guests

Principals, teachers and students

Ladies and Gentlemen.

National Archives of Singapore

I am happy to be here today for the Year 2000 Friend of Singa Award Ceremony to honour our young ambassadors of courtesy.

2 I am also glad that the Courtesy Council has continued with this annual award because as Mr Hon has pointed out earlier, the early years of a person's life are crucial to the development of his character. This award is a recognition of the positive actions of these young people and a reaffirmation of our faith in them. Through this award, I hope that they will be encouraged to continue with their good work. While the Courtesy Campaign itself cannot fundamentally transform people, I believe that it can serve to remind people of the merits of courtesy and lead them in the right direction. I also hope that others will emulate this year's recipients and come back next year as award winners themselves.

3 Courtesy embraces kindness, helpfulness, politeness, generosity and honesty. These are

intangible qualities but they have a powerful impact on lives. A student who helps a disabled classmate to get around the school would have made a significant difference to his life. He would not only have helped his classmate achieve mobility, he would also have given him his friendship and in the process, helped him overcome the psychological barrier of his handicap.

4 In this age of rapid technological advancements, there is an even greater need for courtesy. As e-mails and other interactive appliances demand quick response from us, we may become less concerned about manners and etiquette. It is therefore imperative that we discover for ourselves a code of courtesy to go with their usage. The handphone has become such a convenient tool of communication that most of us cannot imagine life without it. Singaporeans have some of the highest rate of handphone usage in the world but not everyone knows how use it without inconveniencing others.

5 The Courtesy Council has rightly focused on the theme of appropriate handphone usage in this year's Courtesy Campaign. The slogan "Let's use handphones with courtesy" calls on us to exercise care and consideration for others. This means setting our handphones to the silent mode or using text messaging during movies, plays and meetings so that others will not be disturbed. It is the least we can do. Even at places and occasions when the use of handphones is acceptable, we should be considerate. This means keeping our voices down and our conversations short. It is a way of telling others that we have their interests at heart. Even though not many school children own handphones, the message it carries is still relevant. It simply means that we should always respect others' rights for only then will our own be respected.

6 To the winners of the Friend of Singa award today, I urge you to continue your good work. You are an inspiration to your peers and a testimony that youth is no barrier to courteous and considerate behaviour. I would also like to commend your families and schools for supporting you in your endeavour to make courtesy a way of life. On this note, I wish you a pleasant day.

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