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SPEECH BY DR OW CHIN HOCK, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MAYOR OF THE TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL DISTRICT, AT THE ASEAN REGION LOCAL ADMINISTRATION FORUM 2000 ON FRIDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2000 AT FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, SINGAPORE

Mr Masahiro Futahashi, Administrative Vice-Minister of Home Affairs, Japan, Mr Shigeichi Mori, Chairman of Board of Directors of CLAIR, Distinguished Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

2   I am pleased to be here this morning. Today's forum provides a good opportunity for local administrations from different countries to come together to share and learn from one another.

Role of Local Governments

3   Local governments play an important role in a country's system of governance. They are the "nerves" and "arms" of central governments. First, being closer to the ground, local governments are more attuned and responsive than central governments to the specific needs of their own communities. They

help address local concerns and provide local inputs to national initiatives. Second, they can tap on their local knowledge and network to deliver services more efficiently and responsively and to deliver these services with a human touch. Local governments thus help to customise and personalise the one-size-fits all policies of central governments. Third, local governments provide a platform for greater partnership between the public, private and people sectors and an avenue for greater citizen involvement in local affairs. These usually lead to a greater sense of ownership, more effective implementation and better results.

4   In Singapore, despite our compact size, there are variations in our population profile and the needs of our local communities. In 1997, we set up the Community Development Councils (CDCs). The CDCs are evolving into local administrations, providing social and community services at the local level, facilitating local solutions to local problems, and leading local responses to national challenges. The CDCs' key focus is not merely the local delivery of social services, but more importantly, the promotion of social cohesion and community bonding, through empowering each community to look after and care for its own local concerns. Our CDCs, as local administrations, are really the "new kids" in town. Your local governments and administrations are mature and have been in existence much longer. We certainly have much to learn from you.

Challenges facing Governments

5   The theme of today's forum, "Raising the Professional Ethical Standards of the Civil Service in the New Millennium", is an important one. Governments now operate in a more complex environment brought about by external forces of globalisation and rapid technological change, and internal challenges such as education, economy, and ageing population. Our roles and modes of operation must change to meet new challenges posed by a new economy, and a new society.

6   In the past, generally speaking, the government was a regulator and guardian, acting to ensure that rules were complied with, and leading the nation towards its universal objectives such as peace, stability, prosperity and protection of its sovereignty. In today's fast-changing knowledge-based economy and information society, our countries will fall behind and fail in achieving its objectives if we continue with the regulatory roles and slow modes of operation. We have to be innovative and responsive in providing the right

environment and supporting systems. We also have to work more closely with the private and people sectors to provide collective solutions to complex challenges, and to make sure that government policies take into account their desires and aspirations.

7   To meet the challenges ahead, local governments must be efficient and effective, and have the trust, confidence and support of the people. To achieve this, it is imperative that local governments remain professional, maintain high ethical standards and run transparent administrative organisations. As we change our roles and modes of operation, we must also transit from <u>a model of actions by rules to a model of actions by core values of governance</u>. Core values of governance, such as integrity and incorruptibility, become all the more important in guiding our officers in day-to-day decision making, particularly when rules may be slow in coping with new situations, and not flexible enough to manage public-private-people sector partnerships.

8   Having an ethical code to guide our officers is necessary but not sufficient. This has to be supported by a system of rewards and penalties, and backed by examples of personal leadership. Appointing good people to government and rewarding them well is an ancient Confucianist concept. Two thousand and three hundred years ago, Xun Zi, a Chinese philosopher born in 318 BC (318-238BC) said, "It is impossible to have good people to come forward to serve without proper rewards; it is impossible to deter bad people from committing crimes without proper punishment." Another philosopher, Mozi (? ? – 470-391 BC) also believed: "… identify the virtuous and value the able. They would be conferred the title of nobility, given high emoluments, appointed to high positions, and delegated authority to issue resolute order."

9   In Singapore, we have developed a market-based formula to ensure that the salaries of ministers and civil servants do not lag too far behind that of their private sector counterparts. We also have swift and severe penalties in our laws for corruption to deter potential offenders, making it clear that corruption is not tolerated.

10   The political leadership sets the tone for the civil service and the society at large. It must lead by example to have the moral authority to govern. Corruption, cronyism, nepotism and money politics must be eradicated or they will eventually erode the legitimacy of any government.

People Network across Boundaries

11   We live in an increasingly interdependent world. Even in the public sector today, the confrontation and "win-lose" philosophy has to give way to cooperation and a "win-win" attitude. The importance of coming together and sharing ideas must never be taken for granted. It provides the avenues for learning, getting to know new role models, and more importantly, to understand each other better.

12   Singapore benefited from technical assistance and cooperation from developed countries in the past. It is now sharing its development experience with and providing technical assistance to other developing countries through the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), which includes Third-Country Technical Cooperation (TCTP). Japan is one of Singapore's TCTP partners. The SCP is administered by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

13   Another example of cooperation is the relationship between our People's Association and CLAIR. With the help of CLAIR, every year, officers from the People's Association are sent to Kagoshima for stage management attachment programmes. CLAIR also plays an active role in bringing Japanese cultural performances to participate in Singapore's Chingay Parade. On a broader spectrum, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme implemented by CLAIR has provided young university graduates, from all around the world, opportunities to participate in international exchange activities and foreign language education.

14   We must continue to develop the people network across our boundaries by opening up the communication channels at all levels – at the central government and local government level, at business level and at the ground level where our people visit each other and exchange ideas. I am sure that CLAIR will continue its important work of bringing all of us together.

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