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**SPEECH BY MR OTHMAN HARON EUSOFE,
MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF MANPOWER
THE ASIAN CHILDREN'S WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS
CONFERENCE 2000 AT MARINE PARADE LIBRARY BUILDING
29 NOVEMBER 2000 AT 9.30 AM**

Dr Tan Chin Nam, Chairman National Library Board,
Mr Ramachandran, Chairman National Book Development Council and Asst.
Chief Executive National Library Board,
Distinguished speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen.

1 I am happy to join you this morning at this Asian Children's Writers Illustrators Conference 2000. The Asian Children's Festival deserves our attention as it recognises and celebrates the potential of children in our part of the world.

2 Cliché as it may sound but children are our future. It's important that they enjoy good childhood because that's when they learn the most and the best. Depending on how they are taken care of, they can grow up to be either a generation of slackers or a generation of seekers!

3 Thanks to the Asian Children's Festival, we can have more ideas to nurture a nation of creative and enthusiastic seekers, willing and able to make a difference in whatever they do and wherever they are! They will have the opportunity to enhance their ability to break down walls and connect our people to a universe of knowledge and learning to ensure a lifetime of success. Indeed, we must do our best to provide them with more opportunities to develop their talents and creativity.

4 Parents have therefore a huge responsibility in this area. Shape the child's life right and you have a winner on your hands.

5 Reading and learning for children is crucial. Not being able to do that will make their world a dull and sterile place – where imagination is alien and humour is lacking. I believe that this Asian Children's Festival will explore more ideas of what are good and positive for the children. Provide them with the motivation to quickly realise their innate interests and capabilities and to forge their own paths. We should endeavour to make life exciting and rich for them and the communities they live in and contribute to. Let them dream of what they really hope to be when they grow up and guide them to maximise their talent and potential as well as to safe and healthy pursuits. In the current context of our development, let us resist the strong temptation to get them to learn only on an examination-centred approach.

6 The Asia Pacific region is bouncing back robustly after a period of slow-down and this festival is therefore very timely. This event sees a gathering of creative individuals from the region who have taken the time to come to Singapore to share their experiences and insights. I appreciate your active participation and I am certain that we will indeed learn much from your expertise and experience.

7 While there are already many books and educational materials out there for our children, more should be done to create material relevant for people living in this part of the world – the Asia-Pacific. We would like to see more Asian perspective and an Asian identity incorporated into the learning materials. Having said this, I am also confident that there will be a prolific production of such materials soon! It will go a long way in helping parents, teachers and children understand and appreciate the uniqueness of our Asian culture.

8 I commend the National Book Development Council of Singapore, the National Library Board, the People's Association and the National Arts Council for their collaboration to put this event together. I am sure that all participants will have a fruitful time in blazing new trails and mapping new territories at the Asian

Children's Writers and Illustrators Conference and all the programmes in the Festival.

9 Once again, my congratulations and all the best for the future. It is now my pleasure to declare the Asian Children's Writers and Illustrators Conference and the Asian Children's Expo open! Thank you.

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