

**Transcript of Remarks by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Finance & Minister for Manpower at the PPIS 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Charity Gala Dinner on Wednesday, 27 June 2012 at 8.15pm at Fairmont Singapore Hotel**

Mdm Sapiah Molla, President of PPIS

Mdm Maznah Masop, CEO of PPIS

Ms Christine Hakim, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Thank you for inviting me. It is a real privilege for me to be here today, a very important time with PPIS turning 60. Doing good work for society over such a long period is worth celebrating, and it is worth remembering, as Maznah said, the people who started this off a long time ago - the 22 women, 60 years ago and what wonderful vision!

2. The best organisations are started by individuals who believe in something, get together and make it work. Things grow over time, but the spirit and passion that started the organisation also see it through the years. So congratulations on everything you have done for women and their families, and for community and nation over the last 60 years.

**PPIS's contribution to the community**

3. PPIS started small but is now a very important partner for the Government and the community. A partner in eradicating problems, bringing hope to families and building a better society. More than just dealing with problems, you are helping to take society forward, by inspiring families and especially women.

4. And this is part of our major project in Singapore. Our key project is to build and sustain an inclusive society. It involves many national policies, initiatives on the ground, networking among people and organisations. Many initiatives, but they will take time. There will always be quick fixes that we need to do, to plug immediate problems, but the larger

project is that of sustaining social mobility, decade after decade, from one generation to the next.

5. We have to do all we can to prevent disadvantage passing down from one generation to the next. It happens naturally in every society. In every mature society, you see it - advantages being passed down from one generation to the next, and disadvantages very easily passed down to the children and then the grandchildren. We have to do our utmost to work against that, do our utmost to ensure that those who start off behind have the best chance of catching up so that disadvantage does not get repeated across generations. In other words, to ensure it does not become the culture of a permanent underclass.

6. And I believe we can do that in Singapore. I believe we can prevent a permanent underclass from being formed, and avoid the cycle of disadvantage that comes very naturally in any society. But it means new initiatives, more effort, partners supporting each other - and passion for the cause.

7. First, we have to intervene earlier - intervene earlier in the life of the child; in fact, before their preschool years, working with the family so that they can bring up the child as best as they can. Intervene early to spot specific learning difficulties in each child, help them to correct for that and catch up and gain confidence. Because if you start off with a loss of confidence, it is very easy to feel you are at a disadvantage for many years on, through your school years. So we have to avoid confidence deficits, by intervening early to address difficulties, so they can go on and do well in school.

8. Second, we have to tackle specific problems among other groups in our society - the difficulties of the aged poor and the disabled, and the special problems of other groups like single mothers. These require specialised resources and programmes customised to the needs of each group. This too is a very important area of new initiatives, that we are putting more energy and resources into.

9. Third, in order to succeed in the first two initiatives, we need a strong force of committed social workers, professionals and volunteers. Social workers are critical. We are short of them. We are therefore building up the social work profession. It is not just a

matter of remuneration, although that is certainly something we are addressing, but also building up career opportunities for social workers - opportunities to develop, to tackle larger challenges and to feel that you are doing something worthwhile as you progress.

10. So developing the social workers' career is a very important priority. And we are also expanding opportunities for a range of other specialists to be trained - speech therapists, learning support specialists, counsellors who can gain the trust of families who have lost hope and help them work for a better future, or gain the trust of drug offenders and help them to turn their lives around. No one should lose hope forever, although we all lose hope temporarily at some point in our lives. Counsellors are critical, trained but also gaining experience on the job and by being part of a team. So this third priority is extremely important – developing the social workers and also training up and developing specialists in the range of fields.

11. PPIS plays a key role in everything that I have said. You have specialised centres (apart from running the FSCs) - specialised centres that are doing very good work, tackling problems amongst vulnerable groups. In particular, Vista Sakinah - Centre for Remarriages and Stepfamilies; As-Salam - Centre for Single Parents; and Inspirasi - Hub for Marriage reparation and Enrichment. Three good examples, adopting targeted approaches and interventions that are customised and meaningful to each group. These are the actions on the ground that go a long way. We must always remember that. It is not just about general pronouncements but actions on the ground that will gradually transform a community.

12. You are also important as a touch point for national programmes - both through your FSCs and your role as a key agent for several national programmes, such as HOPE (HOME Ownership Plus Education scheme). So you are working with the Government, plus you are innovating and developing your own specialised programmes to meet the needs of the clients that you know best.

13. Now you are now embarking on new directions, which are also very important. Because as I have mentioned earlier, our task is not just to plug immediate gaps and clear the deficits, but also to build hope and aspirations in every family. And developing leaders in

women is a very important and effective strategy for the future that you have embarked on. I know you are going about it very systematically, developing the abilities of young Malay Muslim women to participate in the workforce and do well; to help their families manage their finances and bring their children up well - everything that builds aspirations. Because we know every family can have aspirations, and can work to reach them.

14. And you are using innovative new tools. I do not know all the details, but it is very interesting how you are using information technology, and tapping on your technology partners, to develop new ways of assessing the needs of families and customising the type of support they need.

15. PPIS is therefore not just active but fired up for the future. I am confident, given the way you are going about this, and the support you have in the wider community that we see here tonight, that you will achieve our aspiration of building a community and a society with vision, *ihsan* and resilience.

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