

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE GREAT WOMEN OF OUR TIME AWARDS
PRESENTATION
THURSDAY, 12 OCT 2017, 7PM, VLV CLARKE QUAY
MRS JOSEPHINE TEO, 2MINISTER FOR MANPOWER**

Mr Loh Yew Seng, CEO, SPH Magazines

Present and past Great Women of Our Time nominees and honorary winners

Distinguished guests

Introduction

I am pleased to join you here once again. Today, we celebrate the achievements of exceptional women in Singapore for their outstanding leadership and achievements in their professions.

Progress of Women in Singapore

Women in Singapore have achieved much. Our women live long and healthy lives¹. The employment rate for local women ranks well among developed countries² and Singapore does reasonably well in terms of gender equality index³.

National Archives of Singapore

Singaporean women have also scaled new heights in their professions and careers. In 2015, we had our first female Brigadier-General Gan Siow Huang. Just last month, we are proud to have our first female President, Madam Halimah Yacob. But it is getting tougher to find the first woman in this or that field. I for one, did not realise until my appointment was publicly announced and someone pointed out that the security sector had not had a woman minister before.

¹ Life expectancy at birth for women is 85.1 years, more than men whose life expectancy is 80.6 years.

² Female residents aged 25-64 is 72% in 2016, up from 62.6% in 2006. Singapore ranks 13th amongst all 35 OECD countries.

³ This is a composite index that measures the inequality between female and male achievements in 3 dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment and labour market. The higher the rank, the smaller the gender inequality.

Tonight, we recognise 18 great women who inspire us. One of them is Elim Chew, founder of 77th Street. Elim has expanded her range of businesses widely. They include restaurants, a courier service and app, and even fish farming! But Elim has also stood by her principle that “everything starts from the heart”. She strives to make a social impact through all that she does.

Laura Hwang is another achiever who has dedicated many of her years to causes that empower women. During her tenure as President of the Singapore Council for Women’s Organisations, Laura was instrumental in motivating changes to the Women’s Charter to improve legal and support systems for divorced women and broken families. Laura now plays another important role as our nation’s representative for women’s rights at the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children.

Elim and Laura are two great women. But every day, each of us meet or know many others who are great in their own ways: women who juggle work and family, while keeping their own skills and knowledge current. Whatever our personal beliefs and interests, I think we are at least united in wishing that every woman in Singapore has the opportunity to fulfil her potential, work and family aspirations.

Helping women fulfil their potential

The Government is committed to doing so. We have enhanced our support measures over the years. To give mothers time to care for and bond with their new infants, we have increased maternity leave over the years⁴: in 2004, it went up from eight to 12 weeks; in 2008, from 12 to 16 weeks.

But we don’t want child-raising to be a woman’s job. It is the job of both parents, where both the joys and pains ought to be shared. Therefore, we have also enhanced leave provisions to encourage greater shared parental responsibility – today, fathers have 2 weeks of paid paternity leave and also can share up to 4 weeks of their wife’s maternity

⁴ Maternity Leave was increased three times (it was extended to the third child in 2001).

leave. Including paid child care leave and unpaid infant care leave provisions, fathers can enjoy a total of up to 8 weeks of leave⁵ to care for their newborn children in the first year of birth.

Beyond leave provisions, there are also other measures. To make our workplaces more family-friendly, we have the Work-Life Grant which funds each company up to \$160,000 over four years to implement Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs). Just last week, I launched the Tripartite Standard on FWAs to encourage more employers to make a public commitment that they have offered FWAs in their companies.

Last month, NTUC also launched the Returner Work Trial, to provide support for back-to-work parents to return to the workforce. Apart from these efforts, the Government is also studying further ways to encourage more flexi-load options such as part-time and job-sharing, so that women need not choose between full-time work and being out of the labour force.

Conclusion

The Government together with our tripartite partners will continue working towards making Singapore a Great Place for Families, and to foster inclusive and family-friendly workplaces. In doing so, we will at the same time give women more opportunities to become all that they hope to be.

To conclude, please join me in toasting the nominees, award recipients and your supportive families and friends. Congratulations once again to all the award-winners tonight and I wish everyone here a great evening.

Thank you.

⁵ The 8 weeks comprise of 2 weeks of paid paternity leave, 4 weeks of shared parental leave, 6 days of paid childcare leave, and 6 days of unpaid infantcare leave.