

Embargo until 7 February 2018, 11am  
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**SPEECH OF PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE LAUNCH  
OF THE RSAF50 CELEBRATIONS AT SINGAPORE AIRSHOW  
18 ON WEDNESDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2018, 10AM, CHANGI  
EXHIBITION CENTRE**

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Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence

Mr Ong Ye Kung, Second Minister for Defence

Dr Maliki Osman, Senior Minister of State for Defence

Mr Chan Yeng Kit, Permanent Secretary of Defence,

Lieutenant General Perry Lim, Chief of Defence Force,

Past and present Air Force Chiefs,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am delighted to be here this morning to launch the Republic of Singapore Air Force's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, or RSAF50 celebrations.

Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to our guests from overseas. With us today are friends from over 28 countries who are honouring this occasion with your presence and with the participation of your aircraft at the Singapore Airshow 2018. This gathering of distinguished guests from Air Forces around the world is testament to the strong and wide-ranging relationships that the RSAF has established.

The RSAF50 celebrations mark five decades of the RSAF keeping our skies and Singaporeans safe. The RSAF has come a long way, from a single air defence command with less than one hundred personnel in 1968, to a modern, professional air force today capable of confronting myriad threats. Together with the Army and Navy, the RSAF has safeguarded Singapore's sovereignty and provided the stability for Singapore to progress and grow. Indeed, Singapore's status as a vibrant air and trade hub today are founded upon the security provided by a strong defence force.

It is not by chance that Singapore has developed rapidly over a few decades into our modern, bustling metropolis. Even in the early days of independence, our founding leaders were keenly aware that Singapore was inherently vulnerable because we are a small island nation with no strategic depth and limited resources. They understood that, in order to build an independent nation with any chance of survival, Singapore needed to have the ability to defend itself. Thus our Pioneers committed themselves to building a credible armed force to defend Singapore's land, sea and skies. This was an uphill task, with limited manpower, money and resources. In the case of the RSAF, the enormity of this challenge is even more acute. Singapore's limited geography means that airborne threats can arrive at little notice, and with the potential to cause great harm and disruption. In order to keep our skies safe, the RSAF must have early warning capabilities and the ability to counter any threats from the air, round-the-clock, day and night.

Today, the dedicated men and women of the RSAF do just that. They watch our skies 24/7 and keep us safe by operating technologically-advanced systems and equipment, including ground-based air defence systems, sensors, fighter aircraft, helicopters, transport aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles. In 50 years, these men and women of the RSAF have helped Singapore grow from having almost no air defence capability to become a formidable air force which can respond swiftly and decisively to a full spectrum of threats. In particular, I would like to thank all the Pioneers of the RSAF for laying the foundation to develop the RSAF to what it is today.

The RSAF has also demonstrated its professionalism when called upon to assist Singaporeans and civilians around the world during times of need. In 1997, the RSAF was instrumental in evacuating more than 400 Singaporeans from Cambodia when there were political tensions. It has contributed to multinational peace support operations, such as in Timor Leste and as far away as the Gulf of Aden, Afghanistan and Iraq. The RSAF also participates in relief operations for natural disasters such as those for Hurricane Harvey in Texas last year. In 2015, the RSAF evacuated Singaporeans who were stranded in Sabah and Nepal after earthquakes. I will not go on to list every other operation of the RSAF, but it gives me great pride, as a Singaporean, to know that our Air Force has made a difference, not just in Singapore but also in various parts of the world.

Over the years, the RSAF has built strong relationships with many nations, underscored by mutual trust and understanding. This has allowed the RSAF to interact regularly with other Air Forces, where they learn from each other, train together to hone their skills, and jointly conduct operations. In our region, the RSAF regularly exercises with Air Forces from Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, Australia, India and New Zealand. Further abroad, the RSAF has close partnerships with the US, French, UK and Italian Air Forces, including permanent detachments in some of these countries. Singapore is very grateful for the support of these and many other countries, and I am confident that these ties will strengthen further in the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks an important milestone for the RSAF. I would like to congratulate the RSAF on its success and achievements over the past 50 years. To all the airmen and women who have made the RSAF's success possible, I thank you for your professionalism and unwavering commitment. I am confident that the RSAF will continue to keep our skies safe and secure. I wish the RSAF continued excellence in the years ahead.

Thank you.

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