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Speech by Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, Minister of State for Defence, at Committee of Supply Debate 2014

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CSNS "Recognition and Benefits for NS" Working Group

Madam, I thank Mr Ong Teng Koon, Mr Gerald Giam and Mr Pritam Singh for asking what more can MINDEF/SAF do to recognise the contributions of our NSmen. Over the years, we have shown our appreciation to NSmen in different ways, such as the National Service Bonus, the NSman Tax Relief and the National Service Recognition Award (or NSRA). Many NSmen have benefitted from these schemes. For example, the NSRA has already benefitted 210,000 NSmen to date. As part of the Committee to Strengthen NS (or CSNS), I chair the "Recognition and Benefits for National Service (NS)" Working Group to address how MINDEF/SAF can better recognise the contributions of our NSmen. We have spoken to many National Servicemen as well as Singaporeans from all walks of life, and are at our final stages of evaluating these feedback and suggestions, including enhancing our existing recognition schemes like the NSRA for example, to better recognise our NSmen in the area of health care. When we commemorated the 45th anniversary of NS in 2012, MINDEF also offered SAFRA benefits in the form of vouchers and club memberships. I am pleased to report that more than 80% of NSmen have redeemed some \$43 million worth of SAFRA vouchers, and about 400,000 NSmen have taken up the SAFRA free membership offered.

With increased membership and as part of our continuing efforts to recognise our NSmen, I am pleased to announce that the construction of a new SAFRA clubhouse in Punggol will commence in the middle of this year. This will add close to 20,000 square metres of additional recreational spaces for our NSmen and their families to enjoy and bond. When completed, NSmen and their families will have convenient access to quality

lifestyle facilities at six SAFRA clubs located island-wide. We will also be redeveloping SAFRA Tampines to include new sports and other exciting facilities, and also study the feasibility of a new SAFRA clubhouse in the northwestern part of Singapore, to expand further the variety of offerings to more than 540,000 NSmen and their families who are SAFRA members today.

Mr Giam has suggested that NSmen who take on extra responsibilities be specially appreciated. We are heartened that Mr Giam shares our sentiments. In recognition of their effort, these NSmen have been given an additional allowance since 1983. This is reviewed periodically and MINDEF will continue to look into other ways to recognise the contributions of these NSmen.

However, as we explore how MINDEF and SAF can continue to offer more recognition to our NSmen, it is also important for other stakeholders to do their part in showing recognition to our NSmen. Employers, families, communities - there is much that each can do to send a clear message that NS is a critical institution and its success (including showing recognition) is everyone's responsibility.

Commitment to Defence

This shared responsibility and the commitment of all Singaporeans to defence was highlighted by Ms Irene Ng and Mr Ong Teng Koon. MINDEF continues to engage all Singaporeans to strengthen their support for defence. The CSNS is only the latest in our series of engagement efforts over the years. We have been engaging ACCORD members, grassroots leaders, employers, trade union leaders, overseas Singaporeans, New Citizens and others through various activities, to keep them updated on NS and defence-related issues. For example, we arranged for more than 260 different stakeholders and their family members, and more than 10,000 students, to visit the Singapore Airshow in February this year. In November last year, the Navy@Vivo also attracted around 31,000 visitors. Such outreach efforts aim to enable Singaporeans to experience first-hand the capabilities of the SAF, particularly also the competence of our NSFs and NSmen. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education under the SAF-Schools Partnership Programme, we have also reached out to almost 70,000 students from 30 schools through various activities since 2010. Hopefully, these activities do give the boys a good preview of the SAF before their enlistment thereby increasing their level of commitment when they get enlisted, and for the girls, we hope it gives them a better understanding of what their friends and family members go through during NS. MINDEF has continuously sought new communication and engagement initiatives to bring the SAF closer to the hearts and minds of Singaporeans. On the social media front, our cyberpioneerTV YouTube channel, and the Army, Navy and Airforce Facebook pages have attracted strong followings. It is heart-warming to read some of the personal reflections on these Facebook pages. Let me share with the House one such post made by LTA(NS) Davis

Koh Han Rong, who is currently a university student, on the Army Facebook that he posted last year: "I am grateful for the army that has transformed me to who I am today... Ever a day the button is pressed, I will be ready to stand forth and protect this place I call home." Many Members will be familiar with PIONEER magazine, which was started in 1969. PIONEER continues to reach out to 180,000 subscribers each month. Over the years, we have refreshed the magazine to make it more relevant and informative. We have also shared its content on our social medial channels to extend its reach and help us engage our audience. Members will also be familiar with the BMT web reality series "Every Singaporean Son", and may be pleased to know that MediaCorp will be telecasting the series on Channel 5 later this year.

Entertainment aside, these efforts create a strong emotive resonance and allow all members of the public to understand the need for defence, the SAF and NS. We are extremely heartened that Singaporeans' commitment to NS and defence remains high. According to the Oct 2013 survey conducted by NUS' Institute of Policy Studies, more than 98% of respondents agree that NS is necessary for Singapore's defence. Surveys aside, we have also witnessed different members of the community expressing their support for our NSmen in their own ways, ranging from the 21 retailers who offered exclusive promotions to all SAF servicemen during SAF Day last year, to bloggers such as Darryl Kang who saluted online those who have contributed to national defence, and also an unnamed female student who gave PTE Yang Hui a thank you note for his service to the nation whilst on a bus earlier this month. MINDEF will not take this support for granted, and we will continue to expand our engagement efforts to further strengthen Singaporeans' commitment to defence.

Total Defence for a new Generation of Singaporeans

Madam, we agree with Ms Ng and Mr Ong that Singapore's defence depends on Singaporeans taking personal responsibility and getting involved in our defence. Mr Ong and Mr Alex Yam asked how Total Defence remains relevant and how MINDEF engages the public on Total Defence. This year marks our 30th anniversary of Total Defence.

Over the last 30 years, we have seen and we have been confronted with a variety of challenges, including the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008, the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the potential terrorist attacks and threats post-9/11. In all these instances, we witnessed Total Defence in action. Total Defence has stayed relevant because it has adapted to changing circumstances. Because everyone played a part, we were able to overcome all these adversities. But as we move forward, a new generation of Singaporeans will need to take ownership of Total Defence. For the younger generation, their memories do not stretch to World War II and Konfrontasi, events that many could read about only in textbooks and the internet. While these events remain vivid in the minds of our pioneer generation, it may not be so for our younger generation. Of course, we must not allow these memories to fizzle away. But we must also recognize that our

younger generation will have their own experiences and memories that will be etched in their own minds. We must ensure that these experiences continue to have relevance to Total Defence, given that the younger generation now exists in an increasingly unpredictable world and that the next crisis could be just around the corner. How Singaporeans responded to the haze crisis last year gives us clues of how our younger generation view Total Defence. We witnessed how many young Singaporeans stepped forward to help fellow Singaporeans. Some groups set up Facebook pages to encourage Singaporeans to share resources such as masks and air purifiers, while others distributed masks and herbal tea to the less fortunate.

Similarly, when asked to share their takes on Total Defence via an animation clip for our annual N.E.mation! competition for students, I was impressed by how many of the teams went the extra mile for their projects, and also how thoughtful their messages were. Many of these students' stories revolved around helping people in need and initiating actions to strengthen our society. This sense of community is integral to Total Defence today. The path of reflection and self-discovery taken by these students must be integral to Total Defence as we move forward, as every generation of Singaporeans must also discover for themselves what Total Defence means to them.

On MINDEF's part, to strengthen support for Total Defence, we will continue to reach out to the younger generation and other sectors of society through more "experiential" and "reflective" forms of engagement. Indeed, Total Defence must be the daily experience for every Singaporean. In this year's Total Defence campaign, which is themed "30 Years of Total Defence: Because You Played A Part", we featured stories of everyday Singaporeans who have contributed to Total Defence in their own way. For instance, Mr Lin Chin Heng, who was once a troubled youth, is today a mentor to other troubled teenagers. Or senior SMRT bus captain Mr Suppiramaniam who unfailingly greets all his passengers and remembers the names of his regulars. These are everyday Singaporeans doing what they consider to be ordinary things, but the outcome for the community is anything but ordinary. Their stories were featured at an interactive Total Defence exhibition at the National Museum last month, and were also published in a commemorative book. These stories will also be showcased at some of our public libraries over the next few months. We hope that these ordinary Singaporeans with extraordinary hearts will be inspirations for others to do their part, daily, for Total Defence. Some of these materials are in the bags that you have received.

Let me conclude by sharing a quote from a young Singaporean taken from the reflection wall put up at the National Museum during the Total Defence exhibition this year, which I found very encouraging. Ms Lee Li Wen, a 21 year-old student wrote, "Singapore is home to me and I love her dearly. I'm glad that my parents and the public are taking the time to make meaning of Total Defence Day. Indeed, we protect what we love." This tells

us that the younger generation shares the conviction that Total Defence continues to be relevant and important to Singapore. It also gives us confidence to together build an even stronger Singapore. Total Defence has evolved, and it will continue to evolve. It is up to each generation of Singaporeans to take ownership of Total Defence and infuse it with fresh purpose. But what will not change is Total Defence as a personal and collective commitment to defend our home and our way of life.

Thank you.

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