



# SPEECH

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## **Speech by Senior Minister of State for Defence Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman on Total Defence Day**

15 Feb 2016

Dear friends,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First, let me thank you for being here this afternoon. We are happy to be able to hold this Total Defence Commemoration Event here, in this spectacular Theatre of Generations. Indeed, Total Defence is the strong foundation on which the future of Singapore depends. But even as we look forward to what lies ahead for Singapore and imagine the opportunities and the possibilities that we can seize, we also need to be aware of what threats and challenges await us. This year's Total Defence exhibition, which we can visit at the Future of Us exhibition's Marketplace, just round the corner, gets us thinking about the question "What if our Blue Skies Turned Grey?"

Singapore is no stranger to dark skies. In the early 2000s, we encountered the threat of the Al-Qaeda terrorists after 9/11, overcame the outbreak of SARS at home, and rode through the global financial crisis that followed closely. Dark clouds are looming again. The economic outlook is uncertain as we face weak economic growth and volatile stock markets all around the world. The Zika virus is spreading rapidly in the Americas. Terrorism has reared its ugly head again. All this is of concern to us. The world has shrunk. We are also interconnected

through the internet and movement of people across the seas and continents and what happens far away could find its way onto our shores, with disastrous consequences.

Today, I want to focus on terrorism. It is the biggest threat facing all countries. We should not be surprised if what happened in Paris, Istanbul or Jakarta happens here in Singapore. In fact, we had a close shave in 2001, when we uncovered the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) plot to bomb various locations in Singapore. Since then extremist ideologies have become even more widespread. Groups like ISIS have used the Internet and social media to attract followers from all over the world. In fact, nearly 1000 men and women from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and even Singapore are believed to have travelled to the Middle East to fight for ISIS. Over there, they will gain operational and combat experience, learn to make bombs, and build networks with other militants. If they return, they will pose a direct and serious threat to our society. ISIS has even expressed its intention to establish a province of its "caliphate" in Southeast Asia. Militant groups in the region have also pledged allegiance to ISIS. This shows how our thriving multi-cultural and multi-religious society presents a direct affront to the worldview and values of these extremists.

How should we respond to such threats? The way we have always responded -- by taking a Total Defence approach to deal with these challenges, with each of us playing our own part, proactively. When the 9/11, SARS and global financial crises hit us in the 2000s, we closed ranks, made personal sacrifices, pulled through and emerged relatively intact. One reason, I believe, was our continuous investment in building up a strong SAF and a Home Team, putting in place sound economic policies, strengthening our social and communal bonds and nurturing a sense of identity as Singaporeans -- painstakingly and patiently -- so that as a nation, we stood strong against those crises, and could recover quickly after they passed. But, in our confidence and optimism for the future, we must not let our guard down. In particular, I believe we need to work hard to further strengthen our social and psychological defences. The enemy is more sophisticated. The battle is no longer traditional. The real battle of today and of the future is for the hearts and minds of our people. Terrorists aim to spread fear, sow discord among the communities and to divide the people. They aim to disrupt, destabilise and demoralise a stable, prosperous country, so that they can win more adherents to their cause.

The only way to respond is to be vigilant, determined and resolute in our hearts and minds to reject any extremist idea that seeks to divide us. Only then can terrorism fail. This fight is not for security agencies alone. The SAF and Home Team will step up their efforts to protect Singapore -- but that is not enough. This fight involves every one of us -- regardless of our race or religion -- all coming together to make a firm stand against

any group that threatens to destroy our way of life. And in the event of a terror attack occurring in Singapore, our response must be one of solidarity -- closing ranks among all communities -- and showing the terrorists that life will bounce back to normal quickly, and we will not let them to disrupt our lives nor instil fear in us. This is what the French did. Just over two weeks after the Paris attacks, they proceeded as planned with the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change, which involved more than 140 world leaders and up to 40,000 attendees and across 190 nations. Likewise, the Indonesians refused to be cowed by the attack in Jakarta, and proclaimed their defiance against the terrorists through the #kamitidaktakut (We Are Not Afraid) movement.

The key to Total Defence is resilience -- we must continue to build social and community resilience against terrorism and extremism. Our social resilience is about building and investing in relationships, and having a proper understanding and trust amongst the different races and religions. Without this cohesion and resilience, all it takes is one hit to sow mistrust and create irreparable fault lines in our society. We can take a leaf from the terrorist attack in Sydney in December 2014 that threatened to provoke widespread Islamophobia in Australia. Australians across the country rallied together with the #I'llridewithyou movement, with many offering to ride with Muslims to work on public transport. There are other examples of people from different religions banding together in the face of terror. Two months ago, Muslim passengers on a bus in Kenya shielded and protected non-Muslims from extremist al-Shabab militants. In 2011, a week after a suicide attack on Coptic Christians in Alexandria, Egyptian Muslims offered themselves as "human shields" to protect Coptic Christians during their celebration of Christmas. Our best comeback to any acts of terror is to rally together as one united people.

Social resilience also means having the ability to stay rational and strongly reject messages that seek to incite hatred and discrimination against our fellow Singaporeans, whether on cyberspace, social media, or messaging platforms like WhatsApp. We have the power to prevent such messages going viral. Whenever we receive such messages, stop and question their authenticity before we click on "share". Verify their source, and think about the implications of your sharing such messages. I recall years ago an image of Muslim schoolchildren in a bus was shared on social media, with the malicious caption, I quote, "young terrorist trainees". Muslims and non-Muslims alike stepped up to condemn such remarks. Small gestures such as these will go a long way in preserving and strengthening our social harmony.

This year's Total Defence campaign carries a very pertinent and timely theme "Together We Keep Singapore Strong". This is an important message -- that the strength of Singapore depends on the collective effort of every Singaporean, each doing our part and working with the authorities to ensure that Singapore can stand up to any

threat or challenge, and that Singapore is able to bounce back quickly should a crisis befall us. Indeed, when we come together to play our part in Total Defence, the strength of "Me" is turned into the power of "We". Who is this "We"? It is the first word in our National Pledge, and it draws Singaporeans together as "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion". This is our national identity, that brings together the "me's" of the various communities living here. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Thus at the community level, for us to capitalise on this whole, each "me" community must appreciate the shared values and be part of the common spaces, minimise our differences, enhance our similarities and have the confidence that our "Me" identity remains intact and not compromised. Extremist thinking accentuates differences in "Me" and promotes exclusivity and rejects inclusivity. Our "Me's" need the social, psychological and religious resilience to repel extremists' influences in the common interests of the "We's". Threats and challenges may come from beyond our shores, but the strength to face them comes from within ourselves, our families, our friends, our communities and our nation.

My favourite part of this exhibition, which you will see today, is where we find the faces of strengths -- stories of Singaporeans who show that we have what it takes to face challenges and overcome adversity, and to help others along. Take the story of soccer coach Faizaltumlari Noorali. When he discovered that a fire had broken out in his HDB block, he immediately ran from door to door to alert his neighbours and kept returning to rescue residents on other floors even though the smoke was threatening to suffocate them or himself. Then there are the families living on the 14th floor of Block 591A Montreal Link who display a strong sense of community and neighbourliness. Almost every month, they gather in the common corridor for a meal. During the month of Ramadan, every household, whether Chinese or Malay, brings a food item to dinner in a usual pot-luck style. This kampong spirit makes us unique, and we must treasure it for our current and future generations.

I hope that you will all be moved by these Singaporeans to make a commitment to do something yourself to keep Singapore strong. Total Defence was conceptualised 32 years ago, but it is timely that the current generation reflects on what it means for them now and in the future. And more than just introspection, we want to hear from the public what they can do to defend Singapore and why they want to do so. This is one of the outcomes we hope to achieve from the ongoing SGfuture series of citizen engagements under the theme "A Secure and Resilient Nation". I am happy to be part of this group that will be discussing later this afternoon the topic "Total Defence and the Changing Face of Threat". We want Singaporeans to tell us what they see as key threats facing them and Singapore and what they will do to mitigate these threats. Can these threats be eliminated? If yes, how? If no, what do we do? MINDEF will also be organising two other sessions on "The

Singaporean DNA" and "Celebrating 50 Years of National Service" to discuss other building blocks of a secure and resilient nation. Through these sessions, we hope to get the people talking about things that can affect Singapore's safety and security, supporting and working with us to defend our country, playing our part by contributing ideas and participating in activities to keep Singapore strong.

We also would like to see more individuals volunteering their time and effort to help strengthen public support for defence and participation in the fight against terrorism. A good example of volunteerism is the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence, or ACCORD in short, where members of the public tap on their networks and start ground-up initiatives to help strengthen support for our National Servicemen, the backbone of our defence. This morning, ACCORD launched the #NeverAgain social media movement together with the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry at their 49th War Memorial Service. This ground-up effort hopes to raise awareness of the significance of 15 February and invites us all Singaporeans to pledge their commitment to be a resilient people, united in our resolve to never again allow Singapore to fall. I would like to thank members of ACCORD, some of whom are here today, and hope that more will join their good work in contributing to Total Defence.

In conclusion, our pioneers built Singapore from scratch. They sacrificed much for us to be successful when others simply had us written off. Similarly, we now all want to build a bright future for the generations that come after us -- our children and their children -- and leave them a strong legacy of peace and security. Each of us must recognise and appreciate the threats and challenges we face and what we must do to face these challenges. How strong we are in our hearts and our minds depends very much on how each of us see ourselves as Singaporeans - how we relate to one another regardless of race or religion, and what we hold dear as our values, beliefs and principles. Let us start by renewing our commitment to be responsible for our own defence and to play an active role in ensuring that no one takes away what is most dear to us -- the freedom to live peacefully and harmoniously with our fellow countrymen regardless of their race and religion, the freedom to be Singaporeans. Together, we keep Singapore strong!

Thank you.

**News Release:**

- Total Defence More Relevant Today (MINDEF\_20160215001.pdf)

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