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Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY MR HARUN A GHANI, POLITICAL SECRETARY
TO THE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND MP FOR
HONG KAH GRC AT THE POLICE AND NATIONAL CRIME
PREVENTION COUNCIL SEMINAR FOR SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS ON "INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTHS IN CRIME
AND DRUGS" ON TUESDAY, 18 APRIL 2000 AT 9:30 AM
AT THE GRASSROOTS CLUB THEATRETTE**

National Archives of Singapore

Mr Khoo Boon Hui, Commissioner of Police

Mr Michael Yeo, Chairman, National Crime Prevention Council

Ladies and Gentlemen

Our Young, Our Future Leaders

Our youths are precious because they represent our future, and many

will become future leaders. We devote resources to develop their potential. We want them to stay clear of crime and drugs.

2 The Police and the Central Narcotics Bureau enforce the law. But enforcement alone cannot solve the problem. To keep our youths from going astray, parents, social agencies, community organisations and schools must play their part.

3 Next to parents, schools have the most important role to play. The school is where students spend most of their time. It is where they pick up values and form their character. Therefore we, as principals, discipline masters, operations managers and teachers, can make a huge, positive difference in the lives of students. As a former school principal myself, I will add that this is a responsibility that all good schools carry out with pride.

Fall in Juvenile Crime

4 The number of juveniles – youngsters between the age of seven and 16 - arrested for crime fell in 1999. About 1,500 were arrested last year compared to around 2,400 in 1998, a decline of 37 percent. Nearly three in 10 or 29 per cent of these juveniles were girls. Three out of four juveniles were arrested for shoplifting and theft-related offences. Like in previous years, students made up 85 per cent of the arrested juveniles.

Juvenile Shoplifters Study

5 Juvenile delinquency knows no educational or social barriers. Schools with good academic results also have juvenile delinquents. A Subordinate Courts study on juvenile shoplifters in August last year found that 15 per cent of shoplifters came from the top 50 Special / Express stream schools. Another 15 per cent came from the top 40 normal stream schools.

6 Juvenile offenders also come from normal families. In the Subordinate Courts survey, three out of every four offenders came from normal, intact families.

7 These juveniles commonly stole clothing, wallets, cosmetics, and compact discs. This points to their "wants", rather than their "needs". Bad influence from friends, greed and the thrill of doing something wrong without getting caught were the reasons they took to crime. Although most of the offenders were caught for the first time, 41 per cent indicated that they started at the age of 15. One quarter started at the age of 14. Nine percent admitted that they began shoplifting even before the age of 10. These offenders may have been taking things lightly because in the past they managed to escape being caught.

8 These study results tell us that we, who run schools, should not become complacent. Even when juvenile delinquency is getting to be less of a problem, there is still much that we should do.

Vigilance against Drugs

9 Let me now move on to the drug problem. Youth drug abusers made up about 5 per cent of the total abuser population. 188 abusers below 20 years old were arrested last year. The number of youths who abused inhalants (glue sniffing) was high - more than seven out of 10 were below 20 years old.

10 Not all the youths arrested were students at the time of arrest. However, those who were not students would have all undergone some form of schooling before dropping out of the education system. It is never too early to start teaching students about the dangers of drug abuse. Schools can also take part in the anti-drug activities organised by organisations like the Singapore Anti-Narcotics

Association (SANA) and CNB, and the National Council Against Drug Abuse.

Preventive education in schools

11 As part of crime preventive education in schools, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), the Police and other members of the Home Team have implemented several programmes. These include school talks; the police-school liaison scheme; the Honorary Voluntary Special Constabulary (VSC) Officer scheme; workbooks for upper primary and lower secondary students; and crime prevention badges for Scouts, Guides and NPCC members.

12 The NCPC has also produced three education videos entitled 'Gangfile', 'Prison Me? No Way!' and 'Girls Don't Go To Prison'. These show the realities of prison life and highlight the serious consequences of getting onto the wrong side of the law.

13 The Police also make special arrangements with other Home Team agencies to help high-risk students stay away from crime. For example, some students are sent on the Prison Visit programme where they get a first-hand experience of the harsh realities prison life.

Important role of schools

14 I would like to reiterate the important role of schools in educating students and deterring them from committing crime. The Police would be happy to train discipline masters and discipline teachers in all secondary schools to be as Honorary VSCs. Already there are 110 Honorary VSC officer-teachers from 85 secondary schools and 3 Vocational Training Centres. These schools have found a marked improvement in school discipline, as the teacher-police volunteers have

Police powers to deal with cases involving students that occur in or near school premises and during school-related activities.

15 Schools can also put up Community Safety and Security Programmes, or CSSPs and expand their links with the community and Home Team agencies to tackle issues and problems concerning your school.

16 Schools can lend support to the crime and drug prevention programmes, and monitor their students' progress, attendance and behaviour in school. Our children do not turn delinquent overnight. Teachers and parents should keep a lookout for telltale signs, counsel and take other prompt action before it is too late. This extra effort is worthwhile. We would all have read at some time or the other how an exceptional teacher went beyond normal duties to help a student turn over a new leaf. That chance to make a difference in a youngster's life is open to all of us if we care enough to look closely at the young people under our charge.

17 I would also encourage you to get the parents involved early, so that consistent advice is reinforced at home. A strong partnership between the families, schools, the community and law enforcement agencies, will go a long way towards successfully cutting down further the problem of juvenile delinquency, youth crime, and drug abuse in Singapore.

Conclusion

18 In conclusion, I would like to thank the NCPC and the Police for organising this seminar. I hope that today's presentations and discussions will bring us closer together in our aim to create a better future for our students.

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