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Speech by Encik Othman Wok, Minister for Social  
Affairs at the official opening of the Ang Mo Kio  
Old People's Community Home at Block 228 (1st floor)  
Avenue 3, Ang Mo Kio Housing Estate on 10 Mar 77  
at 10.00 am

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am glad to note that the Asian Women's Welfare Association has heeded the call for voluntary bodies to co-operate with Government in the provision of welfare services particularly for the aged. The Association has now embarked upon the Ang Mo Kio Community Home for the Aged project and this is the tangible result of its concern for old people. The Association has managed to garner the support of the public and tap the generosity of the business houses to assist in setting up this Home.

2 Many other associations and societies would do well to emulate the example of the Asian Women's Welfare Association. The Ministry of Social Affairs has called upon mutual benefit organisations to concentrate on providing services for the living rather than the dead. While many such organisations include the provision of welfare services in their objectives, a number of others exist to give aid merely for funeral expenses. Only one or

two mutual benefit organisations have begun to respond to the suggested setting up of community homes for the aged. Many more should do so. Other societies including co-operatives should also engage in community and welfare service projects.

3 Government has done its best to encourage and support efforts made by associations and societies in this field. The Housing & Development Board is prepared to make available, as it has done in this case, some flats for old folks' homes.

4 Community homes like the one here which is modelled on the Henderson Crescent Old People's Home will still be needed. The Ang Mo Kio Home consists of some 10 units of one-room flats and can accommodate 40 persons. I am told that old people who are ambulant and are on Public Assistance will be admitted to this Home. They will do their own cooking and washing. This kind of home has the advantage over other institutions of preventing the isolation of the aged from the community. Old people put among themselves in a corner of the island quickly lose their sense of identity with the general population unless they are visited, given special treats and generally made to feel wanted.

So, for the old who can still look after themselves, a better answer is the community home where they will be surrounded by younger flat owners. They can mix freely with their neighbours and will not feel lonely. They will still live within the community. Only those who require close attention and care should be put into institutions.

5 In the Ang Mo Kio Home, Government provides Public Assistance allowances and the Asian Women's Welfare Association provides management and other financing. This sort of combination of Government and voluntary efforts can make for a reasonably good balance in meeting the welfare needs in Singapore, not only in the care of the aged, but also in other fields of social service as well. But the best is to inculcate filial piety among the young so that the old will not be rejected but will continue to live with their own families.

6 I would like to take this opportunity to comment on a press report published in the Straits Times yesterday concerning the review of the Women's Charter. The report referred to recommendations made by a Committee appointed by me on divorce 30

and related matters. Let me first explain that this Committee was created administratively to assist the Ministry to identify those provisions which are out-moded and to see whether loopholes exist in the existing legislation. It was not established by law or under the Constitution and is not really a "special government committee" as such. In view of the rising divorce rates and the controversial nature of the recommendations on divorce, it is not the opportune moment for drastic changes to be made to those provisions in the Women's Charter relating to divorce matters. The recommendations of the Committee have therefore been shelved for the time being. It is absurd for certain organisations to propose that the waiting period for divorce be reduced to one year. If we agree to this, divorce will soar to unimaginable heights. The family unit will be weakened and in the end, we will have a social situation in which large numbers of old lonely people need to be cared for by society and even if we were to build 100 old folks home, it will not be sufficient to house all of them.

7 In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Asian Women's Welfare Association and others who have helped the association to successfully launch this project. It gives me great pleasure to declare the Ang Mo Kio Old People's Community Home open.

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