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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT AT THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION "DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER: THE MILLENNIUM
CELEBRATION" THURS, 21 OCT 99, 10.00AM TAKASHI MAYA SQUARE

Good morning

Ms Janet Sussens & Ms Olivia Branson

De Beers,

Mrs Betty Chen,

Patron/President Chinese Women's Association and Chairman of
Henderson Senior Citizens' Home

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here today at the opening of the "Diamonds are Forever: The Millennium Celebration Exhibition" that has been organised to celebrate the new millennium. This exhibition will also launch the Millennium Diamond Hallmark, a range of diamond jewellery that was specially designed with much creative synergy.

2 I am happy to note that Henderson Senior Citizens' Home, managed by the Chinese Women's Association, is the beneficiary of this four-day exhibition. The Home is expanding its services and is raising funds to set up a Seniors Activity Centre. This Centre will provide community-based care and support services to senior citizens, which will include home visits, home help and the provision of meals service. The donated funds from this exhibition would greatly help to improve the facilities of the Home.

3 We need to increase our provision of services to the elderly and constantly review the sufficiency and quality of these services because Singapore's population is ageing rapidly and the needs of the elderly are changing. Today, one in 14 Singaporeans are above 65 years old. However, in 2030, one in five Singaporeans are expected to be above 65 years old. The elderly of the future will also be different. They will be better educated, live longer and are more financially independent.

4 In response to the challenges posed by Singapore's ageing population, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Ageing Population was formed in late October 1998. My Ministry, the Ministry of Community Development (MCD) has also been identified to be the leading Ministry to help to co-ordinate the work of the five workgroups under this committee. With the Ministry's Elderly Development Division, we are able to provide focus and direction as the leading agency on ageing issues. The Division would also help to co-ordinate the implementation of the IMC's recommendations.

5 With a longer life expectancy, older people are expected to live a good number of years after retirement. Therefore, there is a need for them to plan how they could spend their time meaningfully and stay both physically and mentally healthy. For those who are healthy, they can remain economically active. They can continue to learn new skills and be employable for as long as possible.

6 At the same time, we must change our perception of the older person from one who is fully dependent on the family and community to one who can and wants to contribute and continue to be an asset to all aspects of society. This is especially true when future senior citizens will be better educated, have greater financial security and a longer life span.

7 It is important for us to treat the elderly as an asset, whether at home, at work or even in the society. Today, we can also see many senior citizens who are still able to contribute in an active way. In many voluntary welfare organisations and at grassroots organisations, there are many in their golden years leading an extra hand. In Yu-Hua constituency, we also have the good fortune of many senior citizens helping me out in different ways to better run my groups such as the Women Committee and the Senior Citizens' groups. With this personal working relationship

with the elderly, I believe more strongly that there is a rich source of experience and wisdom that can still be tapped from this generation of senior citizens.

8 We should aim for a society where older persons are living as an integral part of the community and not isolated in an institution or elderly enclave. Companies, for instance, can implement flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, advisory positions and re-designed jobs to ensure the continued employment of older workers. . One of the Inter-Ministerial Committee's workgroup even suggests that companies can also support carers of older persons by introducing flexi-hours, part-time work and telecommuting for care-givers. I would also encourage companies and organisations to provide training to the senior citizens. With training, they can upgrade their skills or to-be retired older workers in the company could continue to seek employment in the company. I can assure that companies will find that older workers can be a valuable asset as they are more loyal and have a wealth of experience to share

9 To successfully implement the Committee's recommendations, we also need community involvement, including an active corporate involvement. Here I would like to commend De Beers, the participating jewellers and designers for their generosity in donating a portion of the sales at this exhibition to an eldercare organisation and the considerable amount of time they have devoted to making this exhibition a great success. I look forward to more of such active corporate involvement in the community.

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore