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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AT THE MALAY YOUTH LITERARY ASSOCIATION'S (4PM)

UNIVERSITY CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION

WEDNESDAY, 1 DEC 99, 7.30 PM

National Archives of Singapore

Good evening

Mr Izzuddin Taherali, President, Malay Youth Literary Association (4PM)

Principals and Teachers

Participants of University '99

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be with such a youthful group this evening. I would like to commend 4PM for organising this seminar, 'Univision '99', which provides a platform for pre-university students to discuss important social issues in Singapore.

2 It is apt that the theme for this is the S21 vision of creating an active citizenry. Indeed, every Singaporean has a part to play and can make a difference to society. Titled "Odyssey of the Mind", participants have exercised their critical and creative thinking skills in deliberating on how Singaporeans can contribute towards making Singapore the best place to grow up in, live in, work in and grow old in.

#### Active Citizenry

3 To be an active citizen, one must have an interest in and an awareness of social issues. The active citizen must take an interest in what's going on in society and in his own community, before he can decide how he can contribute to improve the situation. A seminar like this provides a good opportunity for students to discover more about social issues and the problems confronting our community. Your participation today shows that you have this basic interest and sense of social concern that is vital to active citizenship.

#### Volunteerism

4 But being concerned, interested and having an opinion on social issues is not enough to make you an active citizen. An active citizen is one who acts on his concerns and does something concrete to improve his or her community and society. Today, I would like to suggest to you that volunteerism and active participation in community service is one of the key paths to active citizenship. This is an avenue that is open to every one of us.

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5 Recent newspaper reports (ST & BH on 24-25 Nov) on the Mendaki survey revealed that the rate of volunteerism among the Malay-Muslim community is low. According to Berita Harian on 24 November 1999, only 11 percent of the Malay-Muslim community are directly involved in voluntary work. 76 percent had never been involved in any voluntary work. The Mendaki survey also revealed that those involved in voluntary work tends to be young people, between 24 and 25 years of age, and mostly tertiary educated professionals.

6 There is much scope for improving the rate of volunteerism among all Singaporeans, including the Malay community in Singapore. Schools have already started promoting volunteerism with the six-hour community service for all students. But this programme merely creates an awareness of the need for participation in community life, and to be successful, should mark the beginning of a life-long habit of service to the community.

7 4PM and other similar organisations can pick up from where the schools leave off. As a youth organisation and a grassroots agency, 4PM can harness the potential pool of volunteers and get them involved in community work regardless of their educational background. Organisations like 4PM can make community service a way of life in the Malay community and in doing so set an example to the rest of society. To achieve this requires meaningful programmes to attract participation and the professional management of volunteers so that both the clients and the volunteers will be happy. Malay-Muslim organisations like Mendaki and 4PM can also work closely with the National Volunteer Centre, or the NVC, which is beginning operations in December, to promote voluntarism among the Malay community.

#### Mentoring Scheme

8 As you know, Singapore is fast evolving into a knowledge-based economy or KBE. Our young have to be equipped with the basic skills and knowledge to ride the challenges of a KBE. Learning will be key and students from all communities should be given the support required so that they can continue schooling to develop to their fullest potential.

9 Just two weeks ago, MOE released some very encouraging figures on the progress of Malay students. According to the Straits Times (18 Nov), Malay students had shown the greatest improvement in academic grades in the past 10 years. More Malays qualified for secondary school, up from 74% to 90% and the number of Malay students admitted into ITE, polytechnics and JCs had more than doubled, from 2,286 to 4,960. In fact, the number of Malay students attending polytechnics had tripled.

10 However, in every society, there will be some students who are weaker in their studies. Able young people like you can play a role here. Students like yourselves can act as mentors to coach and encourage weaker students to help them stay in school. I understand that some schools have already embarked on such mentoring schemes. To the principals and teachers present here, I would like to encourage you to press on with such programmes. Schools need not work in isolation, but can collaborate closely with parents, community organisations and related agencies like MCD and MOE to develop more effective mentoring programmes to curb the rate of school dropouts and juvenile delinquency.

#### Conclusion

11 Young people like yourselves play a very important role in shaping the kind of society we want to for the future. After all, the future belongs to you. It is my hope that with all the encouragement and support, more young Singaporeans will actively participate in community development. I am very heartened that you have spent the last three days discussing social concerns. I would like to challenge you now to be active citizens. You can do this by being volunteers in community service and helping your peers.

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