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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE MORAL NETWORK OF OLDER PERSONS (MNOP) AT THE GRAND
COURT VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT, ORCHARD SHOPPING CENTRE

THURS, 9 DEC 99, 11.00AM

Good Morning,

Mr Lee Kim Siang, Chairman, Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society

Dr Robert Loh, President, National Council of Social Service and Chairman, Board of
Advisers

Members of the Management Committee

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to be here with you this morning to launch a very meaningful

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project – The Moral Network of Older Persons by the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society.

2 For more than 20 years, the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society has continued to perform the goodwill of serving the community. Since its set up in 1978, the Society has about 38 facilities under its name, helping the young, the old, the weak and the sick. I am glad to note that the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society has made use of its vast experiences to further refine its programmes and identify the key niche areas to venture into. It is also heartening to note that the Society has also maintained its firm interest in the areas of the needs of our older persons.

3 The Moral Network of Older Persons will train volunteers to help sick, frail or disabled senior citizens. It will also help to train caregivers in providing the care and help to their elderly relatives. Singapore is facing a rapidly ageing population. In 2030, our present 7% of elderly aged 65 years and above will increase to form 19% of the population. The elderly of the future will also be more educated, more independent and have different needs and aspirations. The group aged 65 to 74 years old with at least a secondary education is projected to increase from 11% in 1995 to 62% in 2030. There are thus urgent issues and challenges our society needs to address. We would also need to look into our programmes and services for the elderly. However, to provide better services to the elderly, we need the help of the community.

4 I would thus like to commend the network for opening its programme to the youths. This ageless service provides the opportunities for the younger generation to interact with the older generation. The young members would be able to understand the elderly, the issues the elderly face as well as learn important moral values and knowledge from them. With this network, the elderly are not only assisted, but would be able to age gracefully. I believe that the interaction would also help to build up confidence and self-esteem in both the young and the old.

5 Senior citizens could also volunteer their services in this network. Being an ageless service, I hope to see more senior citizens stepping out to join as members of this network too. Senior citizens, especially those who have retired could spend their time more meaningfully. Senior citizens could make use of their free time to help out those unfortunate around them. In organisations such as the Singapore Action Group of Elders, there are already more than 400 senior citizens actively volunteering their services to help other elderly. We could also see a large pool of senior citizens volunteering their services at the Lions Befrienders. Being an elderly themselves, they would be able to understand the needs of those elderly in need of help. Communication could also be easier between the two elderly as the weak or frail elderly could be more willing to express his or her thoughts to someone of the same age group.

6 The network provides a good opportunity for volunteerism to take place. In Singapore, we hope to raise the level of volunteer participation. Today, there are only about 11% of Singaporeans who are volunteers. Compare this with the rates of the United States at 39% or Japan at 25%. Even in the United Kingdom, their 1997 National Survey of Volunteering shows that the participation rate of those aged 55 and above is slightly in excess of 40% against an overall participation rate of 48% of those aged 18 and above. I hope in the near future, Singapore will see an increase in our rate. It is also my hope that the volunteer participation rate of our elderly increases correspondingly with the increase in our elderly population.

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The work of organisations like yours in roping in the young and old will be aided with the imminent start of operations of the National Volunteer Centre. This new national coordinating body whose aim is to promote volunteerism as a way of life across all sectors and at all levels of society can facilitate your efforts all age groups in reaching out to your target group of senior citizens.

7 Every Singaporean has a part to play in helping the weaker ones in our community, and thus helping to build a better home for everyone in Singapore. On this note, I would like to urge Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society to continue in its good work and I wish the Moral Network of Older Persons every success.

8 Thank you.

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