

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

Speech by Encik Othman Wok, Minister for  
Social Affairs, at the Opening of the Panasco II  
Conference at the Singapore Conference Hall on  
15 June 1975 at 5.10 pm

Mr Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen

The Society of St Vincent de Paul has distinguished itself all over the world as a friend of the poor, the handicapped and the underprivileged. St Vincent de Paul Societies are established in churches and schools by lay-Catholics to help their fellowmen irrespective of race, colour or religion. Your members are inspired by the noble Christian ideal of love for all men, to bring happiness and comfort to those in need of material and spiritual assistance. Indeed, the activities of the Society of St Vincent de Paul constitute an excellent example of the constructive contributions which religion should make towards the betterment of mankind.

2 Religion is a living institution and religious groups must constantly adapt themselves to the changing circumstances in the world and should be outward-looking and responsive to the needs of society. Singapore is a multi-religious community where diverse religious beliefs can exist side by side in harmony. This is because most religious groups share common moral principles although they may subscribe to different

metaphysical systems. Whether we are Catholic or Protestant, Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist, we are taught to be helpful, kind and loving to fellow human beings.

3 Religion as a social movement should no longer be based on ascetic ideals of renunciation and detachment from worldly matters. There must be involvement in community service and a greater concern for human morality. Although religion may derive inspiration from metaphysical beliefs, religious followers must come to grips with temporal facts, and religious precepts should be essentially moral maxims. Charity, kindness, love, honesty and tolerance are moral virtues which can only be meaningful in the context of social interaction.

4 The Society of St Vincent de Paul is an example of a religious organisation which is totally committed to the community. Your members bring solace and comfort to the aged, sick and underprivileged in all parts of the world. Your philosophy is based on salvation through action and involvement, happiness through charity and care for others.

Through your organised efforts, you have helped to alleviate suffering and bring greater joy to the world.

5 Today, members of the Society from Asia and Oceania are gathered here to evaluate and review "Vincentian Action in Asia" to provide a more meaningful and practical form of charity with dignity for the less fortunate in the community. I am sure that your charitable activities will not only help to supplement the public welfare services in Asian countries, but also contribute towards better understanding amongst our different peoples. This is very important in a world where national rivalries and greed for power can lead to tension, bloodshed, misery and pain. Today more than ever before, we need to cultivate tolerance through greater understanding which is not the same as indifference through ignorance.

6 As a Christian and charitable organisation, your leaders can play a positive role in guiding the people along the path of peace and goodwill. The virtues that you preach and practise are the human values which transcend race, colour and religion. They are essential elements for the creation of a harmonious society and the promise of lasting peace in the world.

7 I am sure that your discussions will precipitate many useful ideas to benefit societies in Asia and Oceania. I congratulate you for your noble aims, and wish you every success in your undertakings.

8 And now it gives me great pleasure to declare this second Pan-Asian Congress open.

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