

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY MR SIA KAH HUI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
LABOUR, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
INAUGURAL MEETING OF EAST ASIAN REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP
OF THE BOYS' BRIGADE AT 3.30 PM ON 3 AUG. 75 AT THE
PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

I am happy to have the opportunity of joining you at this inaugural meeting of East Asian Regional Fellowship of the Boys' Brigade. The primary purpose of this meeting, I am told, is to provide an opportunity for officers of the Boys' Brigade Movement in Brunei, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore to come together once in every two years to exchange views and ideas on how to promote and realize the object of the Boys' Brigade - "the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness". Some people may regard this as old-fashioned and out-dated in view of the so-called modern values. I believe, however, that the object of the Boys' Brigade is still very relevant today, if not more so than it was when the Movement was founded by Sir William Alexandra Smith some 92 years ago.

The countries in our region are going through an accelerated rate of urbanization and industrialization. Many of the time-honoured traditional values and beliefs are being undermined by the ruthless processes of urbanization and industrialization, or discarded in a mad rush to embrace modernity. The erosion of these cherished socio-cultural norms and institutions has profound impact on our youths. Many of them have been rendered totally baffled and confused by the contradictions between the traditional and modern sets of values and beliefs. They are completely at sea as to how they should behave or what they should believe in.

It is small wonder that some of our adolescent youths become rebellious and are defiant of Establishment and of parental authority. Small gangs of frustrated youths roaming about in streets in pursuit of anti-social activities are not uncommon. Vandalism and drug-taking among the youths are on the increase. These are the more overt manifestations of their inner frustration and helplessness. Destruction

of self or of public property is increasingly being resorted to as a means of escapism by young people who fail to find meaning and purpose in their lives. It is indeed a tragedy that so many young lives have been wrecked because they lack the attributes, which the founder of the Boys' Brigade Movement believed and we believe would make "a true Christian manliness".

The development of an awkward adolescent into a self-confident adult with manly qualities cannot be left to the natural processes of growing up. A child has to be carefully nurtured into an adolescent who in turn has to be guided along the road to full adulthood. Adolescence is the most impressionable period of an individual's life. During this formative period, the seeds of his future character and personality as an adult are sown. If positive and wholesome traits are planted in him, he will develop into a responsible and God-fearing adult. If, on the other hand, he is being nurtured in a negative and unwholesome environment, he will develop into an anti-social element.

I am, therefore, very pleased to note that "the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline and Self-respect" among the adolescent boys still constitutes one of the main objects of the Boys' Brigade Movement. These attributes are sadly lacking in the so-called modern youths.

I hope more youth organisations will pay greater attention to the instilling of these wholesome character traits in our youths. These are the very attributes that would ensure our youths walk the straight and narrow path instead of tramping along the highway to self-destruction. The Boys' Brigade Movement has a very important role to play in helping boys to acquire and develop these wholesome personality traits so that they may not only be able to withstand the onslaught of the negative and destructive element of counter-cultures, but also they may take their place in society as responsible adults when they leave behind their adolescent world.

I am confident that you all will at this fellowship benefit from each other's knowledge and experience and map out a programme of action which will help realize the object of the Boys' Brigade, which, we believe could transform fumbling and awkward adolescents into self-confident adults with true Christian manliness. With these words, I declare open this Inaugural Meeting of East Asian Regional Fellowship of the Boys' Brigade.

AUGUST 2, 1975.
