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SPEECH BY MR S JAYAKUMAR, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND
SECOND MINISTER FOR LAW, ON THE LAUNCHING OF 'CIVIL DEFENCE
IN SINGAPORE' PUBLICATION AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY ON
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We launched our National Civil Defence Plan four years ago in 1982 to build up a credible Civil Defence System so that our civilian population will be protected in the event of any emergencies. We implemented the Civil Defence Volunteer Programme at the same time to inform our citizens of the need for Civil Defence and to train them in various Civil Defence skills. With the active cooperation between our community leaders, the people and the Singapore Civil Defence Force, our citizens are aware of the importance of Civil Defence and the need for them to play an active role in Civil Defence. They have received training in Civil Defence skills and taken part in various Civil Defence and emergency exercises such as the Blood Grouping Exercises, Water Distribution Exercises, Community Spirit Rescue Exercises and the recent Emergency Food Distribution Exercise conducted in Kim Keat and Thomson constituencies.

During a survey conducted among Kim Keat and Thomson residents who took part in the recent Emergency Food Distribution Exercise in November 85, a question was posed to them as to whether they considered the exercise an inconvenience. Seventy-eight per cent did not consider the exercise an inconvenience. Fifteen per cent of the respondents considered the exercise to be an inconvenience as they felt that war was unlikely to occur in Singapore. However, 14 out of this 15 per cent felt that the exercise was, nevertheless, necessary and only one per cent was adamant that the exercise was an unnecessary inconvenience.

We are encouraged by this response. It shows that an overwhelming majority of our citizens are aware of the need for Civil Defence and therefore Civil Defence Exercises. However, there are still some citizens who, while acknowledging the necessity for such exercise, look upon Civil Defence and emergency exercises as an inconvenience.

Of course, it is an inconvenience in some way. But the question is: is it necessary for our people, is it useful? The conduct of such exercises during peacetime is essential to familiarise our population with Civil Defence drills and our emergency plans and procedures. It is therefore important that every citizen must be made aware that these exercises which may cause temporary inconvenience are absolutely necessary. Our citizens must therefore be constantly reminded of the need for Civil Defence so that they will participate actively in all Civil Defence and emergency exercises and not regard them as unnecessary inconvenience.

The need to educate our population on the importance of Civil Defence is all the more apparent as almost 3/4 of our population were born after the last war. Having been spared from the harrowing experience of war and living through periods of relative affluence and peace, it is not unexpected that most of them find it difficult to visualise and appreciate the need for making Civil Defence preparation during peacetime to meet any eventuality of a war. Indeed it is our hope that our Civil Defence, like military defence, will not have to be put into use as we continue to preserve peace and tranquility for our future generations.

The book which is being launched today, "Civil Defence in Singapore", is an effort by the Singapore Civil Defence Force to promote greater understanding of how Civil Defence has evolved in Singapore. From scanty records and official documents, the SCDF has compiled and traced the

development of our Civil Defence through the war years till now. The documentation of several grim lessons learnt from Singapore's World War II experience will provide a glimpse of the effect of war on a people totally unprepared, both mentally and physically, for war. Casualties were high, the wounded could not be treated in time, panic and confusion was rife and people simply did not know what to do when faced with a war. Our Civil Defence preparations then were activated too late when the enemy was at our very doorsteps. This tragic experience must imprint in the hearts and minds of every one of us the utmost importance to establish emergency systems and preparations in peacetime even when no imminent threat is envisaged.

This publication supplements the SCDF's effort to inform and educate our people on what Civil Defence is, what it involves and more importantly, why it is necessary as a vital component of Total Defence. Together with its accompanying audio-visual presentation, we hope to convey lessons of our history to the new generation, to drive home to everyone the message that our defence ultimately lies in our own hands and it is up to each and every one of us to play our part.

I would like to commend the Singapore Civil Defence Force for its pioneering effort to chart the development of Civil Defence in Singapore. I would also like to call on the support of all community leaders and everyone who cares about preserving the freedom and independence of our island-nation, to pass on the word that we must not be found to be "Too little, too late" again in our Civil Defence preparedness.

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