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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI,
ACTING MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (HOME AFFAIRS),
AT THE SINGAPORE ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEAF'S
40TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND DANCE
AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DEAF
AT THE MARRIOTT HOTEL BALLROOM
ON SUNDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 1995 AT 8.00 PM**

I am happy to be here with you at your 40th Anniversary Dinner and Dance. This is indeed a special occasion for your Association as it marks the finale of your 40th anniversary celebrations and your commemoration of the International Day of the Deaf.

2 After 40 years, it is perhaps timely for you to reflect on your achievements and milestones and make new plans and adopting new strategies to meet the challenges of the future. You have achieved much during the past 40 years. You have looked after the education and vocational needs of your members. You have established the Singapore School for the Deaf in 1963, the Vocational School for the Handicapped in 1975, the Nursery School in 1986, the Centre for the Hearing-impaired in 1988 and the Deaf Access Programme in 1990. These clearly demonstrate your association's ability to provide effective programmes and services to respond and cater to the needs of your members and their families. I congratulate you on your success.

3 You will recall that the Advisory Council on the Disabled was set up in 1989. The Advisory Council made several recommendations concerning the disabled. I am happy to report that all the recommendations have been implemented. For example, to overcome the difficulties of recruiting para-medical professionals and therapists for voluntary welfare organisations, the Nanyang Polytechnic has set up the School of Health Sciences to train physiotherapists and occupational therapists. In the area of prevention of disability, the Ministries of Health and Labour have focused their public education efforts in preventing congenital disabilities and industrial accidents respectively.

4 In the area of special education, the Ministry of Education with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) fund 15 special schools with a total enrolment of 2,828 students. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has also set up the School Psychological Service to assist students with learning, behaviour and speech difficulties and problems arising from intellectual disabilities.

5 In the area of vocational training, the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) has been admitting disabled people into courses such as Basic Skills Training, Pre-Vocational Training and its National Trade Certificate and Industrial Trade Certificate courses. The Vocational School for the Handicapped (VSH), run by the SAD, has also been providing many useful courses.

6 The NCSS has also taken the lead in organising public education and awareness programme in correcting social attitudes towards disability and preventing disability.

7 To enable persons with disabilities to work or attend special schools and training lessons, NCSS also provides them with transport subsidies. In FY 94/95 alone a total of about \$700,000/- was disbursed for this purpose.

8 Together with various other assistance schemes, such as tax relief for disabled dependents, more funding for special schools, a barrier free environment, all these efforts make the lives for persons with disabilities much easier.

9 Although much has been done for the disabled, more can still be achieved. With technological advances and modern devices, hearing-impaired persons now face less constraints and are increasingly able to participate in more mainstream society activities. For example, they can now communicate with each other through electronic mail. This is an area of great potential and your Association should look into improving computer literacy among your members.

10 A major obstacle faced by disabled persons is the need for greater public awareness of their needs and potential. Disabled people want equal opportunities and access to facilities and services, not welfare handouts.

11 Voluntary organisations serving specific target groups like SAD have an important role to play in building bridges of understanding with the wider community. SAD is well placed to help overcome society's prejudices and attitudinal barriers.

12 I am sure that with participation from your members and a wide spectrum of the public, SAD will continue to implement programmes to cater to the needs of your members. The awards to be given tonight are a good way to recognise their efforts.

13 Before I end, I would like to commend the SAD Management Committee and the 40th Anniversary Organising Committee and the many helpers and well-wishers for their hard work and tireless efforts in making this dinner and dance possible. I wish you all the best and hope you have an enjoyable and memorable evening.

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