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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
HEALTH & EDUCATION, AT KOWLOON CLUB'S EIGHTH ANNUAL
DINNER ON 7 FEB 98 AT 7.30 PM AT SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL
CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE, BALLROOM, LEVEL 2**

(To be delivered in Cantonese)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Let me first wish all of you a happy, successful and prosperous Lunar New Year. The last time I addressed you was three years ago when you celebrated your fifth annual function. I am

once again privileged to join you in your eighth Annual Dinner and Dance tonight.

2 Over the years, Kowloon Club has played an increasingly significant role in helping new Hong Kong immigrants adapt to life in Singapore. This is evident from the Club's membership which has grown from about 100 in 1990 to over 2,000 currently. This represents about 20 per cent of the total number of 9,700 Hong Kong immigrants who have moved to Singapore, many with their families, since 1989. Members have no doubt benefited from the wide range of activities organised by the Club.

3 Hongkongers have generally integrated well into Singapore society. Many of you have already taken up Singapore citizenship, a clear demonstration of your desire to sink roots here and your commitment to this country. Your ties with Singapore have grown stronger as your children adapt to our schools and interact daily with local students who come from different racial and cultural backgrounds. They have to go through bilingual education in school and many of them now speak fluent English and Mandarin. Some have even picked up some Malay in school from their Malay friends. Your sons too might have gone through the rigorous training of National Service and

come to appreciate the value of it. The President of your Club is a fine example of a Hongkonger who has contributed to National Service. Most of you would have built up friendships with other Singaporeans, whether at work or in your neighbourhood; or even through the Kowloon Club soccer team which plays regularly with other local soccer teams.

4 In his National Day Rally Speech last year, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong emphasised the need to attract foreign talent to Singapore. He said that we should work towards making Singapore a global and cosmopolitan city and the best home for Singaporeans in the 21st century. To be a global city and to stay ahead in the future, Singapore will need to retain its own talent including those Singaporeans working or studying overseas, in addition to importing foreign talent. In other words, to achieve our long-term development objectives, we need to strive to become an 'oasis for talent'.

5 With the launch of CONTACT SINGAPORE in July last year, we have positioned Singapore as a global city that welcomes talent to work, study and live here. We believe that the gathering of different minds, talents and experiences will make us a more creative, dynamic and culturally rich city. A prime example is the Hong Kong talents who have come to Singapore, bringing

along with them their entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and expertise. Scripting and direction by Hongkongers has contributed to the higher standards of our local TCS Chinese dramas. The standard of our *dim sum* is now comparable to Hong Kong's, thanks to the Hong Kong chefs who have come to Singapore. Many Hongkongers are also working in the finance, banking, sales, marketing and engineering sectors.

6 The current economic crisis in Asia could have raised some concerns in the minds of those interested in coming to Singapore, especially if they are from the developed economies. They may see Asia as being less attractive now. To them, I would like to say that Singapore has weathered the economic turmoil better than other Asian countries because of our sound fundamentals and strong reserves. We have not been completely unaffected. But we remain committed to attracting the best from the rest of the world. We are confident that the economic storm will blow over, and believe that Asia still holds tremendous potential for growth.

7 Local Singaporeans may be worried that foreign talents will add to the competition and exert pressure on them in these uncertain times. Let me assure all Singaporeans that your interests and well-being will always come first and

you will never be disadvantaged compared to foreigners. Foreign talent will pose a challenge, but they will sharpen our competitive edge and enable us to compete better in the international arena. It is far better that they be on our side than go elsewhere to compete against us. Our own workers will of course need to constantly upgrade themselves and undergo retraining to maintain their lead.

8 Attracting foreign talent will be an on-going effort. Kowloon Club members can contribute towards this effort by promoting Singapore not only to your relatives and friends in Hong Kong, but to others all over the world. And for those who have already made their way to Singapore, the Club can reach out to them at their workplace, neighbourhood or schools by showing them the way around and easing their settling-in process.

9 I wish Kowloon Club every success in 1998 and the future as we move towards the new millenium.