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Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
HEALTH AND EDUCATION, AT THE SECRETARIES DAY DINNER
HELD BY THE SINGAPORE ASSOCIATION OF PERSONAL &
EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES (SAPES) ON WED, 22 APRIL 98, 7.30 PM
AT THE MANDARIN BALLROOM (LEVEL 6), MANDARIN
SINGAPORE**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to your annual Dinner and the Professional Secretary Award ceremony for 1998/2000.

2 Each year, Secretaries Day is celebrated in many countries the world over. Bosses give their secretaries flowers and chocolates, treat them to lunch or dinner, or show their appreciation in any other customary manner. Secretaries on their part also have a bash to celebrate their special day.

3 Secretaries indeed have a very special role to play in their bosses' office as well as in the whole company or organisation. Secretaries provide general support to their bosses, so that their bosses can concentrate on their work. They provide the link between the employer and the employees, and between the office and the outside world. Secretaries are also personal assistants to their employers. From scheduling their bosses' appointments to preparing tea and coffee and ordering lunches, to protecting them from demanding callers and visitors, and even helping them to attend to family chores and household matters, secretaries have always been very special assistants to their bosses. Many bosses swear that they will not know what to do without their secretaries, particularly if they have worked for them for a long time!

4 The role of the secretary, however, is changing with the times. Today's workplace has been completely transformed by new technology and organisational innovations. The globalisation of the market economy, and the revolution in information technology have resulted in drastic changes in the way businesses and industries are run, the way human resources are utilized, and the way office work is done. These pose new challenges to workers of all kinds, whether they are managers or executives, professionals or white-collar workers, supervisors or factory operators. All of us must adapt to these changes; secretaries are no exception.

5 The work of the professional secretary has changed dramatically over the last 5-10 years, mainly due to technological developments. The typewriter is already obsolete. Even short-hand and the dictaphone may soon be rendered obsolete, as managers and executives travel around with their notebooks and laptops, and instructions are transmitted back to the office anytime of the day and from anywhere in the world. Managers nowadays communicate with their staff directly through e-mail within the same branch, and between different branches of the organisation in different parts of the world. Memos and documents are prepared directly on the computer and transmitted electronically to their various destinations. In other words, the professional secretary's

traditional job is in danger of becoming redundant.

6 The good news is that there are new opportunities for the professional secretary who is adept at meeting the changing requirements of their work. Indeed, with the current emphasis being placed by companies on efficiency and productivity, re-engineering, downsizing, cost control, and so on, many companies have re-deployed their secretaries to various departments, such as human resources or the personnel department, marketing and sales department etc. In this regard, the professional secretary's job is being re-defined and enlarged to include administrative and managerial functions in order to meet the changing needs of the company. To take advantage of such opportunities, you must seek continuous upgrading of your skills, not just in what you were initially trained to do, but in whatever new administrative or managerial skills you are required to have, given the enlarged nature of your work now. Like executives and managers, you need to maintain a high degree of professionalism, as well as hone your communication and interpersonal skills, and demonstrate creativity and initiative in whatever you do.

7 All these call for motivation and resourcefulness on the job. No longer can the secretary just sit back and wait for the boss' instructions. You must be

alert all the time, anticipate problems and be able to solve them on your own initiative. In other words, you must add value to the company, by doing things which all the automation and the IT in the office cannot do to take your place. Hence, the human touch , creativity and interpersonal skills become all the more important for success in your new roles.

8 These are the challenges in the future for you. Before I conclude, I would like to suggest yet another challenge which is peculiar to the profession of secretaries. Your profession is dominated by women, whereas the world of CEOs, managers and executives is dominated by men. You have been working mostly under men. But now, there is an increasing number of women who have become CEOs and managers. Secretaries will find it increasingly common to be working for women. Have you thought about how you can give your woman bosses some extra support, more so than you can give to your male bosses?

9 As you know, a working woman has to carry the double burden of career and family responsibilities. Thus, a woman boss will need extra understanding and support from her secretary vis-a-vis her multiple roles. It would also be natural for the woman boss to confide in her secretary things which are

personal or emotional in nature. Are you a good listener? Are you sensitive to the needs and moods of your woman boss? Are you willing to go that extra mile to help her in areas which are, strictly speaking, not within your professional areas of work? I ask these questions because I believe that, between women, there is a special sense of bonding that comes from understanding each other's problems with juggling multiple demands from our roles as working women. I also believe that women should also give each other support so that more women can succeed at the top and become role models for all of us and our daughters.

10 With this, I hope I would have given you some food for thought. Let me congratulate the winner of the Professional Secretary Award this year and wish her every success. Have an enjoyable evening.