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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Dr Aline Wong, 13 Feb 2000, 7.30pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND MP FOR TAMPINES GRC (CHANGKAT) AT CHANGKAT' S LUNAR NEW YEAR DINNER, ON SUNDAY, 13 FEB 2000, 7.30 PM, AT THE OPEN FIELD IN FRONT OF BLK 290, TAMPINES ST 22

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President and Mrs Nathan,
Distinguished Guests,
Grassroots leaders of Changkat,
Friends and Residents,

Let me first of all thank President and Mrs Nathan for gracing our occasion this evening. It is indeed our honour and pleasure that both of them can come to a constituency function and share our joy in celebrating the Lunar New Year together with the local residents. President Nathan is also the Patron of St. John Ambulance Association, which has done a tremendous amount of good work for

Singapore since it started conducting First-Aid training before the Second World War. Tonight we are taking the opportunity of His Excellency's presence to launch a partnership between St John Ambulance Association and the Northeast CDC HNF CARE Centre in Tampines. We sincerely hope this will become one of the pet projects of the President. This also means our community leaders have to work very hard to ensure its success.

2 The Dragon Year of the new Millennium is a very special year. As President Bill Clinton said in his recent State of the Union Address, we should be glad to be living at this historic junction of crossing the centuries. He was speaking to his American audience, of course, and was talking about how happy Americans should be over their on-going economic prosperity which has lasted longer than any previous period of prosperity in that country. Similarly, we in Singapore should be happy over how our economy has remained relatively unscathed by the recent Asian financial crisis, and was able to make a quick turnaround since the middle of last year. As befitting the spirit of the Lunar New Year, Singaporeans are feeling prosperous and confident about the future again.

3 The 21st century will be full of challenges. Increasingly we are living and working in a borderless world, where competition and the pace of life will quicken. All of us have to be agile in adapting and equipping ourselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the global market and the new information society. Those who can ride the tidal waves of change will find endless opportunities and prosper. Invariably, some will not be able to adjust and fall behind. It is therefore incumbent upon the successful and wealthy to help those who are disadvantaged for reasons of financial need, physical handicaps, poor health, old age and so on. This is the message that we need to stress repeatedly, not only because we want Singapore to remain a caring society, but also because there is a real possibility for social divisions to widen and threaten our social cohesion in future, whether such divisions are based on social class, ethnicity or age groups.

4 As our population ages, there will be greater need for supportive services at the community level to enable our elderly lead a healthy and happy life amidst their family, friends and neighbours. How can we mobilise our community resources to cater to the elderly's needs for medical, social and recreational services? How can our residents become active citizens and volunteer their time, effort and money to address those needs? How can the spirit of S21 be realised by ordinary people in the local setting? (In fact, our

community leaders have been going around the RCs over the past few months, to lead in presentations and discussions on S21, in an effort to inspire and fire the imagination of our grassroots to implement S21 as a way of life within our NE CDC.)

5 It is against such a background that the grassroots leaders in Changkat conceived the idea of setting up a CARE centre in conjunction with the Home Nursing Foundation, to mobilise community participants from the local schools, homes and businesses to help care for the elderly. It is a multi-service centre which provides and co-ordinates nursing, medical and social services for the frail elderly living in Tampines. It fills a particular niche in the present continuum of health care for the elderly (from the acute hospitals, community hospitals and HNF Senior Citizens Health Care Centres, to social day care and home-based services.) It provides 3 key services: health monitoring and health education, rehabilitation and day care, and information and referral services which are not limited to health care but includes information on government and social services, employment opportunities and so on. Apart from a small number of professional staff, the Centre will involve many volunteers, including students, housewives and retirees from the vicinity.

6 The CARE centre, under the auspices of the NE Community Development Council, has started operations several months ago. Its patient base is steadily increasing. At this juncture, it is opportune for it to enter into a partnership with St. John Ambulance Association, thereby broadening its scope of activities. St. John Ambulance will be setting up a Tampines regional training centre there to make it more convenient for the community residents, including housewives and retirees to receive training in First Aid and home nursing skills for the elderly. This will make such training much more readily accessible to members of the local community, as well as for family members of the elderly.

7 I would like to conclude by thanking NE CDC for its generous support of the HNF Care Centre and other community projects in Tampines. My appreciation also goes to St. John Ambulance Association for entering into this meaningful partnership with us. I am sure your training programmes will benefit a lot of the local residents, particularly the elderly. I like to commend also our grassroots leaders for their dedication and unfailing enthusiasm in strengthening our community. Finally, Mr President and Mrs Nathan, your gracious presence tonight is a great endorsement of our efforts and a memorable occasion for all of us for years to come. Thank you once again for being with

us.

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