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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Dr Aline Wong, 19 Feb, 7.30 pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR. ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
EDUCATION, AT THE KOWLOON CLUB TENTH ANNUAL DINNER
AND DANCE ON SATURDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2000, 7.30 PM, AT THE
WESTIN STAMFORD HOTEL**

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Mr Chung Ting Fai, President of Kowloon Club,

Ladies and gentlemen. Good evening.

I am most happy to celebrate this joyous occasion with you – the 10th Dinner & Dance of the Kowloon Club. The timing is also most apt, to coincide closely with the Chinese New Year, which is a time for reunion and gathering among families, relatives and friends. My heartiest greetings to all of you here – may you be blessed with a Happy and Prosperous Dragon New Year.

2 The past ten years have been a successful decade for Kowloon Club, judging by your current membership of 2,000 families. Your Club is also active in organising at least 120 activities per year for the members to come together and learn or share their knowledge, experiences, and have fun. My congratulations to the committee for a job well done! I am sure that Kowloon Club would continue to forge ahead in the new millennium.

The New Millennium

3 The new Millennium brings new challenges as well as opportunities for all of us. Much has been said about the future – new technology, skillsets and changes in the environment. Singapore is a small country – human capital is all that we have. It is therefore critical for us to ensure that everyone in the workforce is well prepared to handle the new challenges. A dynamic and responsive workforce is needed to support Singapore as a globally competitive knowledge economy. The government initiated a Manpower 21 committee in June 1998 to examine how we could train our people to be well prepared to handle the new demands of the knowledge-based economy. The recent economic crisis was also an excellent ‘awakening’ call for several of us as some were retrenched and personally experienced the need to upgrade their skills.

Integrated manpower approach & vibrant manpower industry

4 To successfully develop a workforce that is well trained and prepared, we have adopted an integrated manpower approach so that manpower demand and supply are well matched in the market. The Ministries of Education, Manpower

and Trade and Industry are also working closely together with industry partners and key government agencies to see how pre-employment training in the schools and tertiary institutions, unemployment training assistance and continuous training could be constantly improved and updated.

School of Lifelong learning

5 All of you here are people with professional, administrative, technical or entrepreneurial skills. Your expertise and contributions are certainly much appreciated by Singapore. With our local population of only 3.1 million (as of June 98), we need international talents like yourselves to help keep Singapore competitive and vibrant. Many of you bring with you skills that are not readily available here. However, like almost everyone else in the workforce, we all need to continually upgrade ourselves. This is one of the strategies that M21 would be adopting – to create a School of Lifelong Learning. It has been said that in today’ s world, a person has to be retrained at least seven times to keep up with the changing skillsets in the market. A lifetime job is no longer applicable in today’ s modern era. I am sure that many of you here tonight would agree with me on the importance of upgrading. But how exactly can you go about it? Perhaps the Kowloon Club can set up a special committee to provide your members with information and assistance in applying for the various training programmes and subsidies available through the many different sources provided by the government and industry.

Social cohesion

6 In the midst of all the competition for survival and progress, we cannot neglect the ‘softer’ aspects in the country. I spoke last year on how social

cohesion is very important in a country. I am sure many of you would agree on this point judging by developments in the region. The crises experienced by Indonesia over the past year illustrated the importance of social cohesion in keeping all of us united at work, at play and in living harmoniously together. Given that Singapore is a multi-racial society, we must co-operate so that we can ‘synergise’ our efforts in achieving our objective. By recognising and accepting that each ethnic group can contribute something valuable and unique to the society, we can reduce barriers and concentrate on building up social cohesion.

Team spirit and ownership

7 To be successful, all of us need to work together. We need to build up a strong community spirit so that we would be able to handle challenges and difficult problems together. Every one of us here have a stake in Singapore. When she does well, we too have succeeded. Such a sense of ‘nationhood’ will enable all of us to relate to the country’s progress and to continue to enjoy the sense of teamwork, satisfaction and ownership that we attain from being a part of Singapore.

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8 Kowloon Club is certainly an asset to Singapore. The many activities organised by the Club definitely help to create ample opportunities to furnish our newcomers with the necessary information so that they can understand and adapt to Singapore better and faster. I wish Kowloon Club every success in the new millennium! Thank you and may all of you have an enjoyable night.
