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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Abdullah Tarmugi, 4 May 2000, 9.45 am

# *Singapore Government*

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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI  
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS  
AT THE SEMINAR ON COMMUNITY SERVICE ORDER  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 4 MAY 00 AT 9.45AM  
AT THE SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION &  
EXHIBITION CENTRE, BALLROOM 3, LEVEL TWO,  
1, RAFFLES BOULEVARD**

Good morning

Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Senior Parliamentary Secretary  
Justice Rubin, Chairman, Probation Committee

Mr Richard Magnus, Senior District Judge

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be here this morning to launch a video on the Community Service Order (CSO) Programme by MCDS.

2           The CSO was first implemented by my Ministry in December 1996. We introduced the CSO to allow offenders to make amends by doing work that benefit the community as a way of restoring his goodwill towards others. The work assignments were therefore treated and given strictly as punishment for offenders. For example, we sent the offenders to do routine chores like cleaning windows and toilets and helping the elderly to peel garlic to be sold in the wet markets.

3           The CSO continues to be a form of punishment as the offenders have to sacrifice their leisure hours for mandated service at specified times. However, we now design assignments that not only give the young offenders a chance to make good but also to help them to learn a skill or two - be it learning marketable skills or social skills. Progressively, the assignments have also become more interesting and challenging to the probationers. These include assisting in organising and carrying out charity events, caring or attending to the elderly in social service agencies, painting the homes of the elderly in sheltered housing, planning and preparing meals for the elderly in day centres or homes. They also assist in outings for people with disabilities. Such exposure help to open up the eyes of these young people to a sector of society that they are not aware of. They also learn to be responsible and accountable when they participate in these activities. They learn respect and consideration for others and for their situations.

4 Some employers who provide work assignments under the CSO programme have told us that they found their participation not only a concrete and direct contribution to the rehabilitation of young offenders but also an opportunity for them to get to know some of them and their capabilities. Indeed, a few agencies have walked a second mile by offering the probationers employment after they have completed their CSO stint.

5 For cyber-offenders, we try to give them assignments that will make use of their IT expertise in ways which benefit the community eg in projects that support the current drive towards a more IT knowledge society. Hacking is a crime and those who do it must know that it is a crime. But we need to see beyond punishing and helping the offender to make restitution by also channelling their knowledge and skills in IT to positive social ends.

6 For CSO to be meaningful, we have to prepare the young people for their assignments by giving them the relevant information and, where necessary, the basic skills to fulfil their obligations. For example, they are given some basic knowledge and "how tos" before they work with the elderly or the disabled.

7 Each CSO stint is usually about 100 -120 hours. It ends with a session of reflection and "processing" of the CSO experience followed by an evaluation of how CSO has been for the offender, his parents and the CSO agency. Despite the offenders' general unwillingness and reservations at the start of their CSO, our post-evaluation survey showed that by the time they completed, 85% of them had indicated that they had acquired a new skill, knowledge or

good habit as a result of their CSO placement. Those placed in elder care facilities invariably said that they could relate better to the elderly members of their family. Our feedback also showed that 95% of the probationers said that their CSO assignments were “worthwhile”.

8           The CSO Programme is a community justice initiative that reflects the close partnership between my Ministry, the Judiciary and the community. CSO works only if there is community acceptance and involvement. And the community's participation is key to the re-integration of offenders into society.

9           This morning, we have invited many of you whom we hope to engage as our partners in this programme. In the audience are also representatives of 55 CSO work agencies and 21 schools in which the programme has been successfully carried out. They can testify how the CSO programme has enabled and helped young people reflect and respond to opportunities as constructive and contributing members of society. I wish to thank all our CSO partners among you for the trust that you have placed on the programme.

10          A few of you, I believe, will share your experiences at this morning's seminar . This sharing will be helpful for those who want to know more about the programme and for those who have concerns and reservations about participating in the programme.

11          I am glad that in a span of about 3 years, we have been able to increase the number of CSO work agencies from only 9 to 55 agencies and 21 schools. We now have over 950 probationers on CSO who have been ordered to perform a total of almost 80,000 hours of community service. In the last 3

years, the probationers have given a total of 74,000 hours (or the equivalent of 8 years) of service to the community!

12 To the agencies and schools that have been with us, I would like to say a big “Thank you “ for coming forward to MAKE A DIFFERENCE for our young people. I hope and strongly encourage more agencies to consider joining the programme. It is now my pleasure to launch the video on the Community Service Order.

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