

**SPEECH BY EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT  
AIN SOCIETY'S CHARITY DINNER ON SATURDAY, 27 APRIL 2013,  
AT 7.30 PM AT THE ORCHARD HOTEL**

Haji Abdul Malek Osman, President of Ain Society  
Haji Mohd Yusof Ismail, CEO Ain Society  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you at tonight's charity dinner to celebrate Ain Society's 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

2. Events such as these remind us that there is more to Singapore society than the narrow pursuit of individual success. Singapore has achieved much because we have practised a fair and transparent system of meritocracy. Ability and performance, rather than connections, wealth or who you are, are the primary basis for one's progress, whether it is admission to schools and universities or appointments in the public and private sectors. We also level the playing field by investing heavily in education and giving every Singaporean ample opportunities to succeed and to maximize his or her own potential.

3. This has served Singapore well through decades of strong growth, when a rising tide lifted all boats. But, of late, meritocracy seems to have taken on some negative connotations. Income inequality has grown over the years, creating resentment and envy. Competition in schools has resulted in stressed-out children and their parents. Some who have not done so well therefore see meritocracy as a system that benefits those with resources and one which impairs their social mobility. I can understand why it is difficult for them to be enthusiastic about a system which they think has not benefited them the same way as others.

4. Indeed, unbridled meritocracy is not good. We do not want a society whose citizens seek to advance their own interests without a care for others, or worse, at the expense of others. I call this "Selfish Meritocracy". Having invested in realising the potential of Singaporeans, it is natural that some will fare better than others – sometimes much better. But the solution is not to hold them back in the interests of equality of outcomes, or to do away with meritocracy altogether. It is to get them back to help others with compassion.

5. We should try to enhance our system of meritocracy to ensure that it continues to benefit society. What we need is compassion alongside

meritocracy, ie like a coin with meritocracy on one side and compassion on the other. Compassion on the part of those who succeeded, because society has devoted resources to nurture them and give them the opportunities to succeed. And compassion towards those who have not been able to climb as high, sometimes through no fault of their own. It is up to those of us who can, to reach back and help those behind to climb the ladder with us, and not to pull up the ladder behind us. Those who have risen to the top owe the greatest responsibility to help the weaker in society. A “Compassionate Meritocracy” can help us build a resilient and inclusive society. A “Selfish Meritocracy” will divide us and ruin our society.

6. Ain Society is an example of Compassionate Meritocracy at work. The society started as a group of 12 public spirited residents eager to find ways to help others in their neighborhood. Over the years, it has grown to become a significant player in our social ecosystem, with over 200 volunteers.

7. Ain Society’s contributions are particularly significant in the Malay/Muslim community, where it runs programmes such as the Family Excellence circles, a social support network which helps parents learn how to communicate effectively within their families, deal with youth delinquency, and create a supportive learning environment within which their children will grow up with the best chances of success in life.

8. Within the wider Singapore community, Ain Society has also made important contributions. It runs a cancer patient support group at its new social service centre at Eunos Crescent, called “Serenity @ Ain”, which reaches out – regardless of background – to provide emotional, social and financial support to chronically ill patients and those suffering from cancer. It also has outreach programmes targeting high-risk youths and needy families, through education and counseling programmes. Ain’s programmes complement the government’s efforts in these areas.

9. Without its volunteers, as well as the support of sponsors and donors, the Society would not be able to achieve its objectives. Ain Society’s continued success depends on the commitment of its friends and supporters. I am therefore very heartened to see the strong support from those of you present tonight. Your efforts, and the work of the Society, go a long way to making Singapore a Compassionate Meritocracy. A compassionate meritocratic society is a better and happier society.

10. Let me end by wishing Ain Society many successful years ahead. Thank you.

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