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Speech by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, at the Medal Presentation Ceremony for 5th SAF UNIKOM Team Held at the Joint Services Officers' Mess in Gombak Drive

07 Jan 1997

I am delighted to be present this evening for the medal presentation for the 5th UNIKOM Team.

Over the years, Singapore has participated actively in UN peacekeeping missions. We have done so because Singapore recognises the important role the UN plays in safeguarding international law and order through its peacekeeping efforts. Our contribution to UN peacekeeping operations is in keeping with our role as a responsible member of the international community, and a firm believer of the principles of the UN Charter.

Singapore's participation in UN peacekeeping dates back to UNTAG in Namibia in 1989 which saw Singapore sending a large contingent of SAF officers, policemen and civil servants to help conduct elections there. Besides UNIKOM, we also participated in UNAVEM in Angola in 1991 and 1992, when we deployed military observers; UNTAC in Cambodia in 1993 when Singapore responded to a UN request for support by sending four Super Puma helicopters and 65 servicemen for a one-month tour of duty to provide support for the elections there as well as to conduct aerial policing for UNTAC; and UNOMSA in South Africa in 1994 when Singapore sent SAF officers and policemen to perform election monitoring duties.

Apart from participating in UN peacekeeping operations, Singapore demonstrates its support for UN peacekeeping efforts by seconding officers at no cost to the UN Headquarters. At present, there are 3 SAF officers serving in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the UN HQ.

The UN Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) that was set up to enforce the cease-fire in the demilitarised zone between Iraq and Kuwait, is the longest UN mission the SAF has participated in so far. Codenamed OPS BLUE TORCH, the SAF's participation is now in its sixth year. A senior SAF officer, LTC Choy Kin Chong, also holds the appointment of Deputy Chief Operations Officer at HQ UNIKOM. The duties of our peacekeepers in UNIKOM include patrolling the demilitarised zone along the 200-km border of Iraq and

Kuwait, manning designated observation posts and investigating violations of the ceasefire agreement.

The officers of OPS BLUE TORCH 5 left their families and loved ones, to serve at the Iraq-Kuwait border, where conditions are harsh. There were also inherent risks to their personal safety given that they were operating in a tense area, and had to deal with the Iraqis and Kuwaitis in an even handed manner, at times under trying circumstances. I am proud to say that our officers adjusted swiftly and performed their tasks admirably.

It thus gives me great pleasure to confer on these officers the SAF Overseas Service Medal. The 7 SAF officers of BLUE TORCH 5 volunteered and participated in UNIKOM between April 1995 and April 1996. They included 2 NSmen who each served 6 months in UNIKOM. Singapore's contribution to the international community through UN peacekeeping efforts is made possible by such officers being willing to make sacrifices and readily responding to the call of duty by volunteering their services. Their professionalism, dedication and outstanding performance have enhanced the reputation of Singapore and the SAF in the international community. Singapore and the SAF are proud of their contribution.

The officers' perseverance and dedication would not be possible without the support of their families and loved ones while they were serving their country abroad. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the family members of these fine officers for their unflagging support.

In conclusion, I congratulate the members of BLUE TORCH 5 once more for the honour you have brought to yourself, the SAF and Singapore.

I wish you the very best in your careers.

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