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Speech by Prof. Wong Lin Ken, Minister for Home Affairs, at the
Institute of Surveyors' Annual Dinner at Hilton Hotel, on
Saturday, 27th November, 1971 at 8.15 p.m.

Our is an age of change. In the last decade, rapid urbanization accompanied by industrialization has brought about visible changes in life styles and values. Housing estates have brought more people closer together, multiplying the opportunities for the lawless to operate and the targets for their crimes. Industrialization has generated wealth, and also created more temptations and opportunities for crime. Indeed, in many Western countries the price of industrialization and urbanization has been paid for in wider range and higher rates of crime.

So far, there is no evidence to indicate that our crime rates have followed the same trend as these countries. In the last decade, our crime rate per thousand of population has remained relatively stable, at about 10 per 1,000 persons. Our population has increased by about 22%, but the number of criminal offences by only 18%.

One of the principal reasons for the relative stability in our crime situation is the operation of the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance. This has restrained the development of crime that has accompanied economic growth in most industrialized countries. This is an unorthodox approach towards crime. It is an acknowledgement that the complex machinery of law fashioned in accordance with British concepts of justice is inadequate for the purpose of maintaining law and order. But it has been most

effective in restraining the activities of secret societies. Without it, our crime situation would not have been what it has been in the past few years.

While the number of criminal offences has remained relatively stable per thousand of population, the cost of crime to society has increased. In 1965, the value of property stolen was \$5.1 million. Last year, it was \$8.2 million, or an increase of about 60%. In 1966, the value of property stolen per offence was \$413, in contrast to the figure of \$632 for last year.

Thefts including stealing of cars, and burglaries have shown some increases, but the most significant development is the trend of increase in robberies, especially armed robberies. In 1966, robberies accounted for 16% of the value of property stolen. Last year, they amounted to almost 29%. Robberies had increased in spite of the fact that there was an unemployment problem in 1966, and a mini-boom last year. Affluence evidently does not eliminate crime.

This is a matter of some concern for the future. It can be expected that the number of crimes must necessarily increase with the growth of population and economic development. But every effort will be made to maintain a relatively stable crime rate and also to restrain the cost of crime to the nation. For this reason, the modernization and re-organisation programs for the Police and the improvement in salaries and work conditions of the Rank and File are both timely and necessary.

But the containment of crime, now and in the future, is more than just the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Police. It is also a public responsibility. Co-operation with the Police and minimising the temptations and opportunities for crime are the traditional ways by which the public has always chosen to exercise this responsibility. But public responsibility can also be exercised effectively in at least two other important ways.

One of these is tailored for contributions by our universities. In the last 150 years, the major sociological studies on crime in our Republic have focussed, for good reasons, on the secret societies. These have provided the basis for our secret society legislations, culminating in the Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Ordinance. Secret societies are now brought under effective restraint, but their potential menace remains. However, crimes not connected with secret societies are on the increase, brought about by economic development, and the inevitable changes in life styles and social values. It is time a major sociological study of crime be made so that decision-makers will have a comprehensive document to guide them in future legislations. In fact, steps have been taken to see whether the University of Singapore can initiate such a necessary study, under the auspices of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Social Affairs.

The other way by which the public can contribute positively towards the containment of crime is to provide a climate of opinion in favour of punishment of criminals. It is essential for the equitable functioning of our system of

justice that justice must be done, and seen to be done. However, justice must be done, and seen to be done, not only for the criminals, but also their victims. In some Western countries, there is a subtle drift towards using the machinery of law as an instrument to protect the criminal minority from the deterrent and punitive laws of the law-abiding majority. The philosophical ideals are praiseworthy, but the practical results pernicious. The concept of justice is magnanimously upheld, but at the expense of law and order.

We have a vested interest in maintaining law and order, not only because without them we can have no organised society, but also because we finally foot the bill. It cost the victims of crime last year \$8.2 million, of which only 26% was recovered. It cost the taxpayers \$53 million to maintain the Police Force, not to mention the \$2.1 million necessary for the support of our judicial machinery. In addition, it cost the taxpayers about \$5 million to upkeep the prisons, or slightly more than \$6 per day for each person in confinement. We have, therefore, cogent reasons to see that criminals get what they deserve. We must uphold the integrity of our judicial machinery, but we should insist that justice must be done, and seen to be done, and, in the process, the rights of the majority to law and order are not subtly undermined.