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SPEECH BY MR. S. RAJARATNAM, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
AT THE NATIONAL DAY PARADE HELD AT THE TOA PAYOH SPORTS  
COMPLEX ON TUESDAY, 9TH AUGUST, 1977

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Most people believe that solving human problems is largely a matter of creating the good society. So we come out with a number of plans and programmes to build a better society. And on paper these programmes look good.

But in practice the vast majority of blue prints for the good society turn out to be failures. Despite wonderful blue prints many societies become more insecure. There is more violence. Riots and revolution increase. Even in wealthy countries unemployment is becoming a serious problem. For millions of people tomorrow is going to be worse than today.

In this respect Singapore is fortunate. I am not saying that we have no problems and shortcomings but we have fewer of these than many countries.

For the past 18 years life has improved for most of us. For some faster than for others, but I do not think that anyone in Singapore would want to go back to the conditions of 18 years ago.

Why is this so? One reason is that we have approached the problem of creating a better society from a somewhat different direction. We believe that the key to creating a better society is to first create better citizens. We believe that better citizens make inevitably a better society. A society is no more than the sum of the strength and weakness of its citizens. If the vast majority of its citizens are irresponsible, selfish, violent and unconcerned

with the welfare of their fellow citizens and contemptuous of laws then no amount of blue-prints can create the good society.

In many parts of the world you hear a lot of talk about human rights. It is proper that people should fight for human rights. But every right implies a corresponding responsibility and a good citizen is one who is as scrupulous in insisting on his rights as on discharging the responsibilities that go with them.

A society which stresses only on rights degenerates into anarchy.

A society which stresses only on the responsibilities of a citizen becomes tyrannical.

A good citizen is one who earns his rights by discharging the responsibilities that go with it. Where the vast majority of citizens regard rights and responsibilities as inseparable aspects of social life, there you will have the good society.

Ultimately it is the quality and character of individual citizens rather than blue-prints and programmes which decide whether a society is good or bad, peaceful or violent, a success or failure.