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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AT THE PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION TO
VOLUNTARY WELFARE WORKERS, ON SATURDAY, 21 OCTOBER '78
AT 7.30 P.M., AT THE ISTANA

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From time to time, the spirit of a nation and the quality of its people are tested. The ability of a nation to survive depends on the nature of the response to problems and disasters by the nation as a whole. These qualities were tested in the Spyros disaster last week.

It is unfortunate that it takes a disastrous event for us to really know whether the mettle of our people are still of good quality. On that occasion, Singaporeans rose to the fore and it proved that we are concerned people who can and will rise to any occasion. There was tremendous empathy and generosity shown towards the victims and their families. People turned out to help without any consideration for themselves and there were many who worked tirelessly round the clock with the consolation that there were others more in need at the moment than themselves.

A significant phenomenon was the large number of people who were willing to donate their blood. The response was so overwhelming that the Health authorities were unable to cope with the donors who turned up both spontaneously and in response to a call. Organisations and individuals also readily came forward with cash donations. There is, therefore, this latent spirit of a caring society which is abundantly evident.

Whilst we would need the public spirited to respond to the urgent needs of a moment, there will always be a need for assistance to the needy both in terms of cash or kind all the time. In our midst are people with problems and needs who require a helping hand. Very often, we take for granted that these problems exist and voluntary efforts and donations become a routine feature of our lives. Sometimes, there is a danger that people disregard the

routine and /2.

routine and do not offer their assistance readily or sufficiently.

Most of you who are here this evening are volunteers and you are doing a creditable job for the community. I am sure you will be the first to respond to a disaster such as the Spyros fire but at the same time, your efforts are creditable in that your contribution to the community is also a sustained one. The volunteers who are going to receive their Certificates of Appreciation this evening are those who have contributed a number of years of voluntary service in various capacities. In the path of your contribution, there must have been many frustrations and difficulties. Very often, these might even have made you question whether you should continue to serve the community in the wake of the competing demands on your time and energy. However, your perseverance to contribute voluntarily to the community is a laudable one for which we hope the award of the Certificate will be a small token of our recognition and appreciation.

In the field of social welfare services, there is a constant need for fresh approaches and new thinking. We should constantly monitor the needs of the society and the problem areas that may arise from the rapid social changes. The provision of services by the voluntary sector as well as by the Government should be flexible enough to identify and cater for the changing needs. New ideas on what can be done for existing and new services in the welfare area will always be welcomed.

Voluntary organisations should have dedicated and able leadership on their management committees to plan and to lay down policies. There are some volunteers on these management committees who have been serving for a very long time. They are the ones who have carried on because new blood is not forthcoming and there are very few dedicated and able people willing to come forward voluntarily to serve in the voluntary organisations. On the other hand, there will inevitably be some passengers on these committees who are not giving of their best. The voluntary organisations need people who can make sacrifices of their time and effort to help improve the services for those who are in need.

I would like to call upon the professionals and those with management expertise to come forward to serve in the voluntary organisations. The contribution they can make will be to identify their interests /3.

their interests with any particular voluntary organisation and enrol as a member which will probably entail a contribution of a dollar a month or less. In this process, they will then be able to attend the annual general meetings and offer their services on the management committees.

I would like to congratulate those who are receiving the awards this evening and I hope that your good work will continue. I also look forward to more volunteers coming forth to volunteer their services in various capacities. May the presentation of the Certificates inspire others to give more of their time and services to voluntary welfare work.

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