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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,
AT THE CHILDREN'S CHARITIES DINNER AND DANCE ON SATURDAY,
10 FEBRUARY '79 AT NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT AT 8.00 P.M.

Once upon a time when we talked of "charity", it was quite clear that we were referring to the underprivileged and the down and out of society who needed financial and other assistance. Today, the word "charity" encompasses a wide range of causes. Increasingly, the voluntary organisations which cater to welfare needs are finding it difficult to obtain financial support from their traditional supporters as well as from traditional sources of fund raising. This is not because people and organisations have become more selfish but because the same piece of cake is being shared by more and more.

Besides recreational, sports, community and cultural organisations, funds are being raised for a whole host of other activities. In good times when the economic situation is rosy, there will be more money to go around for all the worthwhile causes. However, when business is bad, the collection of funds for charity also becomes affected.

Ultimately, we should all remember that charity really refers to those who are in need of welfare assistance. The first call of financial support should be for the alleviation of suffering and the needy. The needy would include those who are mentally and physically handicapped and those who are placed in unfortunate situations where without some welfare intervention, they would find it difficult to cope with life. When we talk about improving the quality of life, we must not forget that it should be something which is available to everyone and not just for the more fortunate people who are able to benefit from facilities made available to advance it.

Voluntary organisations performing useful welfare functions should re-examine their approach not only in relation to fund raising but also to the provision of their services in order to ensure that they are not lost in the competition for scarce resources. For example, there could be more co-ordination of efforts to raise funds. Unnecessary competitions among charitable organisations themselves could be eliminated. The example set by the Children's Charities could be adopted where organisations offering services to a particular category or group get together and consolidate their efforts in the area of fund raising. If necessary, such organisations should also examine whether they could merge to provide better services to the same area of need.

There should be maximum utilisation of resources available. This calls for a reconsideration of patterns of care provided. For example, care for the handicapped could be changed from one of intensive care to one which provides temporary relief to families. Many of the families with handicapped members are not faced with acute crisis; they are normal families under pressures from long term chronic domestic problems. They need relief and practical help. By switching from providing a service which substitutes for the family to one which supports the family, voluntary organisations could perhaps benefit more families by the services provided with the same amount of resources available.

1979 has been declared the International Year of the Child. My Ministry in co-ordination with other Government Departments, the Council of Social Service and voluntary organisations have lined up a programme of activities for the occasion. It is a year when we have been asked to renew our concern for children. The aim is to spur governmental and non-governmental action on behalf of children. It is a year which offers an opportunity to mobilise new resources to meet the needs of children. It also provides the opportunity for voluntary agencies, particularly those dealing with children's welfare, to tap the many resources of funds not available to them, in their annual campaigns and fund raising programmes. Hopefully, the new contributors, once attracted, would continue with their generosity through the years.

In conclusion, may I lend my congratulations to the good work done by the many volunteers to raise funds for this particular cause as well as the numerous volunteers who have been performing yeoman's service charities.

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