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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, AT THE PRESENTATION NIGHT OF THE SINGAPORE KEMUNING SOCIETY IN THE GRAND BALLROOM, HILTON HOTEL ON 22 DECEMBER '82 AT 8.00 PM

Since its formation in 1975, the Singapore Kemuning Society has been actively engaged in promoting Malay culture in Singapore. It has often participated in national cultural events and organised numerous activities like Malay dramas, dances and music especially among Malay youths. These have resulted not only in raising the standards of these performing art forms, thus arousing greater awareness in the Malay Community of their rich cultural heritage, they also helped to promote cross-cultural appreciation among the various ethnic groups in Singapore. Competitions in Silat and Gasing have also been organised to arouse the nostalgic feelings of the young and old. In its attempts to reach out to a wider section of the Malay community, the Society divides its members into small groups for the various activities. In their cultural pursuits, members of the Kemuning Society have not neglected their social responsibility. Fund-raising projects are held from time to time to help the Old Folks' Homes and the Orphanages. This is indeed very commendable. I would like to congratulate the Society for its very valuable contribution to society. It is therefore not surprising that it won the National Youth Service Team Award for 1982.

While we eagerly learn and absorb modern scientific and technological knowledge from the West and apply them in our development efforts, we should be selective in absorbing western cultural norms and values. There is much wisdom and many virtues in our oriental cultural heritage which we should rediscover and promote to ensure our social stability. We should avoid the pitfalls experienced by many Western countries as a result of rootlessness and a loss of cultural ballast. The Singapore Kemuning Society and other traditional cultural organisations therefore have an important social mission, and they deserve every support from the community.

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I am informed that part of the proceeds of this Presentation Night will go to MENDAKI to help its noble aim of raising the education level of Muslim children. The rationale behind the formation of MENDAKI and its approaches in realising its objectives should be well known to every Singaporean by now. Suffice it for me to say that MENDAKI's task is formidable and its success will depend on generous donations from the community, the cooperation of parents and the perseverance of Muslim children in their studies.

It is likely that premature school leavers without any skills or expertise and those who are unable to read and write effectively will be left behind in the development race. These people can only secure low-paid jobs and cannot hope for a higher standard of living. Education provides one of the surest ways for a person to improve his station in life and in his work performance. I am happy to see that there are so many organisations responding to the call to help Muslim children in education and training. This demonstrates that Singapore is still a very caring and close-knit society. Therefore, Muslim children must in turn try to take the fullest advantage of the assistance offered to them by MENDAKI and the community. I am very glad to receive the donation of $2,000 on behalf of MENDAKI and to thank members of the Singapore Kemuning Society for their kind consideration. I wish the Management Committee and members of the Society all the best in their future undertakings.