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SPEECH BY THE SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
MR. A. RAHIM ISHAK, AT THE DINNER AND DANCE OF THE 56TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE DAY AT THE
NEPTUNE THEATRE RESTAURANT ON SATURDAY, JULY 22, 1978 AT 7.30 P.M.

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When the co-operatives started functioning in Singapore in the early 1930's, it was restricted to only a few areas - housing, insurance and banking. Learning from the experience in India, the need for a co-ordinating body was realised in 1933 with the establishment of the Singapore Urban Co-operative Union Ltd. In 1953 the Singapore Co-operative Union dropped the word "Urban" from its name and in 1972 expanded its objects and functions to form the Singapore National Co-operative Union Ltd. By then co-operative societies have almost reached its full blossom in Singapore. In terms of growth, some statistics would give you a good indication of this progress. In 1977, the collective membership and paid-up capital of the co-operative movement stood at 127,540 and 39.3 million dollars respectively. However, over the last five years membership has increased by over 70 per cent and the paid-up capital by 28 per cent. Today, the co-operative movement in Singapore has branched out into all forms of activities including insurance, supermarkets, taxis and school books.

The original idea behind forming co-operative societies was to provide cheaper forms of goods and services and make them widely available to both the rich and the poor. It is a means to promote social justice and to provide opportunities to everyone. In Singapore where free enterprise and competition are the main pillars of the economy, co-operatives have contributed to the eradication of some aspects of social injustice. They have also complemented the Government's role in providing goods and services. The private sector by and large has not complained about the sustained growth of the co-operative movement in Singapore. This is because businessmen here understand that there is a place for both to co-exist and both the free enterprise and the co-operative movement can flourish in Singapore as it has done in, for example, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and other countries where

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the mixed economy has proven to be successful. In Singapore the activities of the co-operatives do not only complement those of the Government and the private sector but they actually provide useful competition to one another. They have brought out the best from each other thereby satisfying the most important component in the business transaction - the consumer and members of the public. In the Singapore context, there are extensive opportunities for the participation by the Government, the co-operatives and the private sector in economic development and the provision of goods and services. This tri-lateral partnership has worked for our prosperity and progress and it will continue to contribute to our economic growth and development.

A look at some of the statistics would illustrate the point that there is scope for the growth of co-operative activities in Singapore. At the end of 1977, the paid-up capital for Income, Welcome and Comfort stood at 1.6 million, 2.2 million and 472,000 dollars respectively; while their reserves were 26.6 million, 1.3 million and 4.7 million dollars respectively. Welcome and Income also paid six per cent dividends to their shareholders in 1976 and 1977 respectively. This record is remarkable for a new venture in the co-operative field by the NTUC, and I am sure that it is not due to just sound and efficient management alone. The opportunities must have been there also.

The opportunities are abundant for the co-operative movement and the scope for expansion is almost limitless. However, in order that the co-operative movement in Singapore assume a more matured and sophisticated role in society, there is a need for all those involved in the management and running of co-operative societies to examine their aspirations and programmes. There have been 50 years of co-operative activities in Singapore. There is a need after this half decade to examine how the co-operative movement could play a more positive role in the economic development of our Republic.

Some friends of mine have suggested ideas which could be useful. First, those of you in charge could perhaps look at the possibility of providing more educational and training facilities to create a more enlightened and capable membership. Secondly, more women could be encouraged to join the co-operative movement, thereby enriching the experience and scope of activities. Thirdly, the movement could

examine the feasibility of providing other services to enrich more pleasant living in Singapore. These are just some ideas I have ventured to voice tonight but I am sure that you professionals in the field could make more extensive studies into their realisation.

Tonight is the 56th anniversary of International Co-operative Day, and I would like to congratulate all of you, whether you are members of the old guards or the new rising leadership in the co-operative movement, for making your positive contribution to co-operative activities in Singapore. You have made remarkable strides to increase your membership and capital and I am reassured that you would take advantage of the growing opportunities to make co-operative life in Singapore more substantial and beneficial. I am also confident that you will be able to shoulder the responsibilities of meeting the challenges ahead and in so doing build up greater rapport with the population in general.