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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, 8 Apr 2000, 11.10am

# *Singapore Government*

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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI  
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPORTS  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF  
THE SINGAPORE BOYS' HOME AND SINGAPORE BOYS' HOSTEL  
SATURDAY, 8 APRIL 2000, 11.10 AM**

National Archives of Singapore  
Good morning

### **INTRODUCTION**

In any society, there will be children and youth who go astray. Apart from our statutory responsibility to these boys and girls, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) also has a social duty to give these minors a second chance to grow into socially responsible individuals. We therefore take a "restorative" rather than a "punitive" approach to the management of juvenile offenders. Our juvenile homes aim primarily to

rehabilitate, while seeking to inculcate discipline and ensure the safety of our residents.

2 Since 1990, the Ministry has worked in partnership with other government agencies and community groups to help nearly 2,300 boys and their families, through the many programmes and services available in our Homes. The commitment of parents, volunteers and the dedication of our Home staff, have enabled us to return many boys to the social mainstream. The effective rehabilitation of juvenile offenders must continue to be a shared responsibility.

### **CLASSIFICATION AND REHABILITATION**

3 The previous Singapore Boys' Home at Clementi was more than 100 years old. It was not purpose built and the facilities and physical environment were old and inadequate. The Ministry was not able to implement more effective rehabilitation, vocational and educational programmes and other activities which were badly needed by the boys. The increase in the number of admissions led to overcrowding. Management of the Home at Clementi was indeed a challenge to the staff. This new complex has enabled the Ministry to introduce a number of improvements such as a sophisticated electronic surveillance system, a new computer lab and better facilities to help rehabilitate and reintegrate the boys into society. But more important than the physical improvements are the improvements we are making in the development of our rehabilitation programmes.

4 A significant step forward has been the implementation of a new classification and assessment programme. Since July last year, all new residents are assessed in terms of their risk profile and specific needs during the first two months of their stay in the Homes. This process of classification and assessment allows us to draw up an Individual Care Plan for each resident. The tailor-made Plan maps out the type of programmes, assistance and therapy that each boy and his family will need, in order to maximise his chances of turning over a new leaf.

### **HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY**

5 Concurrent with the efforts to improve our rehabilitation programmes, our staff are constantly reviewing their work processes and making

improvements in the way they do things. One recent initiative is a video link between the Ministry headquarters and the Homes. This use of technology can enable more timely staff consultation and facilitate the management of our cases.

6 An in-house computer system called the Juvenile Homes System has also been developed. This system contains the procedures for managing the homes as well as information on each resident. The data collected enables us to track the progress of our residents as well as our rehabilitation efforts. This in turn helps us improve our programmes by showing us what interventions are more effective.

### **MOVING UPSTREAM**

7 MCDS will continue to improve its rehabilitation and residential programmes for juvenile offenders. But more significantly, we will have to move upstream, to develop and guide our young even before they go astray. With globalisation and advances in IT, our youths will be exposed to many more alternative values and lifestyles, some constructive and helpful and yet others unhealthy. This influence flows incessantly through the internet, the media, pop songs and films. We are an open, cosmopolitan society and we cannot shut out the rest of the world. In embracing globalisation, we will have to manage the impact it will have on our society. The challenge is to prepare our young to be “world-ready”, while at the same time, grounding them in a strong set of values and a sense of social responsibility, suited to our circumstances and needs.

### **EFFECTIVE PARENTING**

8 This teaching of values and socially responsible behaviour must inevitably begin at home. Effective parenting is the key. Most of us would acknowledge that mothers play a pivotal role in the family. But recent studies show that the quality of fathering is also an important factor often neglected in the development of children. My ministry recently conducted a study on the relationship between fathering and juvenile delinquency. The study found a high correlation between juvenile delinquency and authoritarian and neglectful fathers. There was also a close link between delinquent behaviour in children and the combination of an indifferent, authoritarian or neglectful father and a neglectful or indulgent mother. These findings highlight the fact that effective parenting can and does make a difference between a well-adjusted child or a

wayward one. Parents therefore need to work together and exercise joint responsibility in the upbringing and supervision of their children. Parents need to be warm, yet firm and consistent. Children do not only need love, they also need active supervision and interaction from both parents. Parenting and taking care of children is not just a mother's responsibility. Fathers too, play an important role.

## **COUNSELLING FOR PARENTS**

9 The effective rehabilitation of juveniles requires the involvement of parents and family members. My Ministry has implemented a number of programmes to involve parents in the rehabilitation of their children who are in our Homes or who are placed on probation. Such programmes aim to strengthen the parent-child relationship. The families are advised on how to discipline and guide their children, and how they can help their children reintegrate into society on their release from the Home or Hostel. Those parents who have participated in these programmes have found them useful and their interaction and relationship with their children enhanced. However, it is unfortunate that some parents are not forthcoming in their participation in these programmes or who do not see the need for their involvement in the rehabilitation of their children. As parents play a key role in influencing the behaviour and development of their children, my Ministry intends to make participation of parents in these programmes compulsory when we amend the Children & Young Persons Act later this year. Parents cannot abdicate their responsibilities to the state. Parents must take responsibility for their children, more so when they run foul of the law.

## **CONCLUSION**

10 The future of every nation is its children and youth. In Singapore, we are acutely aware of this, because people are our only resource. Parents, community groups as well as the government must work together to give our children not only the skills and opportunities to succeed in the new economy but also the values and attitudes which will enable them to lead meaningful lives.

11 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have helped in the management, development and implementation of programmes in our Homes and Hostel for the benefit of our residents. These are the many volunteers and members of the various Committees and Boards

convened by MCDS, such as the Management Committees of the Boys' Complex and the Toa Payoh Girls' Home, the Board of Visitors, the Advisory Board and Discharge Committee, and the Volunteer Probation Officers Committee. Your constructive ideas and valuable feedback continue to help our officers view issues from new perspectives and come up with more creative solutions. You have sacrificed your time for the benefit of the boys and girls under our care. To all our volunteers and members of the various committees and boards, I extend my deep appreciation for your commitment and support. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge and recognise the MCDS officers who have worked tirelessly for the welfare of the boys in our Homes. You should all be proud that that you have made a difference in the lives of the many youths who have passed through your care. I hope you will continue to make that difference.

12 On that note, it is my pleasure now to declare the Singapore Boy's Home and Singapore Boy's Hostel, open. Thank you.

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