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SPEECH BY MR CHAN CHEE SENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,  
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, AND ADVISER TO THE SINGAPORE ACTION  
GROUP OF ELDERS (SAGE), AT THE SAGE CELEBRATION OF ELDERS' LAY  
HELD AT SAGE PREMISES, BLOCK ONE PODIUM, 2ND FLOOR, MAUDE ROAD,  
SINGAPORE 8, ON FRIDAY, 1 DECEMBER '78 AT 7.30 PM

Recently, some attention has been turned to the problems of the aged. There seems to be greater awareness of the needs of old people. Some groups have organised programmes of activities for the old. For example, one school organised a commendable programme where old people were invited to visit the school and enjoy the hospitality and company of its pupils. It is my hope that more schools and other organisations will follow this example because it brings the young and old people together. This will foster mutual respect and encourage correct attitudes between the two.

Part of the problems of our modern world lies in the increasing sense of distance and differences between the young and the old. This sense of distance has often been called the generation gap. It seems that such a gap exists not only between children and their parents but also between parents and their own parents.

It seems to me that the main cause of the generation gap is that people of different age-groups have different interests and pre-occupations. Younger people face the problems of making a living or of improving upon their standards of living. They want to have material comforts, a good education for their children and an adequate and comfortable home. In order to do so, they must go out and work to realise their ambitions. It is becoming increasingly common for both parents in a household to be working. The children also have to go to school and attend extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, the aged have their own worries.

They worry ..... /2.

They worry about the fact that they are no longer contributing economically; about having too much time on their hands; about who will care for them if they fall sick and become a burden. They feel that the modern pace of life is too fast for them and they are unable to keep up.

It is little wonder that the sense of distance between the aged people and the younger ones tends to grow. Because of this, it is important to increase the opportunities by which the young and old can come together to share their love and affection and develop common interests. Everyone of us should do all he can to ensure that the gap in the attitudes towards living is bridged and that the differences do not become wider. We must promote greater mutual understanding and concern between the young and the old.

Aged people should recall that they themselves were once young and try to remember what it was that occupied their attention in their younger days. They could recall their struggle to make a living and to bring up their families. What about their attitudes towards the older folk when they were young? Were they as understanding and concerned towards the aged as they would now like the younger generation to be towards them? If they indulge in this kind of recollection, they will go some way towards understanding what makes young people behave the way they do.

On their part, the young people of today must bear in mind that they too will grow old one day. The way they show respect and caring for older people will have an impression in the minds of their own children. These children will grow up to be young men and women and will face the problems of living with their elders. Their attitudes towards old people can be and will be shaped now. Children should therefore be taught from very young to respect their elders and to show them that they care. This can be done very effectively by their parents' own example in showing caring, concern and understanding for the old people of today. In this way, they will learn to carry with them into their adulthood the sense of responsibility towards older people. The opportunity to do so should not be lost.

I would like to urge all those who are involved in the care of the aged to consider the ways and means by which old and young

can be brought closer together. Social activities should be planned in such a way as to allow not only the old but also the young to participate in cooperation. Such a mixing together in social activities will at least give old and young an opportunity to share some time together. Otherwise, the present trend, whereby the young are engaged in the pursuits of the daily business of living and the old are left to themselves to occupy their time as fruitfully as they can, will continue. This would only serve to widen the gap between young and old.

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