

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS  
AT THE OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION OF PRISON MANPOWER  
SKILLS AT THE CONNAUGHT ROOM, CENTURY PARK SHERATON  
HOTEL ON SATURDAY, 16 JULY 1983 AT 10.00 AM

The theme of this year's courtesy campaign is "Courtesy & Social Responsibility". The Century Park Sheraton, Singapore, has chosen to disseminate this theme in a novel way by organising an Exhibition of the products made by our prison inmates. The products are the evidence of the training and skills acquired by our prisoners while serving their term. The objective is to generate awareness among employers that it is a good source of trained manpower as well as to remind employers of their social responsibility to give our ex-prisoners an opportunity to demonstrate their worth by employing them.

Under our criminal justice system an offender is sent to prison not only as a form of punishment but also to be reformed through a programme of rehabilitation. The progress of his rehabilitation is monitored and assessed by his response and behaviour while serving his term. But the process of rehabilitation continues even after his release through an aftercare service. In fact the acid test as to the success of his rehabilitation would be his conduct and performance upon his release and return to society. It is not often realised that this latter part of his rehabilitation is most crucial and in which the community must play a vital role to help him to re-integrate into society.

To discharge their role of helping ex-offenders the community must provide two necessary pre-requisites, and they are opportunity and trust. Employers must provide the opportunity for the ex-offender to earn an honest living by giving him employment. There must also be a measure of trust placed on the ex-offender that will give him the confidence to do well in his job. Of course, this is a difficult and demanding responsibility to discharge and it is easier said than done. This is because, however well the ex-offender has responded to the rehabilitation programme, there is no absolute guarantee that the trust placed on him might not be betrayed. There will always be a few who will default. On the other hand, if the opportunity is not given to the ex-offender to be accepted back and to earn an honest living, it is a sure way of driving him back to crime.

On balance therefore there is no doubt that the community must generate the opportunity and that measure of trust to enable the ex-offender to earn an honest living. The task has, however, been made more difficult by the prejudice against ex-offenders that generally exists in our community. I think this is due not only to the lack of social responsibility on the part of some employers but also the result of ignorance of what has been achieved in the rehabilitation of offenders. By publicising it we may be able to dispel this prejudice.

Our approach to rehabilitation has been a pragmatic one. We have made the work programme the mainstay of our rehabilitative strategy in our penal institutions.

Since 1976 the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises or SCORE has been running workshops within our penal institutions. SCORE took over the former Prison Industries and restructured it. It introduced new industries by leasing out workshop space to outside companies to set up manufacturing facilities. They

provide the inmates with employment on a 44-hour week and a work regime similar to that of factories outside. This is to inculcate in our prisoners the work discipline necessary to hold on to a steady job outside when they are released. They are paid a fair wage which is put in the Post Office Savings Bank to be used to help their family or by them when they are released. As at 30 June 83, 21 firms had leased factory space. The industries brought in range from rosewood furniture making to fibre glass components, and garments.

More recently with our emphasis on upgrading of training and skills development of our work force, we decided to provide vocational training for selected inmates in skilled trades. By acquiring better skills, it would be easier for them to get good jobs outside.

In May 82, the Prisons Department, with the assistance of SCORE and the VITB, introduced a one-year full-time course in electrical wiring. Selected trainees from RTC undergo a 3-month institutional course after which they are sent outside to be employed by PWD contractors for the remaining 9 months to acquire on-the-job experience under a Day Release Scheme. They then sit for a Public Trade Test leading to a VITB Certificate of Competency. To date 16 trainees have completed the 12-month training of whom 11 passed the Public Trade Test. Another 36 are currently attached to PWD contractors and 16 are undergoing the 3-month institutional training. In addition, welding, brick-laying and pipe-fitting courses have been introduced for Criminal Law Detainees in prison. The programme for skill-based training in the construction trades will be expanded to other penal institutions and drug rehabilitation centres, starting with a pipe-fitting course in the Jalan Awan DRC on 18 Jul 83.

There is also a day release scheme for Criminal Law Detainees at the Ahmad Ibrahim Camp in Seletar. 168 detainees are housed in this Day Release Camp. During the day, they commute to work in the factories outside and return to Camp at night. To date, 92 companies are participating in the scheme. They provide a wide range of employment. The Day Releasees are paid market wages and CPF contributions. Since the launching of the scheme on 1 May 81, a total of 389 detainees have gone through the scheme. Of this number, 191 detainees (or 49.1 per cent) continued to be employed by the same employer after release.

Thus much has been done through these schemes to prepare our prisoners for smooth integration into society when they are released. We need more companies and concerns to participate in these schemes by providing employment. We need more enlightened employers to set the example and break the prejudice against employing ex-offenders. This Exhibition is therefore most timely and I would like to commend Century Park Sheraton Singapore for their concern and bold initiative in organising it.

I have now the pleasure to declare the Exhibition open.

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