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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE GET-TOGETHER DINNER OF THE MACPHERSON WOMEN SUB-
COMMITTEE AT MACPHERSON COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY
14 JANUARY 1984 AT 8.00 PM

When I first became MP for MacPherson nearly 16 years ago there were very few women residents in our constituency who were willing to come out to do community work. The vast majority wanted to remain at home and not get involved in community activities. I can recall that we had difficulty in getting a sufficient number of women activists to form the first Women Sub-committee when our old MacPherson Community Centre was opened for activities.

Today the position is vastly changed. We now have increasing numbers of women residents in MacPherson actively engaged in community activities and rendering service in the various grassroot organisations. They comprise not only the younger age group of women residents who are working but also the elderly housewives who have been very active in the Senior Citizens' Club of MacPherson.

In April last year when we launched here in MacPherson a Demonstration-cum-Training session for housewives on fire-fighting in connection with our Civil Defence programme, there was a massive turn-out of nearly 3,000 women. Over 500 volunteers were taught how to use a fire-extinguisher. I believe this was an unprecedented turn-out of so many women to participate in a community project in a constituency.

However, this development of increasing numbers of women coming out to actively serve in the grassroot organisations in our constituencies is of recent origin. It started off with the launching of our Residents' Committee (RC) Scheme some five years ago. We made it a point to recruit women as RC members so that the RC can reflect a truly representative body of opinion in the neighbourhood. In 1980 about 10 per cent of the total number of RC members in Singapore were women. It has now increased to 13 per cent but in actual numbers there are many more women RC members today. It was given further impetus by the launching of our Civil Defence Plan when we made housewives as one of our specific targets for recruitment as Civil Defence volunteers. Out of 13,483 volunteers who join the Volunteer Civil Defence Units (VCDU) to-date, 4,565 of them are women. This works out to 33.86 per cent.

With reference to the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS), a significant number of the NW Group (NWG) leaders are women. To date a total number of 11,129 NWGs with 51,439 participating households have been formed. Of the 11,129 NWG leaders, 1,741 of them are women who had formed 1,747 NWGs with 6,790 participating households. This works out to 15.6 per cent of the NWG leaders who are women.

Over a decade ago the proportion of women who served in the Community Centre Management Committees (CCMC) was only two per cent. Today it has increased to over seven per cent. However, the number of women serving in the Women Sub-Committee has increased eight times. It is interesting to note that a greater proportion of our women in the younger age group and the elderly age group are actively engaged in the activities of our community centres. In 1973 when the Youth Executive Committees (YEC) were first established, 30.3 per cent of the members were women. The percentage of female YEC members rose to 37.7 per cent in 1983. When Senior Citizens' Clubs were formed in community centres in 1981,

out of 1,423 members, 419 or 28.7 per cent were women. In 1983 the total number of members rose to 5,282 and out of this number 1,725 or 32.6 per cent were women.

This increasing participation of our women in community service has also moved along the right direction. The organisations in which the vast numbers of our women are actively involved in are those which are primarily concerned with the protection and improvement of the home and its environment. On matters such as the protection of the home against crime or fires occurring in homes or if fires do occur, to prevent them from spreading, the participation of our housewives is indispensable. With greater participation and input of views from our women community leaders, our community centres and RCs should also be that much better equipped to deal with the social problems of the neighbourhood more effectively.

The social problems that usually disrupt the peace, harmony and well-being of an HDB neighbourhood are vandalism of lifts, dirtying of corridors, juvenile delinquency, inconsiderateness leading to quarrels between neighbours. These problems usually originate from a few delinquent children or youths in the neighbourhood who had the misfortune of being badly brought up as a result of their parents' neglect. It is here that the other mothers in the neighbourhood who have the experience of bringing up their children well will be able to deal with these problems with the necessary understanding. If they volunteer their services, they have the best chance of successfully resolving the problem.

I know that in Japan, to meet the problem of juvenile delinquency in a neighbourhood, housewives organised themselves to search out the juvenile delinquents in street corners and try to talk them into giving up their anti-social behaviour. I would urge our women in Singapore to emulate the good example of their Japanese counterparts. Even if they do not succeed in winning them over because it may be a bit too late, their efforts would still not be wasted. This is because by doing so they would have by their personal example shown up those mothers in the neighbourhood who have neglected their duties of motherhood and perhaps through social pressure change them for the better.

I would also urge all our women who are already serving in our various grassroot organisations not only to continue with their good work but also to persuade more of their women neighbours and friends to join them in actively participating in community service. In fact our target should be that the active membership of all grassroot organisations operating in our neighbourhoods be comprised of 50 per cent women. Our women will then be in a better position to play a crucial role from the point of view of mothers, in shaping the future of our society.

Finally, I would like to commend the MacPherson Women Sub-committee as well as all the other women in MacPherson who are serving in the various grassroot organisations for their contribution to the community. I am sure they will continue with their good work and I wish them all the best for the New Year.
