

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE OPENING OF THE NCPC SEMINAR "CRIME PREVENTION -
EVERYONE'S INTEREST AND RESPONSIBILITY" AT THE RELC INTER-
NATIONAL HOUSE, ON SATURDAY 14 JULY 1984 AT 10.00 AM

A serious social problem that is now emerging in most developed as well as developing countries is the rising crime rate. The more urbanised and affluent the country is the higher is the incidents of crime. Poverty and slum dwelling can no longer be deemed to be the basic cause of crime. Although compared to most other countries the crime rate of Singapore is still very much lower, in the last few years our crime rate has also been rising. Our crime rate has risen from 1,033 per 100,000 of population in 1979 to 1,609 in 1981 and to 1,635 in 1983 per 100,000 of population. There is therefore an urgent need to check the uptrend and keep it down.

Although the main responsibility of combating crime lies with our Police Force, they cannot do so single-handedly. To succeed, every effort mounted by the Police must be complemented by public co-operation and assistance. Thus long before we launched the Neighbourhood Police Post system last year, we had implemented various schemes to involve the community to actively participate in measures to prevent and deter crime. When Residents' Committees (RCs) were first established in 1978, police officers were encouraged to become members. Police officers attended regular meetings of the RCs to brief them on the crime situation and they can assist and participate in preventing crime in their neighbourhoods. In 1981, the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) was launched. RCs were asked to spearhead the formation of Neighbourhood Watch Groups (NWGs)

among the residents in public housing estates. To date a total of 25,342 NWGs involving 115,372 households have been formed.

In 1981, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) was established. The main objective of the Council is not only to promote public awareness and concern about crime but also to mobilise a much wider section of the public to actively participate in the work of crime prevention. Through the NCPC which comprises both individual and corporate members from the various sectors of our society, a wider cross section of the public can be directly reached. Since its inception the NCPC has done a great deal of work towards fulfilling its objectives.

In 1981 and 1982, the Council, in conjunction with the Singapore Hotel Association and Singapore Manufacturers' Association, conducted two seminars for hotel executives and industrialists. In 1983, a series of four seminars cum security workshops were conducted for hotel front office, house-keeping and security staff. The Council also formed working committees to study and identify crime problems in specific areas such as commercial premises, industrial premises, public housing and residential premises. These committees have prepared reports indentifying crime risks and made recommendations as to how to deal with them. They are now placed before you to deliberate upon.

Today's seminar is another significant achievement of the NCPC. It has brought together selected representatives from a wide cross section of important civic, government, professional and commercial bodies. The 250 participants of the seminar come from the Citizens' Consultative Committees, Residents' Committees, Government Departments, Statutory Boards, Professional Institutions, Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations and from the Insurance, Building, Property and Security Industries. I have no doubts that the seminar will bring about a better understanding of our crime problems.

I, however, hope that through the influence of the participants on the respective bodies they represent, the private, public, commercial and industrial sectors will respond positively by implementing the recommendations. Just to quote a few examples, the architects and planners can in their professional capacity make sure that built-in crime prevention measures are brought to the attention of their clients and incorporated at the design and construction stage of buildings. Often, the cost effective aspect of security is appreciated only after the buildings have been completed and occupied. Much of the expense in adding physical security measures and systems to existing buildings could have been saved by incorporating them at the building stage. Since such rectification is expensive, invariably the hazards are allowed to exist, creating permanent opportunities for crime.

The insurance industry has also a responsible role to play in ensuring that insurance firms do not indiscriminately insure property without proper security protection. Insurance firms can, for instance, either provide incentives or make it a condition for property owners to install proper security systems for the protection of their premises against crime before they agree to provide the insurance coverage. But this, of course, must first be agreed upon and practised by the whole of the insurance industry so that no individual firm can have an unfair advantage over the others. I would like to stress that while the profit motive is a legitimate objective in business, it should never be pursued at the expense of social responsibility.

I am confident that if we are determined enough and go about it the right way, we shall be able to achieve the objective that crime prevention becomes everyone's social responsibility. In fact, the efforts that we have mounted in the last few years to get people actively involved in crime prevention has produced some concrete results. In a survey conducted by the Times Organisation on social

responsibility in April this year, it showed that 60 per cent of those interviewed are practising the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme by keeping an eye on their neighbour's house while they are away. Of this group 67 per cent of them look out for strangers in the neighbourhood and 32 per cent would attend to visitors knocking at their neighbour's door and 16 per cent said that their neighbours leave their keys with them.

With the success of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in public housing estates, criminals are now shifting their attention to private housing estates and commercial and industrial premises. For instance, robberies in commercial premises in 1983 increased by 11 per cent compared to 1982. Similarly, housebreaking and theft in commercial and shopping complexes increased over the same period by 28.12 per cent. To check this uptrend, the Police launched a scheme for the management, owners and tenants of these complexes to form Crime Prevention Committees (CPCs). Todate 58 CPCs have been formed. Much still needs to be done in this area. It is here that NCPC working directly through its corporate members can make yet another significant contribution in the formation of more CPCs.

The NCPC has been established for about three years. Its achievements have been the result of the able and dedicated leadership provided by its chairman and members of the Board of Directors who have spared no efforts to ensure its success. Under the Constitution of the NCPC, besides the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, I am limited to appoint only nine other members to the Board, and some of them are appointed on the basis of their being the current heads of the relevant civic and professional organisations. I have directed that changes be made to the Constitution at the next Annual General Meeting to increase the number of members of the Board so that the Board need not lose the valuable services of some of our able and dedicated members.

Finally, I would like to commend the NCPC and all those who have put in the effort in organising this important seminar. It now gives me great pleasure to officially declare open this seminar and wish all the participants a meaningful and successful meeting.

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