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Subject: (Embargoed)Speech by Mr Chan Soo Sen, 2 Oct 99, 2pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY
SECRETARY (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY
OF HEALTH), AT THE DONOR APPRECIATION CEREMONY
ON SATURDAY, 2 OCT 99 AT 2.00 PM AT MANDARIN SINGAPORE
BALLROOM, LEVEL 6, SOUTH TOWER, ORCHARD ROAD

Good afternoon

Mrs Goh Chok Tong

Patron

National Kidney Foundation

Dr Lee Suan Yew

President

National Kidney Foundation

Mr Richard Yong

Chairman

National Kidney Foundation

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

This afternoon, we gather here to honour a group of public spirited, kind, and magnanimous people and their family members. Their decision to donate organs for transplant has given life and hope to others. Their action and decision are so important, so badly needed, so inspiring, but at the same time, so exceptional. They have inspired me so much that I have decided to join them. So I pledged all my organs and body parts for transplant, and have received my Organ Donor Card yesterday. The card is indeed a fitting birthday gift for me.

2 Although we are only 90 days from the new millennium, more than 40 years after the first successful transplant operation, and 27 years after the implementation of the Medical (Therapy, Education & Research) Act, only 30,451 persons have signed up to pledge their organs. This is a mere 1.4% of the 2.3 million eligible pledgers.

3 This response is, I must say, rather disappointing. Advancement in medical technology has improved the success rate of transplant operations to more than 85%. This is the good news. However, the bad news is because of the shortage of organs, transplant patients have to wait a long time for their life-saving operations. I have been told that today, we have

592 kidney patients,

12 heart patients, and

15 liver patients waiting for their operations.

The average waiting time for kidney transplant in Singapore today is about five years, and that for liver or heart transplant is about six months to a year.

4 Unlike the kidney patients who can survive for years with dialysis, the heart and liver patients can't wait for as long as one year. In 1998, 5 heart patients and 18 liver patients died while waiting for transplant operations, much more than the 1 heart transplant and 11 liver transplant operations performed. Thanks to the good work of organisations like the NKF, only 5 kidney patients died while waiting for transplant in 1998. However, the five-year wait for a kidney is debilitating, frustrating, and expensive. This is well appreciated by men on the street. When I asked a seventh-moon donor to NKF why he contributed so generously, he said, "Kidney patients are very miserable. They can't die, and yet they can't live properly. We must help them!"

5 He is absolutely right. But I fear I have more bad news: Our waiting list appears to be growing longer, as we have more new patients than the number of transplant operations. In 1998, there were:

(a) 101 new patients waiting for kidney transplants, compared with 68 kidney transplant operations done;

(b) 14 new patients waiting for heart transplants, compared with 1 heart transplant operation;

and;

(c) 40 new patients waiting for liver transplant, compared with 11 liver transplant operations.

So our waiting lists for all three transplant operations are growing. These numbers will not be helped by the fact that our population is aging. If the trend continues, waiting time will lengthen further, and more patients will die while waiting. This is really depressing as medically 85% of the patients will recover if only transplant organs are available. And this can be so if people pledge to donate organs for transplant.

6 Logically this ought to be an easy decision to make. After all, we do not need our organs in the after-world. As we leave this world, we want to give opportunities to those who are still living. This would be our legacy. What better opportunities can we give than health and life? By leaving behind organs that we no longer need, we give hope and life to patients. We give relief and happiness to their family members, friends, and loved ones. Giving this Gift of Life is a good deed. All of us are taught and encouraged to perform good deeds. There ought to be many willing to pledge their organs.

7 If you are willing, this is the time to act. Fill up the pledge form, and be a donor. This Donor Appreciation Ceremony kicks off a month-long Multi-Organ Donation Campaign, spearheaded by the National Kidney Foundation in partnership with the National Heart Centre, National University Hospital, Singapore Blood Transfusion Service, Singapore Eye Bank, Singapore General Hospital, Singapore National Heart Association, Society of Transplantation, and Tan Tock Seng Hospital. I thank all these organizations for launching this very meaningful Campaign.

8 May I appeal to all: Do not hesitate. Do not delay. I feel there are many willing donors who left us without explicitly stating their intention to donate their organs. Their grieving loved ones do not consider it appropriate to make that decision on their behalf. In grief and mourning, few could have thought of the organ failure patients and their loved ones who are suffering.

9 It is therefore most important for us to salute and commemorate the exceptional spirit of our donors and their families. You have converted grief into strength. At your most difficult moment, you still remember the spirit of giving. You have taught us "Live to give, Give for life". Giving is more pleasurable than taking. Giving a new life must therefore be an ultimate pleasure.

10 It did not matter to you who received the organs pledged. For the donors, their legacies live on. For the family members, they are inspired by that legacy. For the recipients, their only regret is they do not know who to thank, and indeed how to thank. However, deep inside them, they know they owe their lives to you.

11 I appeal to all Singaporeans to follow the excellent example of our donors and their families. Together let us pass on the message "Live to give, Give for life", and feel proud and happy that we have helped ease the plight of the sick and their loved ones.

Thank you. National Archives of Singapore

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