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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Parliamentary Secretary Chan Soo Sen, 4 May 2000, 5 pm

Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(PRIME MINISTER' S OFFICE & MINISTRY OF HEALTH),
AT THE ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO CHAMPION
BLOOD DONORS ON THURSDAY, 4 MAY 2000 AT 5.00 PM AT
SINGAPORE POWER BUILDING AUDITORIUM**

National Archives of Singapore

Assoc Prof Patrick Tan
Director, Singapore Blood Transfusion Service

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you here this evening to honour our Champion Blood Donors. I salute the 30 donors who have made 35 blood donations, the 191 who have made 50 blood donations, the 2 ladies who made 70 blood

donations and the 23 men who have made 100 blood donations. You are the shining examples of public-spirited persons. You give even though no one thank you for your deeds. You do not know, neither is it important to you, who the recipients of your gift of life are. Today' s event is a very small gesture of gratitude to your very big deeds.

2 No one knows when he may suddenly need a blood transfusion. A serious and life threatening illness or accident can happen suddenly, in the course of daily routine or while travelling. An adequate supply of safe blood is therefore vital.

3 This year, World Health Day was commemorated on 7 April 2000 with the theme “Safe blood starts with me. Blood saves lives.” This was a good opportunity to increase general public awareness and understanding of blood safety and to promote blood donations.

4 In 1999, the Singapore Blood Transfusion Service collected a total of 63,011 blood donations from 43,510 donors, of which 13,042 (30%) were female. There was a 5% increase in the number of total donations in 1999 compared to 1998. However, we have a growing and ageing population. Demand for health service, and therefore of blood, will increase over the year. It will be a major challenge to ensure that supply keep pace with demand.

5 Indeed as a result of new requirements to ensure blood safety, it is becoming more difficult to enlarge the pool of blood donors. We have no choice. For something as basic as blood, it is better to be careful rather than be

sorry. Blood donors who may be carrying disease-causing agents have to be screened out. Blood donors need to fill up questionnaires with probing questions on their personal lives – I know some people find this uncomfortable.

6 Cultural discomfort about giving blood is still there, despite assurance that the body of a healthy person can replace the blood cells very quickly. I understand only 2% of the nearly 4-million residents in Singapore give blood. Some may feel disheartened about this low figure. However, let's be positive, and view this low figure as an indication that there is tremendous opportunities for growth.

7 To start with, we can encourage more to join the rank of the blood donors. We can consider more imaginative and personalised approaches. Perhaps regular donors can set up a Blood Donors' Alumni for networking, and to organise events and gatherings. The Alumni can facilitate recruitment programmes such as Bring-a-friend, and have an annual competition amongst members to bring new friends.

8 At the launch of World Health Day on 7 April, a Corporate Recognition Ceremony was inaugurated to give recognition to the top corporate blood donor organisations. The Alumni can appoint some regular donors as goodwill ambassadors. These goodwill ambassadors can work with these corporations and other organisations to strengthen our blood transfusion movement.

9 Another approach is to encourage the existing donors to give twice per year. The Blood Transfusion Service told me a healthy person can give three

or four times per year. However, about 67% of the 45,000 or so annual donors donate only once a year. If all of them donate twice or more times per year, we would have increased the annual donation from the existing donors by nearly 67%.

10 Yet another channel is to work more closely with Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Grassroots Organisations. Their network on the ground is important in reaching out to the potential donors. Throughout the month of April, with the support of the CDCs, six mega blood donation drives were organised in different parts of the island to heighten awareness on the need for blood. The Civil Defence Executive Committees (CDECs) in the various wards are also useful channels in organising blood donation campaigns. All my blood donations after I became a Member of Parliament were through CDECs, CEDCs can also be good partners for the Blood Donors' Alumni if it is set up.

11 Public education to develop positive attitudes towards voluntary blood donation will continue to be important. One important education message should be to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Healthy blood comes from healthy donors, and healthy lifestyle leads to healthy donors. Other than refraining from risky activities, maintaining good nutritional intake is also important. A few months ago, I was surprised by the large number of young people not accepted as blood donors at the Joo Chiat CDEC blood donation drive. I was told that many of the young people, especially the ladies, were deferred because they are under-weight and/or anaemic. If they eat well and exercise well, we would have more donors.

12 In conclusion, I want to thank all blood donors for your contribution, and

the Champion Blood Donors for your inspiration. I wish you good health and happiness.

Thank you.

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