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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
LAUNCH OF THE BOOK "BOY MEETS TEKONG: NS GUIDEBOOK
FOR MUSLIMS" ON FRIDAY, 2 JUN 2000 AT 4.00 PM AT CROWN
BALLROOM, ROYAL PLAZA HOTEL**

Haji Maarof Haji Salleh
President of MUIS

Syed Isa bin Mohd bin Semait
MUFTI of Singapore

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you this afternoon for the official launch of the Book "Boy Meets Tekong: NS Guidebook for Muslims". I would like to congratulate the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) and Persatuan Pelajar Pelajar Agama Dewasa Singapura (PERDAUS) for initiating this Book. In a very practical and lively way, and in a style of language easily accepted by young people, the Book offers many practical tips on how to be a good Muslim while at the same time, be a good National Serviceman. I am sure all Muslims serving NS or about to serve NS will find this Guidebook very useful.

2 Pulau Tekong happens to be the place where I had my Basic Military Training (BMT) some 26 years ago. National Service in Pulau Tekong was also the first time I really got to know and work closely with Muslim colleagues. My Officer Commanding (OC), Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) and a few of my platoon mates were Muslims. They were all good soldiers, very professional and competent in their training. As friends, they were approachable, caring, and generous.

3 They had to perform their religious duties, and observe their religious customs. Hence some of the information contained in the Guidebook are familiar to me. They did not usually explain their customs to me. However, they did tell me it was not easy to observe these customs during BMT. The training was fast-paced and intense, and they did not want to inconvenience the rest of us. They had to be flexible from time to time. At the same time, they were concerned whether they had conformed to their religious requirements. If they had the benefit of this Guidebook at that time, they would have been more at ease.

4 Many Muslim youths perform their religious duties more conscientiously today. They want to be good Muslims while, at the same time, they also wanted to be good Singaporeans by performing their National Service well. This Guidebook is therefore most timely.

5 I am impressed by the way the Guidebook was written from the perspective of a young Muslim National Serviceman. It first touches on the excuses one could find for not observing religious duties, dismisses all the excuses, and then offers very practical tips on what to do. These range from how to perform prayers in the field, how to clean up in case of impurities, how to behave while in a communal open shower, and how to perform rituals while recovering from training accidents. Although the Book is very comprehensive, more questions would be asked, and more suggestions offered, as Muslim National Servicemen put these tips into practice. I hope the editorial team consider these feedback and update the Guidebook from time to time.

6 As a non-Muslim, I find the Guidebook particularly informative. Although I had been working with Muslim National Servicemen throughout my National Service, and had been trying by best to understand your religious duties and customs, reading this Book is the first time I get so much information. It really is an eye-opener. It helps me appreciate the hard work a Muslim National

Serviceman needs to put in, to be both a good Muslim and a good soldier. Had I known these earlier, I would have been able to empathise more.

7 Just as Muslim Singaporeans want to be good National Servicemen, non-Muslim Singaporeans want to work with them so that we can have a good and well integrated Armed Force. Understanding religious duties and customs of Muslim National Servicemen helps us towards this end.

8 President of MUIS, Haji Maarof Haji Salleh, wrote in his message to the Guidebook, "Muslims today are increasingly confident". I agree with him. Muslim community feels more confident that they can and will work closely with all Singaporeans towards Singapore 21. I hope that with such confidence and trust, Muslim community can be more open in sharing and explaining your religious duties and customs to the rest of us.

9 Over the last 40 years of nationhood, we in Singapore have achieved religious tolerance. However, tolerance is not good enough. For racial and religious harmony to really take roots, we must aim for mutual understanding between different religious groups and communities. Through mutual understanding, we can truly accept and respect each other's customs and tradition. We know why certain things are done in a different way, and not draw wrong conclusions and then keep these in our hearts. Through mutual understanding, we share the wisdom of each other's culture, and feel closer to each other.

10 National Service is an excellent programme to achieve social cohesion. National Service has played a vital part in bonding our different communities and religious groups. Having to work very closely together, National Service provides opportunities for different communities to really know each other. If they can achieve better mutual understanding, our National Servicemen would bond better. As they complete their full-time National Service, their understanding of multi-racialism will be enhanced and enriched. This is a valuable achievement in National Education.

11 I hope this Guidebook will act as a catalyst to more initiatives for mutual understanding. I hope all of you enjoy reading the Book as I have.

12 I now have the honour to officially launch the Book "Boy Meets Tekong: NS Guidebook for Muslims".

Thank you.

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