

SPEECH BY MR. LIM CHEE ONN, MP FOR BUKIT MERAH AT THE EXHIBITION ON DRUG ADDICTION HELD IN BUKIT MERAH COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 27 AUGUST 77 AT 7.00 PM

Youths by nature are exuberant and adventurous. They are sometimes led astray because they do not realise the repercussions of their actions. They are easily persuaded by promises of quick-returns and are therefore, often exploited by the unscrupulous. The large number of youngsters who have turned to drugs either as a form of escapism or for fun out of curiosity is perhaps a manifestation of this fact. The sad thing is that these youngsters very soon realise their folly but are unable to break from the kind of the drugs on their own either for physical or other reasons. They could have spared themselves the hardship and sorrow they have inflicted on themselves and on their families if they had realised the implications of drug addiction. For this reason, the importance of exhibitions such as the one being held in this community centre cannot be over emphasised. Knowledge is strength and no where is it more true in our fight against drug addiction.

I shall leave the experts to elaborate on the details of the effects of drug addiction. However, I would like to mention briefly the effects of drug addiction on the individual, on his family and on society.

The effects on a drug addict can be seen and felt through changes in his physical, mental and psychological make-up. They range from a breakdown in personal and work discipline to permanent physical disablement or in extreme cases, death. *Drug addicts should ask themselves whether they really want to subject themselves to these hardships and dangers.*

Drug addiction very often causes breakup of families or marriages. This often starts with the addict acting irresponsibly towards members of his family. I am certain that if the addict had known the hardship his addiction could cause his loved ones, he would have re-considered or even refrained from taking the first plunge.

The impact of drug addiction on society is a more subtle one. It is not readily felt but the effects are devastating if addiction is widespread. As a result of the physical, mental and psychological breakdown of the individual addict, society's spirit and will to resist and to strive would be weakened. Our social system would crumble without the moral fibre to support it. Economically, the effects are equally serious because the addict loses his work discipline and will to work. In addition, he becomes a financial burden on society since he has to be looked after and treated.

All these facts point to the urgent need to eradicate this social disease. The Authority's efforts in this regard have to be complemented by public's co-operation and interest if we are to be successful.

Support of Government's efforts to combat drug addiction means more than passive abstinence from drugs. It requires everyone, parents and children, young and old, to be involved.

Parents' role is to provide a stable home, guidance and example to discourage their children from being attracted towards drugs. Parents must realise that this social ill affects the whole society in which their children will be growing up in and not merely affects the addicts themselves. There should be greater awareness of their social responsibility.

At the same time, our younger citizens should cultivate a sense of commitment to society so as not to become a liability to fellow citizens. You should take a more active role in community and social work, as well as participate in sporting activities. In this way, you safeguard yourself from being enticed into the drug habit.

In order to help the less fortunate members of our society, I urge you to offer your services to help in rehabilitation work. Counselling and after-care of drug addicts require specialised training and dedication. For those who are willing and able to accept this responsibility, you should come forward quickly as your services are in great demand. Others who are not able to do so also have a part to play. You could encourage addicts to go for treatment or discourage those whom you know are about to pick up the habit. You should help to educate others on the dangers of drug addiction and to get more people involved in official and community work. By so doing, you are helping to prevent more people from falling into the habit.

Finally, I wish to strongly urge community, religious and youth organisations to participate more actively in the battle to eradicate drug addiction by forming counselling groups and conducting educational programmes on the dangers of drugs. In this regard, I wish to congratulate the Bukit Merah Youth Executive Committee for organising this exhibition on drug addiction. It illustrates their awareness of the seriousness of the problem and of the role they can play. I hope others in the constituency and elsewhere will follow this example.

On this note, I am pleased to declare this Exhibition on Drug Addiction open.