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SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOON CHOY, AG MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE
PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION, AT THE PRESENTATION OF
COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PROGRAMME AWARDS AT ISTANA,
ON 7 OCTOBER 77 AT 6.00 PM

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It has often been said that the youth in Singapore are too self-centred, egoistic, self-seeking and materialist-oriented. In other words, they care only for their selfish interest, material gain, position, status and indulge in self-gratification. Tonight's function is a negation of such generalisation of distorted impressions, vis-a-vis the quality of our youth. You are here tonight to witness the presentation of Commonwealth Youth Service Awards to distinguished youth groups who have demonstrated their spirit of sacrifice and dedication to the service of society.

Out of concern for the plight of the less fortunate pupils who are handicapped in their studies and cannot afford private tuitions, volunteers from the Kim Seng Community Centre Youth Group have organised regular tuition classes in the various subjects to help them along. To-date, 800 pupils of both Chinese and English streams have benefited. In a highly money-minded commercialised city of ours, caught in the rat race for better examination results, private tuition has become a much needed service, fashionable to the well-to-do but a luxury to a large majority of the lower income group. Who would ever think of providing free tuition to the needy 800? It is gratifying to see that volunteers of the Kim Seng Community Centre Youth Group did. This is a glaring example of how the energy of youth can be properly harnessed and channelled for a meaningful service to society. The same can be said of the valuable services initiated by the People's Association Adventure Club and the Rotary Interact Club Services.

The youth of today in many parts of the world, including Singapore but especially so in Western liberal societies, have often complained of empty lives and lack of opportunities for fulfilment. They know only

how to dissipate their energy in the pursuit of materialistic comfort and permissive pleasure. Their lives will remain empty and unfulfilled so long as they continue to think in terms of what they can get out of society and not what they can give to society. There are many things which our youth can do for society if they really care for the welfare of the less fortunate. The government does its best to provide the people with security, jobs, homes, schools, hospitals and other amenities of modern and decent living. But the establishment of a peaceful, prosperous, stable and just society is more than just the grandeur of our city skyline and the rise in GNP. The future stability of our society is inseparably bound up with the quality of life and texture of our people. A better quality of life does not merely mean moving more and more people into the concrete jungle of multi-storey flats. It means also the shaping of more stable and happy homes with meaningful and graceful living.

If neighbours behave like strangers, mothers do not know if her child is learning at school or will return home, public fountains become swimming pools for naughty children and wash basins for hawkers to wash dirty plates and couples fear to walk in lonely streets at night, then you know that something is lacking in the quality of life. When prices of goods and foodstuff soar and inflation cuts into every family's purse and the aged have no one to talk to, you know that more hands are needed to improve the situation. There is always something for everyone to do in the service of society, for no society can be perfect and there will always be unsolved problems. One thing is certain: more hands are needed.

Given the spirit of dedication and the right approach to life, youth organisations in Singapore can play a vital role in the eradication of crime, drugs, poverty, ignorance, disease as well as boredom and permissiveness. The awards which some of you are receiving tonight are meant to give recognition to your contribution towards some of these goals and to stimulate more young people to make similar efforts. I sincerely hope that the awards are not the end but the beginning of more efforts.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Chairman and members of the Panel for their initiative and effort which have made tonight's presentation possible.