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TEXT OF SPEECH BY MR ONG SOO CHUAN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS) & MP FOR NEE SOON AT THE OPENING OF
FAMILY PLANNING CAMPAIGN AT NEE SOON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 1977 AT 8.00 P.M.

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While we are enjoying the comforts of life in Singapore, we should never forget that we are living in a world which is still beset by problems whose roots go deep into the past and into the basic behaviour patterns of men. It is clearly impossible to identify and isolate all the problems and find separate solutions for them. These problems are inter-linked and so must be the solutions.

It is universally agreed that the most pressing problem confronting the world is that of feeding and providing meaningful employment to the rapidly increasing population of the world, particularly in the developing regions. This can be done by bringing under cultivation large areas of currently unexploited arable land; increasing land productivity; industrialisation and population control. These tasks are technically feasible but are contingent on measures of public policy favourable to such development and on social and institutional changes in all countries.

Efforts at social and economic restructuring by themselves will not be able to reach and sustain a satisfactory standard of living for the people. Iron and steel mills, ship-yards, sophisticated electronic and engineering industries, farm mechanisation and an improved methods of cultivation can increase the level of Gross National Product but not the standard of living. This is because if parents are still reluctant to control the size of their families for various socio-economic, cultural and religious beliefs, the increased wealth of a country have to be shared among even more and more people, leaving each person with perhaps even less than before. Furthermore, the country will be burdened with

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having to provide more housing, schools, hospitals, jobs and other basic social amenities, all of which drain the newly-acquired resources.

The Singapore National Family Planning and Population Programme enjoyed tremendous success. When the Programme was launched in 1966, the average number of children for each woman was 4.5. Three years later, in 1969, the rate fell to 3.1 children for each woman.

Even more impressive, the rate plummeted to 2.1 children per woman in 1975. At the present rate, Zero Population Growth will be reached in 2030 when there will be 3.5 million people.

We have succeeded because the people of Singapore have responded to the country's need to conserve its economic resources for maximum utilisation and everybody realises it is harder to meet expenses for a large family. With too many children, parents find it difficult to buy a better stereo set, a better television set, a better car or even a better home. And with more and more women employed in factories and offices, there is even less time to take care of a large family.

While there is every reason for satisfaction, our Family Planning Officials still press ahead with their tasks. They realise that there is still a powerful innate urge in some Singaporeans to want bigger families if they can afford it. Previous studies have shown this. There are others, especially in the traditional and more rural areas of Singapore, who still want more children in the family so that there will be more people to support them in the farms and shops or in their old age. And this is related to the problem of the male son which is proving to be a major problem to Family Planning Officials. It is the natural inclination of the Singaporeans, and in fact most Asians, to want sons to carry on the family line. Moreover, especially among the more traditional groups, sons are believed to be better able to provide for their parents after marriage while daughters will be "taken away", so to speak. These people do not realise the virtues of Family Planning.

With women now making irroads into every field of employment, daughters are just as capable in being good providers. Moreover, as Singapore develops and modernization makes a greater

impart on our cultural values, our children, whether sons or daughters, will aspire more to set up their own homes. And with the many well-designed flats being offered by the Government at reasonable prices and, it is very possible within the average budget of newly-married couples to realise these dreams.

Parents should also realise the rapidly-changing situation in Singapore and the ever-increasing psychological pressure on the individual. With the inevitable over-crowding of an island of only 586 square kilometres, even with Zero Population Growth, rapidly transforming social structures and norms, and comparatively limited economic opportunities, the individual in Singapore faces intense social and psychological pressures. It is each parent's task to ensure that his son or daughter is well equipped to handle the pressures of life in a hard and competitive society. And the parent can only do so if he has the time and resources, brought about by a small family, to provide full guidance to his offspring.

While the emphasis of our Family Planning Programme is that two is enough, I wish to advise young couples that they should plan for the first child to arrive at a time when they are financially and psychologically prepared. Stresses and strains will appear in a family if the couple is too young and unprepared for the heavy responsibilities of parenthood. Hence, proper family planning will contribute not only to responsible parenthood but also promote happy and lasting marriage.

Community Centres like the Nee Soon Community Centre can assist the Government in Family Planning. The Peoples' Association has built a network of community centres all over Singapore to provide social amenities to the people. These community centres however also have a role to play in serving national needs. Because of their grassroots penetration, and the influence of community leaders, community centres can make direct personal approaches to the people. I see their immediate task to be the removal of the deeply-ingrained desire for many children. They can do this by holding more such seminars and providing publicity materials such as posters and pamphlets on Family Planning. With the current reorganisation of Community Centres by the Peoples' Association, and the new dynamism injected into the organisation, I have every confidence that you will succeed.