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SPEECH BY MR. ONG TENG CHEONG, ACTING MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
AT THE OPENING OF THE GERMAN BOOK EXHIBITION ON THURSDAY,
14 SEPTEMBER '78 AT 5.00 P.M. AT THE VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL

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I would like to congratulate the sponsors for organising this Exhibition of German books. The Exhibition is timely, as recent developments have focussed greater public attention on the Singapore book scene.

A recent survey of reading by the Institute of Education has revealed that the quantity and quality of children's reading has not yet attained satisfactory levels, whilst adult membership is only 27.3% of the total membership of the National Library. These are matters of great concern to parents, teachers, and all of us who believe that books as an unending source of information, instruction and entertainment can contribute to raising the quality of life in Singapore.

It is heartening to note however that this year's annual Book Fair of the National Book Development Council and of the Singapore Book Publishers Association drew record crowds. The Council's Book Awards will no doubt provide Singapore writers and publishers with the impetus to intensify their efforts to create and promote a Singapore literature and hopefully to improve the climate for books and reading in the Republic.

Our reading needs cannot, however, be wholly satisfied by local publishing, as the total output of about 1,200 titles a year is far too small to meet the diverse cultural, linguistic and informational needs of the people.

It is within this context that book exhibitions such as today's, which enrich the local book scene, are especially welcome.

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It has been said that "books are the collective memory of mankind". The books of any one nation therefore provide the memory or record of that nation's historical experience, its way of life, its artistic and scientific achievements, its values and aspirations. Books also enable author and reader to meet across the barriers of space and time, whether of the past, present or future, towards new recognition and understanding.

The role of books in fostering understanding between peoples and nations is well demonstrated by the theme of the Exhibition, which is "East-West dialogue in German books". I am told that a quarter of the 2,500 titles on display are in English translation and would therefore be of certain help to those who do not know the German language. Through these books, Singaporeans will have the means to acquire a fuller understanding and appreciation of German life and culture.

I now have great pleasure in declaring open this Exhibition of German books and in wishing it every success.

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