

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION) AT THE OPENING OF THE RED CROSS HOSTEL FOR PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED WORKERS AT BLK 191 BOON LAY DRIVE ON SATURDAY, 1 JULY 1989 AT 5.30 PM

I am pleased to officiate at this afternoon's opening of the Red Cross Hostel for the physically disabled. The Red Cross Society has an impressive track record, both locally and internationally.

It has always successfully rallied its volunteers and resources to help arrange relief actions in peacetime to aid victims of natural disasters and during wartime, to provide medical care and general relief for wounded soldiers and civilians.

In support, the Singapore Government in the last seven years contributed US\$35,000 to the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It also gives annually a grant of S\$50,000 to help meet the operating cost of the Singapore Red Cross Society's Blood Bank.

In Singapore, the Red Cross Society also extends a helping hand by providing auxilliary health and welfare services to the sick, the aged, the disabled and the poor besides the organisation of Red Cross Auxilliaries in schools.

Since 1972, the Singapore Red Cross Society has been operating a hostel to assist the physically disabled with severe mobility problems to remain in employment. Besides providing them with subsidised accomodation, the hostel also provides transport to help the hostelities commute to and from work.

This service is commendable as it operates on the principles that disabled people have the right to take their proper place in society, and they should be given the opportunities to be as economically and socially independent as possible.

The late Swedish Prime Minister, Mr Olaf Palme had once said that:-

"Everybody shall get what he or she needs in order to make a good life, taking into account each individual's unique situation and possibilities. Everybody has the same right to assistance. There is a great difference between receiving your aid as a citizen and getting it as charity because you are different".

In every society there are people who for reasons beyond their control, are unable to function as normal and able-bodied members of the community. Today there is still a tendency to equate disability with inability to cope with life; and disabled people are cast aside from the mainstream of society.

The Advisory Council on the Disabled stressed that the successful integration of disabled people in society depends on the goodwill and understanding of the public and the availability of opportunities for self-development. Unfortunately emphasis on achievement and excellence in a competitive climate tends to favour those who are intelligent, quick and nimble. Frequently man-made barriers deny the disabled the chance to fully realise their potential.

It is imperative that public education be targetted at the public and employers as well as family members to dispel the erroneous notion that the disabled are

economically unproductive and a burden to society. Disabled people are an integral part of our society. Their fundamental requirements can only be met by a more complete understanding of the services and aids they require to live as normal a life as possible.

The Ministry of Community Development has accepted the Advisory Council's recommendation that it should take the lead to conduct public education and awareness programmes on the disabled. I am pleased to announce that the programme will be launched next year as an on-going effort to ensure total community involvement to help project the multi-faceted needs, aspirations, and contributions of disabled people.

The Public Service Division has also directed Ministries and Departments to identify and submit to it the grades of jobs in Divisions I to III which disabled people can be usefully employed under each category of disability. This clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to take the lead in employing more disabled people if they can be usefully employed.

Whilst the Government will do its part to help the disabled to achieve greater participation and integration into society, the community has also a role to play. The support of the community of the various programmes and services for the disabled is very necessary. The primary source of support and care for the disabled comes from the common bond of kinship, and the goodwill and the understanding of the community. These are indeed irreplaceable.

I wish to congratulate the Singapore Red Cross Society for the great deal of effort and time expended to make this hostel 'a home away from home' for the disabled who wish to strike for themselves independent and

economically active lives. The Society has also responded to the needs of the severely disabled by setting up a residential home for them at the former Princess Elizabeth Estate School. My Ministry has assisted the Home to obtain a longer lease of 30 years. I hope the Society will take advantage of this long lease to expand their residential care services which is a much needed service for disabled people who are without family support or whose family and friends are unable to provide care and support.

It gives me great pleasure to declare this hostel open.

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