

Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

Information Division Ministry of Culture City Hall Singapore 0617 TEL 3378191 ext 352 353 354 / 3362207 3362271

83-0112-23

Release No. 33/Nov
15-4/83/11/13

**SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY
OF THE FIFTH SENIOR CITIZENS' WEEK AT THE CHUNG CHENG HIGH
SCHOOL ON SUNDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 1983 AT 2.00 PM**

The age structure of our population is changing rapidly. The elderly, defined as those aged 60 years and above, will represent a growing proportion of the total population. Their problems are receiving greater attention from both the government and the community. The government has in fact appointed a Committee chaired by the Minister for Health, Mr Howe Yoon Chong, to undertake a comprehensive study of the problems of the aged. You will remember that, at the opening ceremony of this year's Senior Citizens' Week, Mr Goh Chok Tong, the Minister for Defence and Second Minister for Health, touched on some of the more important issues which this Committee has been examining.

This Committee had earlier commissioned a national survey on the living conditions of the aged population. The survey revealed that the living conditions of the majority of our aged population were satisfactory. Most of them live with their families while the few who live apart from their families are supported financially by family members or relatives. Only 2.2 per cent are in welfare institutions. This is a healthy state of affairs which shows that our society has not lost its traditional oriental outlook. There is, however, no cause for complacency because the situation may be quite different in the next decade or so. This is because our children are exposed to Western values and there

has been an erosion of the traditional virtue of filial piety. We must take immediate and effective steps to check this trend. The introduction of moral education in schools from next year is one such measure. The organising of the annual Senior Citizens' Week is another. The varied activities during the week are organised to remind the younger generations of the contributions and sacrifices made by the senior citizens, and to reinforce the concept that the younger generations must now repay their elders with appreciation, care and filial affection.

I am happy to note that this yearly campaign has involved increasing participation of the young. This year 33 primary schools and 32 secondary schools have participated in the Speech Contest, each with a representative. I hope that more schools and more representatives from each school would participate in similar contests in future years. Preferably, each school should conduct its own preliminary rounds so that more students could participate. In addition, schools could invite senior citizens living in the neighbourhood to their functions either organised specially during the week or throughout the year. Senior citizens could also be invited to talk to the schools' weekly assembly. These activities may even develop into student groups adopting a Home for the Aged or groups of needy senior citizens living in the vicinity of the schools or their homes on a long-term basis. These are but some of the many possible activities involving school children which could be developed from the annual Senior Citizens' Week.

Residents' Committees and other grassroots organisations such as the CCCs and CCMCs are also well placed to help solve some pressing problems faced by the senior citizens. As I said earlier, the majority of our senior citizens are living with their families. One major

problem they face is boredom and social isolation, at least during the day when their family members are working or schooling. RCs could organise one senior citizens' corner in each RC zone. The RC centre can be used as a base where facilities for making tea and coffee, newspapers and other reading materials, radio and television, video recorders and indoor games can be provided. Stone tables and chairs can also be provided by HDB at the adjacent void decks where senior citizens can play chess, discuss current issues or simply chit chat. Some may want to bring their caged birds and listen to their singing while sipping tea. All this is possible without having to spend a large sum of money. The important thing is to involve the senior citizens themselves and their families in the management of these activities. An essential requirement is that these senior citizens' corners must be within walking distance of the homes of the senior citizens.

The Senior Citizens' Week would have achieved its objectives if more activities along these lines could be organised in the future. On this note, it is now my pleasant duty to declare this year's Senior Citizens' Week closed.
