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SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SEMINAR ON "THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN CURBING CRIME AND DRUG ABUSE" AT ST PATRICK'S SCHOOL ON SATURDAY, 9 JUNE 1984 AT 11.30 AM

I am pleased to be here this morning to officiate at the opening ceremony of this Seminar and to be given the opportunity to address a group of young persons on crime and drug abuse. Youth symbolises the hope of our future and like a seed needs to be properly nurtured, nourished and guided so as to grow up strong, steady and resilient. It is common knowledge that the early years of a person's life is very crucial in the formation of his character and personality. The environment, which includes the people that he mixes around with and the values he is exposed to, is an important factor in his development. In tackling the issue of crime, delinquency and drug abuse, we should start at the base, at the youths, to ensure that they may be given the proper values, guidance and support to steer them away from crime and drug abuse and along the path of healthy development into reliable citizens of tomorrow.

Problems of crime and drug abuse receive much attention today because they have become increasingly serious.

In 1980, only 24 cases of inhalant abuse was recorded. However, the number of these cases rose rapidly to 820 in 1983. This situation is very alarming. Research studies have shown that the majority of the inhalant abusers are young people under 20 years of age.

The consequences of inhalant abuse can be very damaging and have far-reaching effects on our bodies as it adversely affects our speech, brain, heart, liver, kidneys and the nervous system. It can be more dangerous than heroin addiction. There was a recent case of a 15-year-old Singapore boy whose brain was permanently damaged as a result of glue-sniffing.

There are two approaches to combat crime and drug abuse. Firstly, through legislation and enforcement. This approach involves the establishment of penal institutions and rehabilitation centres. This approach is direct and has the immediate effect of removing from society criminals, drug addicts and traffickers. The Ministry of Social Affairs intends to invoke Sections 63 and 64 of the Children and Young persons Act (Cap 110) to bring young inhalant abusers to court. Legislation is however only a short-term solution.

The second approach is a more long-term one. It is that of public education. This approach complements the first. It is intended to be preventive in nature and as the common saying goes: Prevention is better than cure.

It takes a longer time to educate the public about the dangers of drug abuse and the folly of crime but the results are more far reaching and penetrating. Public education provides members of the public with a better knowledge and understanding of the problems of crime and drug addiction. It involves them in the prevention of crime and drug addiction as armed with their knowledge, they can identify drug addicts and take immediate action to help addicts from destroying their lives. Seminars like this one, exhibitions, film shows and talks on crime prevention serve a very important role in educating members of the public to play a preventive role.

You should each of you now play your role in preventing crime and drug abuse. All of us play varying roles at one time or another. We are members of a family, a friend in school, a working colleague in the work-place, a member of a group, a member of society. Through all these roles, we can play our part in helping to curb crime and drug abuse. For example, in our own family, we can give love and comfort to support and guide each family member and keep up family togetherness and sharing. In this way, moments of stress and difficulties can be shared and lightened and there will be no need to turn to crime or drugs to resolve our stresses and difficulties.

Early identification of problems and intervention can save your family from serious consequences. With the knowledge gained at this Seminar on the prevention of crime and drug abuse, you can in turn educate your family and they can in turn educate their friends.

School is a place where a young person's mind and character is moulded and values and knowledge are transmitted. Students in school play very useful roles in curbing crime and drug abuse. Most uniformed groups in schools take the initiative to organise anti-crime and anti-drug abuse campaigns to raise the awareness of the students to the dangers of drug abuse and the seriousness of crime in society.

Attendance at this Seminar may be limited to the few of you here. But it does not mean that the messages learnt should stop with you. You should share what you have learnt with your classmates and friends.

I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Organising Committee for conducting this Seminar and doing their bit to help fight crime and drug abuse.

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