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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION AT THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION WORKPLAN SEMINAR 2000 ON TUESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2000 AT HOTEL NEW OTANI AT 9.15 AM

Good morning

Last year, I challenged the People's Association's senior management to craft a succinct vision, mission statement, motto, and a set of core values, which will guide every staff and every volunteer of the PA in its work. This they did by involving a cross-section of 300 staff and grassroots leaders in the exercise. It is a reappraisal of the PA's core objectives since its founding 40 years ago. For the first time in the history of PA, we now have a workplan seminar to launch this, and to begin a process of committing ourselves to a new way of thinking and doing things in the PA.

2 From the outset, I want to stress that the PA has done a good job since its establishment on 1 July 1960. In the last 4 decades, the PA has been very instrumental in helping to build a multiracial harmonious and cohesive society. The favourite theme nowadays seems to be civil society and active citizenship. But the PA has been part of the civil society movement, and advocating an active

citizenry since its inception. Just look at the thousands of volunteers in our Citizens' Consultative Committees, Community Centre and Club Management Committees and Residents' Committees. Many of them have been serving the community for many many years. The PA was, therefore, the vanguard of an active community in Singapore. From just a few community centres, we now have 106 CCs and 520 RC centres. We have developed a broad and unique range of activities and facilities which are the envy of other organisations in Singapore. We are the primary grassroots movement and the community development agency which can reach out to almost every Singaporean.

3 Over the years, the PA's organisational structure and job scope have changed quite dramatically. In the 1990s alone, the PA took over the role of managing the CCCs and the RCs from the Prime Minister's Office. We also took over the management of the Boys' Clubs from the Singapore Police Force and the Civil Defence Executive Committees from the Singapore Civil Defence Force. More importantly, in 1997, the Community Development Councils (CDCs) were established under the PA's auspices and support.

4 The CDCs will become the local administration bodies, providing one-stop services for the residents and other voluntary organisations. The roles and responsibilities of the CDCs will be expanded. There will be a significant increase in the workload of the PA in facilitating the transfer of more functions of government agencies to the CDCs.

5 The RCs are now an integral part of the HDB estates. In order to connect with those living in private housing estates, the PA has been helping to set up more Neighbourhood Committees (NCs). In the coming years, NCs will be a crucial channel between the people and the government as well as a valued networking avenue for the residents of the non-HDB neighbourhoods.

6 All these developments which the PA has undertaken are the results of the PA meeting the changing needs of our society. There will be more changes as our population matures further and Singapore becomes a first-world economy and a world-class home. So the PA staff must avoid being cloistered in the comfort zones of previous practices and bureaucracy, because if they do, our people will simply go to look for other alternatives.

7 Our mission today remains the promotion and development of multiracial harmony and a cohesive society. But, we should innovate and be creative. New approaches to bring about the desired outcomes should be adopted. For example,

our citizens will not just be contented with going to the CCs to watch TV or read newspapers. They want to go to the CCs to learn more about information technology, surfing the net, coffee and wine appreciation, public speech-making, international dances, fashion-making and so on.

8 Change is a fact of life. With globalisation and rapid technological advancement, change is occurring at an even faster pace than what we are used to. Just look at Singapore's physical landscape. Many of the old buildings and favourite haunts we visited during our childhood days are no longer here. This is not a bad development. If you look at it in the context of the social and economic progress which Singapore has made, these changes have been most beneficial to our nation. Now that Singapore has become better developed and is positioning to ride the globalisation wave and be part of the information age, we must examine how key institutions in Singapore should be updated and upgraded.

9 The PA is one such institution. Our people, who are now better educated, expect a better quality of life. They also have many more choices for satisfying their artistic, learning, recreational, sporting and other needs. So, for the PA to remain relevant, it must keep up with the times and reinvent itself every few years. We must anticipate changing trends, tastes and interests. While catering to current needs, we should also be trail blazers, not just followers. If we do not transform ourselves, we become irrelevant to the lives of Singaporeans. Hence, we have reviewed our approaches and practices and laid out new plans and strategies to move ahead.

10 In other words, the PA really has no choice. Either it modernises itself and meets the expectations and needs of our people or it will remain in the greasy groove of history. The smart thing for us to do is to look at the trends, remain on top of the curve and seize the opportunities. Only in this way, we will maintain our central position and pivotal role in the development and advancement of the grassroots movement.

11 I know that this transformation is not an easy process. It will exert considerable pressure on our human resource. It will also mean that many of the methods of our operations have to be reviewed or even abandoned. There are more challenges now, particularly when you have a growing inflow of foreign talents and an increasing number of Singaporeans who leave our shores for work and adventure abroad. The rootedness of our people in Singapore must be deepened even as they become more and more cosmopolitan. We should help them remain committed to Singapore.

12 As we move forward, we have infused new strategies and a fresh outlook to help the PA meet the new challenges and reap benefits from the new opportunities. We must not rest on our laurels. The PA must be dynamic, full of substance and inspirational. The vision, mission, core values and motto should galvanise PA staff, grassroots leaders and volunteers to work together as close partners in bringing about an active community.

13 I would like to encourage you to reflect deeply on the PA's strategic thrusts and deliverables for FY2000. Share your perspectives, give your comments and recommendations on the issues raised. Open communication, trust and collective learning are essential in building a cohesive PA with a strong heartbeat. As in any effective team, it is only when each and every member builds upon his strength that he will be able to complement others and build a stronger and more effective PA.

14 The path ahead may take many turns as we ride the sweeping tides of socio-economic and technological changes. To succeed, we must face the changes and new challenges confidently, explore new frontiers and push for continual improvements in every area. We need to challenge long-held assumptions and begin looking at old problems from new angles. Only then can the PA be a blue-chip, progressive, innovative and dynamic organisation.

15 I am sure all of you are proud of the PA's achievements to date. We will be even more proud if the PA develops into a place where new ideas are encouraged, nurtured and implemented, where creative and innovative plans and systems are constantly introduced, shared and improved upon and where work and output exert a far-reaching impact on all those served by it. The next 40 years of the PA must be more successful and satisfying.

16 I now take pleasure in officially launching the first PA workplan seminar.
