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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Wong Kan Seng, 10 Apr 2000, 9.30am.

# *Singapore Government*

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AT THE SCDF WORKPLAN PRESENTATION FOR WY2000 ON MONDAY, 10 APR 2000 AT 9.30 AM AT THE CIVIL DEFENCE ACADEMY**

Good Morning

Commissioner James Tan

Officers of the Singapore Civil Defence Force

Ladies and gentlemen

### **The Year's Initiatives**

Having a safe and secure environment has helped Singapore sustain our economic growth and prosperity. Safety and security are crucial prerequisites for economic growth and success. To be truly effective in keeping Singapore safe and secure, the community and the Home Team must continue to work together, seamlessly.

Last year, I challenged the SCDF to identify segments of the population that you have yet to create partnership with, and to forge strategic partnerships with these communities. I am pleased that you have risen to the challenge. One fine example is your introducing a basic civil defence training programme for foreign maids, which has struck a resonant chord with many residents.

On a larger scale, you have empowered grassroots leaders and Civil Defence volunteers to manage public shelters near their homes. Their links and understanding of their respective communities put them in the best position to devise and execute emergency sheltering plans. This is being done on the Community Safety and Security Programme platform. This move recognises not only that communities are best able to organise themselves, but more importantly that they want to have an active part in looking after themselves.

### **The Total Defence of Singapore**

The SCDF and all the other Home Team agencies play a critical role in the Total Defence of our nation. Total Defence comprises psychological defence, social defence, economic defence, civil defence and military defence. *Civil defence* equips the civilian population with the ability to respond in a trained and orderly manner during emergencies. SCDF, through its programmes with the community, helps to train the people to be prepared for emergencies. In working with the community on the shelter management programme, for instance, you help prepare the community to ensure their survival in an emergency. In addition, the community-wide CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) programme enables the public to be the first and immediate responders in an emergency. The regular emergency blood donation exercises help familiarise the public and thus prepare them to come forward quickly to donate blood *en masse*, should ever the need arise. On the flip side, ignorance and unfamiliarity breeds fear and despair, which would likely undermine our resilience in the face of an emergency.

*Social Defence*, another pillar of Total Defence, emphasises our citizens' ability to work, play and live together harmoniously, irrespective of race, language or religion, in good times and especially when we are under threat. The SCDF's community outreach efforts through the CSSP help bond together Singaporeans of all walks of life, race, language and religion and so boosts the internal resilience and cohesion of Singaporeans.

## **Partnership with the Community**

Partnership with the community also extends to the corporate sector. A good example is the way you went about setting up the Jurong Island Fire Station. You worked closely with the Jurong Town Corporation and the various petrochemical companies operating there to determine the optimum complement of men and equipment to meet potential hazards.

As Community Development Councils (CDCs) take on more local and community responsibilities, I would similarly encourage the SCDF to work closely with CDCs to leverage on each other's strengths, to maximise the effectiveness of these programmes.

## **Active Feedback**

In the 1998 nationwide survey, 92 per cent of the population felt that the SCDF is responsive to their needs. To maintain this excellent record, you will have to get accurate feedback. Continue to work closely with the respective Civil Defence Executive Committees, who are ideally placed to reflect community needs and perceptions.

## **Satellite Fire Stations**

One big challenge for SCDF is be able to despatch response forces to reach any part of the island swiftly. Late arrival would likely result in greater damage, more casualties or severe injuries and even death. You have adopted the international response standard of eight minutes.

Building new fire stations is expensive. Land is also scarce. Yet you must also be flexible and dynamic to accommodate periodic population shifts.

One option you should study is having a number of smaller satellite stations to strategically pre-position fire fighting and rescue resources. Compact satellite fire stations within housing estates are easily relocated, should there be population shifts. The stationing of fire bikes in neighbourhood police posts have shown that this concept is feasible.

### **Launch of LFAV and the Paramedic Service**

We have been using the traditional large fire engines. The reason these vehicles are so large is because more than half of each is no more than a water tank. Our network of fire hydrants is very extensive, which means fire engines can dispense with an integral water supply, and be much smaller and more maneuverable along busy highways and along housing estate roads. The SCDF designed compact Light Fire Attack Vehicle (LFAV) will complement the satellite station concept. I am delighted to unveil this new vehicle later today.

Today also marks the launch of the paramedic service. The introduction of the paramedics will bring specialist skills in pre-hospital medical care and elevate the SCDF Emergency Ambulance Service to a higher level.

Over the last 23 years, more than 1 million people have used our ambulances. I take this occasion to specially thank the nurses from the Ministry of Health, for their years of dedication and hard work in operating our ambulance fleet.

I wish all of you a fruitful work plan presentation. May you continue to keep up the top quality service you have delivered all these years to the public, and continue playing your pivotal civil defence role in Singapore's Total Defence.

Thank you.