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**SPEECH BY MR WEE KIM WEE, PRESIDENT OF SINGAPORE, AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE XII WORLD CONGRESS ON FERTILITY
AND STERILITY AT THE RAFFLES CITY CONVENTION CENTRE
ON SUNDAY, 26 OCTOBER 1986 AT 7.30 PM**

It is my great pleasure to welcome you this evening to the XII World Congress on Fertility and Sterility of the International Federation of Fertility Societies, organised by the Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Singapore.

I am told that there are more than 3,000 delegates and that it is the largest Congress that the Federation has organised so far. This is also, by any standard, a very big meeting and for us in Singapore, the biggest medical Congress that has been hosted here.

This Congress has not only brought together physicians and scientists from all parts of the world, including the most renowned in the field of fertility and sterility, but also provides an opportunity for young physicians and scientists from this region to listen in person to presentations of eminent individuals whom they have previously only read and heard of. We, therefore, heartily endorse the Federation's objectives of bringing together eminent researchers at periodic intervals to share knowledge and to disseminate information with the overall objective of raising the level of expertise in this field.

Fertility and sterility form the two obvious sides of a coin, one - the regulation of fertility, the spacing of pregnancies and the control of fertility so that couples may have the number of children they wish to have, and the other - ways and means of helping couples who have difficulty in having children of their own.

Attitudes towards family size are greatly influenced by social norms, values, customs and beliefs concerning procreation and the individual couple's desires. These attitudes vary from time to time. They also differ from country to country, from urban to rural areas and sometimes even from village to village. Advances in contraceptive technology have enabled couples to regulate fertility and have the number of children they desire. The easy availability and safety of contraceptives have played a significant role in the decline of fertility seen in developed countries and in many developing countries in more recent years.

What about infertility? It has been estimated that infertility affects one in every ten couples wishing to have a child.

The historic news of the birth of the first "test tube" baby in July 1978 gave considerable hope to infertile couples, but at the same time created many serious ethical dilemma for the couples and their medical advisors. The programme of this Congress has rightly included not only the technical and scientific aspects, but also the psychological and ethical aspects related to both fertility regulation and management of infertility.

The main concern over artificial or in-vitro fertilisation and embryo replacement is that it could be offered to a couple who have been childless for only a short period of time. Given time, these women could perhaps conceive. This implies that it could be offered unnecessarily to childless couples.

Another point to note is that childless couples, having decided to have a family of their own, become desperate after a while. They may be prepared to accept any form of therapy that is offered to them, whether it is

indicated or not. There are, therefore, many legal as well as ethical implications associated with the realisation of a test-tube baby.

Singapore has been recognised for many years as one of the leading centres in Asia in the management of infertility. Recently, we had the unique achievements of having the first in-vitro fertilisation and embryo replacement baby born in Asia and subsequently also the first baby born from gamete intra-fallopian transfer in Asia. We look forward to greater advancements in this field which offers new challenges and hope.

With our policy to maintain a global perspective and to keep our doors open to knowledge, skills, technology and scientific developments that are taking place in the world today, I am confident that Singapore will benefit from the deliberations of the Congress. I am, therefore, very appreciative of the Federation's decision to hold the meeting here.

Despite the heavy scientific programme ahead of you, I hope that each one of you, who have come from near and far to attend the meeting, will find time from your hectic schedule to participate fully in the interesting social programme that has been laid out for you and see a little of this country, our people and our way of life. I wish you all a very pleasant and memorable stay and hope you will come back again to strengthen friendships which you would have made during the course of this meeting.

I now have the pleasure of declaring the XII World Congress on Fertility and Sterility and Scientific Exhibition open.

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