

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT WEE KIM WEE AT THE OPENING OF THE
EIGHTH SENIOR CITIZENS' WEEK AT THE ISLAND BALLROOM,
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON SUNDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 1986 AT 10.00 AM

The theme of this year's Senior Citizens' Week is "Mutual Care and Respect". It is a timely and an appropriate theme and should provide much food for thought as we launch another week of activities and events to honour the elderly in our society.

The older people among us here today may well wonder why we need to observe Senior Citizens' Week each year. They will remember a time when the idea of a child's duty towards its parents still held strong. While parents owed it to their offspring to nurture and bring them up to adulthood, the children were expected to repay their debt by looking after their folks when they became old and infirm.

Expectations and the sense of duty and obligation change in the course of time. I would like to quote from the teaching of Confucius to illustrate his concept of the ideal relationship between parent and child. A disciple asked the Master: "What is filial piety?" He replied, "Nowadays filial piety seems to mean that a man just supports his parents - he does the same for his horses and dogs. Reverence of a parent is what distinguishes piety." In expounding his answer, Confucius referred to the word "YANG" (養) which might be translated as "Nourishment, to raise, support or provide". As a parent might be expected to raise the child, the child when he attained adulthood should provide for his aged parent. But, Confucius asked, what was the difference between rearing an animal and

feeding a child or caring for a parent? Confucius provided his own reply: "JIN" (敬), translated as "Reverence". Without it the act of providing would be no more than that of keeping a domestic pet. Therefore, a child must show respect and reverence to his parents.

To highlight the need for mutual care and respect is to put the problem of growing old in its proper context. The emphasis on the family is correct. The family is the pivot of all social relationships and human values. A happy home is one where members of a family, from the oldest to the youngest, live in harmony together. I share the hope which the Chairman has expressed in his speech, that care and respect with love, nurtured within each family, will be extended to the community as a whole. Our people must try their best to live together as one big family.

The thought of growing old need not be feared, provided we have prepared ourselves, while in the prime of our life, for retirement. Careful planning for retirement can reduce the sense of desolation that comes from finding one-self dependent on children or the Government to provide for basic necessities.

Most retirees today can look forward to drawing on their Central Provident Fund savings for a modest to comfortable living in old age. To have dutiful, filial children and loving grandchildren at the same time is an added bonus. This must be the meaning of "Mutual Care and Respect" for Senior Citizens' Week: the happy prospect of dignified retirement in the warm bosom of one's family.

While financial and emotional security is important in old age, so is good health, to be able to enjoy meaningful leisure activities. We can keep illness from knocking on the door by cultivating healthy habits, eating sensibly, and exercising in moderation.

There are ample facilities today for senior citizens to keep themselves fit and healthy. There are more than 60 Senior Citizens' Clubs where they can get together for recreation and social activities. Many of them provide regular supervised exercise programmes designed to keep older people physically mobile and active. Others dispense health information and medical screening programmes. We have to thank the many volunteers and service organisations for their donations and contributions in making available these special facilities for senior citizens.

I would like to extend my good wishes to all of you present here this morning and to congratulate the organisers of the Eighth Senior Citizens' Week for a job well done. I now have great pleasure in declaring the Eighth Senior Citizens' Week open.
