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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT WEE KIM WEE AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER AT THE STAMFORD BALLROOM, WESTIN PLAZA ON SATURDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 1986 AT 7.30 PM

Let me, first of all, say that Mrs Wee and I greatly appreciate your kind invitation to be with you at this annual get-together. Although we have here today a gathering of men and women of diverse occupations, interests and lifestyles, there is unmistakably a strong thread of commonality that binds you all together. The basis for this sense of relationship is obvious - you are graduates of the National University of Singapore and its precursors, the University of Singapore and the Nanyang University.

Singapore has made rapid, extensive and enormous progress in almost every field. Life has grown more complicated, its pace quickened and we have less and less time for each other, for reflections, and even for recreation. Once classmates struck up bonds of friendship that lasted throughout life. Today, the more hectic pace probably works against such relationships.

Campus life is admittedly short. With so much of it spent on studies and assignments, it is a wonder that any bonds have been struck up at all. But surely some were, otherwise you would have no NUS Society and we would not be here today. Such bonds, however, may have started as chance affairs. In a society as small and tightly knit as ours, some of these things cannot be left to chance. Bonds are vital if our older, more established graduates are to pass on their experiences and their accumulated wisdom to the newer members amongst them.

The objectives of University education have always been intrinsically rooted in socio-economic realities. People form our most important economic resource and we can, by developing our people's potential to the full through education and training, make our citizens highly productive economically. The question is: How do we ensure that the short sojourn in the University will equip the graduate for high economic performance throughout his long years of working life? Here then is the vital mission of the University education - to inspire our graduates with the desire to learn continually throughout their working life, to develop in our graduates, more general intellectual skills such as creativity, innovation and the capacity to adapt to change. In this way, we ensure that they remain competitive and abreast with the fast growing and complex developments in technology.

The NUS Society, with its membership of 5,000, is particularly well-suited to play an important contributory role in this development. By bringing together its alumni members, the Society should be able to promote fruitful interactions amongst its group of capable and accomplished people and greatly enhance their contributions to the intellectual climate and socio-economic well-being of Singapore. An important facet of this development is maintaining close ties with the Alma Mater and in this regard, I am glad to see that your Society has the generous support of the University and has kept pace with the changes in the University.

The new clubhouse on the University campus itself bears testimony to the close relations that exist between your Society and the University. For persons who share a common educational experience, this Club serves as a valuable social focal point for maintaining and strengthening personal ties, for interaction of graduates with the academia and students, and not least, to reminisce and to indulge in nostalgia.

Perhaps the NUS Society could contribute even more towards the enrichment of the University. Your members, through the Society, are well-placed to assist the University with ideas and suggestions, and with feedback on the quality and performance of graduates and their training needs. This would enable the University to make appropriate adjustments to the curricula of faculties, to keep pace with the changing needs of a rapidly developing society. The alumni can also assist in finding sufficient training places for the undergraduates to acquire practical experience and to learn in the real world of work environment during vacation. I am glad to note that the Society has donated \$15,000 to the University for disbursement as bursary awards to students, and a further \$26,000 in the form of student loans. In these and other activities you have clearly demonstrated your willingness to support and assist your Alma Mater and it indeed augurs well for even closer ties and cooperation in other areas.

In time, it may even be that the NUS Society will develop among its members a distinctive personal style which connotes university education at NUS, in the same way that a certain accent is supposed to mark the Oxford man. But, I hope it will not be something snobbish nor anything that will set the NUS graduate apart from the rest of our society. It should perhaps be a distinctive code of behaviour that embodies courtesy, high moral and professional standards, caring attitude and consideration for one's fellow men - attributes that will not be looked upon as belonging to a certain class, but one which everyone, graduate and non-graduate, old and young, will want to emulate. This the NUS Society can instil in the new graduates. It is a mission that an institution like yours would, I hope, certainly wish to pursue.

With the University producing between 4,000 to 5,000 graduates a year who are all potential members, your Society is poised to become an organisation of great

influence and importance. The next challenge would be to sustain interest and build up and maintain a momentum of activities targetted towards the objectives of the Society. I am confident that the Society's leadership would take up this challenge and see the Society through the future years of growth and progress. I take this opportunity to wish you success in your quest for even greater achievements.

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