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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER OF STATE (DEFENCE),
AT THE LIONS CLUB OF SINGAPORE CENTRAL 20TH ANNIVERSARY
AND INSTALLATION DINNER AT THE HILTON HOTEL BALLROOM
ON SATURDAY, 12 JUNE 1982 AT 8 PM

In some distant developing countries, professionals are regarded as funny beings, anatomical curiosities. Professionals are said to be people with brains but no spine. They have ability but no character. They are said to be the very opposite of vultures. Vultures descend upon a spot at the first sign of trouble. Professionals, on the contrary, flee at the first sign of disturbance or insecurity. We need not go back many years to read of the airports in UK, US and Canada jam-packed by fleeing professionals from troubled spots in many developing countries. No wonder the professionals had such a bad reputation in those developing countries.

In those same countries, professionals are also sometimes regarded as leeches. Leeches cling onto their hosts and suck their blood until they had their fill. When they are satisfied, they leave. Professionals in those countries have no qualms about extracting the most out of their society. In their youth, they took full advantage of the stability of the country; they got the best education that society provided, they creamed off the better paid jobs after graduation. But they were poised to flee the country at the first sign of trouble or crisis, in times when their leadership and abilities were needed most. They silenced their guilty conscience by pretending that they were part of a world community of professionals who owe loyalty only to their profession but not to the country that nurtured them. Their sham is seen by all the common people around them except themselves.

In sharp contrast to those developing countries faraway, we, in Singapore, are very fortunate. By and large, our professionals are committed and dedicated to our country. This augurs well for us as a nation. In my own experience, I have come across a large number of professionals who have given of their time, money and

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energy to help others. For example, in the SAF, I know of many doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other para-medical specialists, who have volunteered their services to tend to our national servicemen and regular soldiers. Our soldiers are not aware of this, but in many cases, they had been treated by the top most medical specialists in Singapore, totally free of charge. In one constituency, there are among the community leaders, professionals from the fields of architecture, the sciences, business, medicine, naval architecture, the education profession, computer science and publishing. I know for a fact that the same is true in other constituencies in Singapore.

Of course, as with any group of people, there are the few exceptions among the professionals also - the black sheep - who are only concerned with receiving but not with giving or sharing. But overall in Singapore, the professional who does not participate in community service is a member of a fast diminishing breed. The excuse of lack of time given by some self-centred professionals finds little credence. Everybody has exactly 24 hours a day. Everybody has professional commitments, family commitments and recreational commitments. Such professionals hide their personal shame in silence when in the midst of their colleagues, discussions on community activities take place. A few mask their feeling of guilt by violent outbursts, branding others as busybodies, government agents, do-gooders and other derogatory names. These few will have to live with their own conscience.

At this point, let me congratulate members of the Lions Club of Singapore; for you represent a group of dedicated and committed professionals who have taken upon yourselves to ensure that the community around you shares in your good fortune; that those who are less fortunate than you are helped in whatever way possible. You, together with other service clubs and community groups, have destroyed for Singapore the false belief that a professional should grab as much as possible. You have acknowledged that you have received the benefits arising from a stable and progressive society and that it is only appropriate that in your own ways you

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ought to share with the society a little of what they have. You have understood the time-tested principle of great human civilisations of receiving and returning a portion of what you have received. A professional who only receives and does not give and share is spiritually like the Dead Sea, unable to cleanse and refresh himself and hence of little use to those around him. I hope the Lions Club, together with the hundreds of service clubs and community groups will make a special effort to recruit those professionals who so far have not come forward to participate in community service and help diminish even further this minority.

I wish you success in your coming year of service.
