

28 SEP 1989

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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89-44B-17

Release No: 26/SEP
08-2/89/09/11

SPEECH BY BG (RES) GEORGE YONG-BOON YEO, MINISTER OF STATE
(FINANCE) AND (FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
BASIC TRAINING COURSE FOR MALAY VOLUNTEER AFTERCARE OFFICERS
AT THE KAMPONG KEMBANGAN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON
11 SEPTEMBER 1989 AT 8.00 PM

The war against cocaine in Columbia is a gruesome reminder of the harm drugs can do to a country. The problem is worldwide. We are not spared in Singapore. Many crimes are committed because of drugs.

This is a difficult war which has to be fought on many fronts. We have to work to reduce the supply of drugs which is what the Columbian and American Governments are now trying to do. But we must also work to reduce the demand for drugs.

We have tough laws against drug-trafficking in Singapore. But tough laws alone are not enough. We are seeing more cases of first-time addiction. From less than 500 new addicts in 1985, the number has risen to over 1,200 in 1988. So long as the demand for drugs is there, the supply will be forthcoming however tough the laws are. Too much money is at stake.

The Government can do its part but the war will never be won if only the Government is fighting the problem. All of us must join in. The battle has to be fought at home, in school, in National Service, in the workplace, in wherever young people gather.

The Malay community is hardest hit. About half of all drug addicts caught in 1988 are Malays. The problem is getting worse because seven out of every 10 new addicts are Malays. The trend is very worrying.

This basic training course is specially organised for Malay Volunteer Aftercare Officers (VAOs) because it is easier for Malay VAOs to work with Malay drug addicts. I congratulate the Special Anti-Drug Action Task Force of Kampong Kembangan's CCC and Taman Bacaan for recognising the importance of rehabilitation. I congratulate all of you for coming forward as volunteers. You are making a very important contribution to the community. I hope other Malay organisations will also participate in our war against drugs.

Drugs are not solely the concern of the Malay community. It is of national concern. It is of concern to all races. The manner in which a community looks after those of its members who are in trouble is a test of the moral strength of the whole community. Those whose own family or friends are not affected cannot shut their eyes and say "this is not my problem". It is our problem. We must be concerned and contribute where we can.

By pulling together, we will win this war.

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