

SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE APPOINTMENT CEREMONY OF TEACHERS AS HONORARY VOLUNTEER SPECIAL CONSTABULARY (VSC) SENIOR OFFICERS ON MONDAY, 14 SEPT 1998 AT 9.30 AM AT SENIOR POLICE OFFICERS' MESS (SPOM)

Commissioner of Police,

Director-General of Education,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

In July last year, I appointed the first batch of 11 teachers from nine secondary schools as Honorary Volunteer Special Constabulary Senior Officers, or Honorary VSCs in short. The scheme has promoted better understanding and co-operation between Police and schools. It has also enabled schools to manage the problem of student delinquency more effectively.

2 I announced in February this year that we would extend the scheme in phases to all secondary schools and Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs). Today, I am happy to present appointment certificates to the second batch of 18 teachers from 16 schools. I am also pleased to announce that the Police and the Ministry of Education has received a total of 42 nominations for the third batch of

Honorary VSCs, including 4 nominations from three Vocational Training Centres. This shows the Honorary VSC scheme is fast making an impact.

3 Let me now give an update on the juvenile delinquency situation. Over a period of five years, the number of juveniles that is, those between 7 and 15 years old, arrested for seizable offences, more than doubled -from 1,205 in 1990 to 2,574 in 1995. These arrests fell to 2110 in 1996 and 2,147 last year. Latest statistics for January to June this year show that 1,115 juveniles were arrested for seizable offences, an increase of 10% from 1,013 in the first six months of last year. This increase arose mainly from a higher number of juveniles arrested for property-related offences, in particular the shoplifting of yo-yos in April and May this year.

4 The number of student juveniles arrested declined between 1995 and 1997. It was 2,239 in 1995. This fell to 1,782 in 1996 and to 1,749 in 1997. As at June this year, there were 955 student juveniles arrested for seizable offences, compared to 841 arrested in the first six months of 1997, an increase of 13.6% again mainly due to shoplifting.

5 The number of juveniles arrested for rioting, unlawful assembly and serious assault cases - an area we have focussed our attention on for the last two years - has also decreased. It fell 42% to 84 in the first six months of this year compared to 144 in the first six months of last year. In particular, the number of juveniles arrested for rioting fell to 37 in the first six months of 1998, down by 59% from 91

in the first six months of 1997. This is a positive sign that the measures we have been taking are beginning to make a positive impact.

6 For the wider group of youths aged 7 to 19 years old, the total number arrested for seizable offences fell from 4,509 in 1996 to 4,412 in 1997, a drop of 2.2%. The number arrested in the first 6 months of 1998 is 2,308, up by 4% compared to 2,222 for the same period last year. Similar to the pattern for juveniles, the number of youths arrested for theft and property-related offences increased this year while the number arrested for rioting, unlawful assembly and serious assault decreased. In particular, the number of such youths arrested for rioting fell to 539 in 1997, down by 14% from 627 in 1996. The number arrested in the first six months of 1998 is 150, down by 54% as compared to 325 for the same period last year.

7 Whilst I am happy that the number of juveniles arrested for rioting, unlawful assembly and serious assault has decreased, the total number of juveniles arrested is still unacceptably high. We cannot be satisfied. There is much room for improvement. In particular, we must be tougher especially on those who repeat the more serious offences. The courts have said they will be stricter in these cases. There is also an increase in the number of juveniles arrested for property-related offences such as shoplifting, theft and robbery in recent months. This is also the case for youths. IMJD will study this phenomenon further. On the whole, we have to remain vigilant and press on with our efforts to bring the numbers down.

Integrated Multi-pronged Approach to Managing Juvenile Delinquency

8 The Honorary VSC scheme is just one facet of our integrated efforts to managing juvenile delinquency. These efforts are spearheaded by the Inter-Ministry Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (IMJD), which I chair. Let me give you a quick update on the progress of two measures that were implemented last year.

a **StreetWise Programme**

In November 1997, the National Youth Council (NYC) initiated the StreetWise Programme, which currently involves 5 youth service agencies. This is a six-month programme to change the behaviour of youths who have unwittingly drifted into gang activities. Other project partners are Schools, Police and Probation Officers from the Ministry of Community Development (MCD). The programme provides academic and recreational support and includes counselling and developmental training to inculcate life skills. As at July 1998, 64 youths have been placed on the Programme.

Participants who have completed the course have shown encouraging signs of improvement. From these early efforts and lessons learnt, NYC will refine and strengthen the programme. I am heartened in particular by the efforts put in by the participating youth service agencies who plan to continue involving these youths in their

activities after they have completed the programme. This is a useful early preventive approach in tackling problems associated with street corner gangs.

b Age Restriction On Certain Entertainment Outlets

From 1 October 1997, Police restricted juveniles from patronising entertainment outlets that serve alcohol with dancing facilities and outlets with tea dances. The main objectives were to protect them from undesirable influences and prevent gangs from using these entertainment outlets to congregate and recruit members. In October 1997, seven cases of breach of the restriction involving a total of 19 juveniles were detected. Since then, the number of cases has stabilised at no more than 2 cases per month. From Oct last year to June 98, a total of only 12 cases of breach involving 38 juveniles were detected by both Police and outlet operators.

9 To further consolidate our efforts, I am pleased to announce that IMJD has formed two working groups to look into first, management of out-of-school youths and second, inter-agency co-ordination of IMJD programmes on the ground. While the total number of out-of-school youths remains small, they are identified to be a high-risk group in terms of juvenile delinquency. The Working Group will explore the strategy of tapping community resources of Community Development Councils to reach out to out-of-school youths. For example, TOUCH Community Services,

with the help of Marine Parade Community Development Council, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and NYC are exploring the concept of a Youth Learning Centre for out-of-school youths. As the first-of-its-kind programme targeting at out-of-school youths in Singapore, this centre will provide academic support and inculcate life skills training.

10 Over the past 2 years, IMJD has synergised the resources of Police, MCD, MOE, NYC and VWOs to put in place a spectrum of measures and programmes encompassing prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation. As in our anti-drug efforts, we have adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach. These measures are beginning to bear fruit. Nevertheless, we must continue to monitor the situation closely and devise new strategies, where necessary. IMJD has focussed on juveniles, that is, those below 16 years. But its measures have also benefited older youths. Indeed, a sizeable number of young persons involved in crimes and gangs are older than 16 years. Many of these older offenders are out-of-school youths. They require a different approach from student offenders. Hence, the Inter-Ministry Committee will formally widen its focus to also include youths, that is, those aged 19 years and below. It will be renamed Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime or IMYC.

11 The Committee has devoted much of its earlier efforts to prevention and enforcement. It has introduced many new preventive programmes. It has set up strong working networks amongst the various agencies to ensure a common focus and pulling together in the right direction. The Committee will now place more

attention on rehabilitation. In particular, it will ensure that the various regimes set up under the purview of various Ministries and agencies dovetail and complement each other. The message must be clear that whilst we do not want to waste our precious youths so that no effort will be spared to rehabilitate wayward offenders who genuinely wish to return to the straight and narrow path, the law will, however, not be soft on youths who commit serious offences, especially repeat offenders.

Roles of Teachers Appointed as Honorary VSC Senior Officers

12 I had said when appointing the pilot batch of Honorary VSCs in 1997 that the scheme aims to strengthen links between Schools and Police to keep juvenile delinquency problems and youth-gang influence away from our schools. In this regard, teachers who are Honorary VSC Inspectors and Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs) play three key roles.

13 First, your appointment symbolises Police presence and authority in your schools and enhances your position as the overseer of school discipline. Second, you are the liaison officer between your respective schools and Police. Finally, you are advisors on Police matters in your schools.

14 Finally, my congratulations to the 18 newly-appointed Honorary VSC Inspectors and ASPs. You have undergone a specially tailored two-week training

programme. When you return to your schools, you should continue to keep regular contact with the Police. This will help you to become more effective in tackling juvenile delinquency in your schools. I also commend the pilot batch of Honorary VSCs and their schools for their continual efforts and support in making this scheme a success. I am confident that the success of the first two batches will enthuse even more school teachers to step forward to be trained and appointed Honorary VSCs. Let me reiterate that your role as Honorary VSCs will make a meaningful contribution to the overall management of juvenile delinquency. I wish you every success. Thank you for coming forward to serve.