

**SPEECH BY MINISTER OF STATE (LAW & HOME AFFAIRS)
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE AT LAUNCH OF
MEDIATORS' CHATROOM ON SATURDAY, 27 JANUARY 2001 AT 10.30
A.M. AT ANG MO KIO GRASSROOTS CLUB**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

I am delighted to be here for the launch of the Mediators' Chatroom. Community mediation has grown by leaps and bounds since it was first introduced here three years ago. The first Community Mediation Centre (CMC) was set up in Marine Parade Central in January 1998. This was followed by a second one in Ang Mo Kio in April 1999. A third Centre is due to be set up in Woodlands. The centres have handled a total of 1,500 cases since they began operation, out of which 73% were successfully resolved.

Mediation as a Lifeskill

2 Over the last three years, efforts have been made to promote community mediation as an alternative form of dispute resolution. The initial phase of development is now completed. I am now pleased to unveil an exciting and challenging workplan for community mediation for the year 2001. The workplan will chart the strategies for the further growth and development of community

mediation in Singapore. The overarching objective in the new workplan is to promote mediation as a useful personal lifeskill, not only as a skill to help others resolve their conflicts.

3 The imbibing of mediation skills and mindset will gradually equip individuals with the ability to manage their conflicts independently without the need for a trained mediator. While it is not expected for every individual to be professionally qualified as a mediator, a certain level of basic knowledge helps to shape one's perspective towards conflicts. One can begin to approach conflicts positively and adopt a mindset towards achieving a win-win situation. This is the spirit behind our workplan for the new year – to project the usefulness of mediation as a lifeskill for everybody, including young Singaporeans.

4 Several action plans have been conceived to implement the overall strategy of promoting mediation as a lifeskill. The Ministry of Law will set up a training unit to produce professionally-qualified mediators as well as to provide continuous skills development for mediators. Since 1998, the Ministry has trained some 180 community mediators. These are volunteers who form the backbone of our Community Mediation Centres. There will also be various outreach programmes such as a Community Mediation Day and Media Awareness Week to bring awareness of mediation to the ground. Our CMCs will also be touching base with their overseas counterparts to exchange ideas and explore the possibility of organising joint international conferences in the longer run. This is one way to build up our profile and make an impact in the international arena. The Ministry

aims to involve more government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, the Judiciary and grassroots organisations like Community Development Councils and Citizens' Consultative Committees in the area of mediation.

Mediators' Chatroom

5 I am pleased to be part of the first initiative under this new workplan – the Mediators' Chatroom, the first of its kind in Singapore. Here, residents can log on to the Internet and obtain on-line advice from trained mediators on how to manage their disputes. Thanks to Information Technology, residents who prefer to remain anonymous can now take advantage of the privacy of the Internet and chat with mediators about their difficulties and problems.

6 The Mediators' Chatroom is available on the website www.hdbhousing.com every Friday between 7 and 8 p.m. Our mediators from the Community Mediation Centres will be on hand to chat with residents. The first live chat will be held on 2 February. The website is chosen because it is a community portal catering to HDB residents. It is an online interaction and information channel to promote e-communities within those residing in public housing. Through the Mediators' Chatroom, we would like to encourage as many people as possible to come forward and make use of our mediation services even if they prefer not to disclose their identities.

7 Statistics collected from our CMCs show that a majority of the cases which our mediators handle involve disputes with neighbours such as nuisance caused by excessive noise, obstructions along the corridors, water leakage, threats and verbal abuse. This portal would potentially reach out to a large pool of HDB residents encountering such day-to-day difficulties. We hope that they will make use of this channel to seek advice on how to resolve their problems harmoniously without having to resort to the courts. After clearing their doubts and concerns in this manner, I hope that more residents will avail themselves of the resources of the CMCs.

8 I congratulate the organisers for setting up this chatroom. It is now my great pleasure to launch the Mediators' Chatroom.

9 Thank you.